Two centuries of palaeontological research in the University of Liège, Belgium

Julien Denayer *[1], Annick Anceau [2], Cyrille Prestianni [3]

1 Université de Liège (ULg) – Belgium
2 Universite de Liege – Belgium
3 Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences – Belgium

When the University of Liège was founded in 1817, geology and mineralogy were taught by H.-M. Gaëde then by A. Lévy, P.-A. Lesoinne, C.-P. Davreux and M. Gloesener in 1828-834. They all contributed to the building of the fossil collections but palaeontological research started with P.-C. Schmerling who described the Quaternary cave fauna, including the rest a child now considered as the first neanderthalian ever described. Geological research started with the arrival of A. Dumont in 1835 while L.-G. de Koninck was appointed to teach palaeontology in 1846. His expertise on fossil animals led him to produce impressive monographic publications on Belgian material but also on collections sent to him from all over the world. His *Faune du Calcaire* carbonifère de la Belgique is the most comprehensive study of Carboniferous invertebrates ever published. In 1857 G. Dewalque replaced Dumont and de Koninck on geology and palaeontology chairs and combined both their scientific views to produce very detailed research. His publication on Jurassic fossils is remarkable but his main achievements were his geological map of Belgium and his masterful *Prodrome d'une description* géologi*que de la Belgique*. In parallel, he gathered a huge collection of fossils. Dewalque progressively delegated his teaching to his collaborators who eventually replaced him. A. Gilkinet was the first palaeobotanists to embrace the theory of evolution and worked on Devonian to Paleocene plants. M. Lohest published several contributions to the Palaeozoic fishes, including a mandible now interpreted as from an *Ichthyostega* -like tetrapod. J. Fraipont first entered the university as assistant of the biologist E. van Beneden and published papers on marine invertebrates before working on Devonian crinoids. He published several papers on Palaeozoic invertebrates, including the remarkable echinoderms from the *Marbre Noir de* Denée. Furthermore, Fraipont and Lohest described the human remains from the Spy cave where they demonstrated, for the first time in history, the co-occurrence of a fossil human species, Mousterian lithic industries and Pleistocene megafauna. After the death of J. Fraipont in 1909, palaeontology was taught by his son, C. Fraipont who continued his father's work on palaeoanthropology and created the Palaoeanthropology Doctorate. A. Renier was a palaeobotanist who dedicated his life to understand the palaeontology, and stratigraphy of the coal measures. He initiated the works of S. Leclercq, C. Fraipont's assistant before the war. In 1937 she was appointed as the female Professor in Belgium. Leclercq produced important monographies on Devonian plants and Carboniferous coal balls and was among the first to focus on the biological of her fossils. G. Ubaghs replaced C. Fraipont in 1946 and started to work on early echinoderms. He was charged to write the Echinoderm chapter in the Traité de Paléontologie and the Treatise of Invertebrate Palaeontology.

* Speaker