

# The historical mineral collections of the Liège University

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The mineralogy museum of the University of Liège was constituted shortly after the foundation of the university, in 1817. Accumulated over the years by famous geologists and mineralogists Gustave Dewalque (1826-1905), André Dumont (1809-1857), Giuseppe Cesàro (1849-1939), and Henri Buttgenbach (1874-1964), the mineral samples were rare and of high historical value. In his description of the museum in 1938, Buttgenbach (1938) lists a total of 32.000 samples, among which 21.000 minerals from the systematic international collection, 4.500 specimens from Belgium, 360 samples from Congo, and 6.000 minerals from the Ungemach collection.

During the second World War, a bombing raid by the German army provoked a terrible fire in the museum, that destroyed many samples, books, and mineralogy instruments. This tragical even was described in detail by Donnay (1938) who states that "*The whole museum (except for a few pieces which were in the vault) and all the other facilities were burned the day the Germans left! It is a great disaster*". After this publication, the international mineralogical community was extremely generous, and many donations allowed to slowly reconstruct the collection which nowadays hosts approximately 23.000 mineral specimens.

Belgian specimens are representative of all classical localities of our country, including the Pb-Zn deposits of the Moresnet region, which is the type locality for the three species willemite, fraipontite, and hopeite. Metamorphic minerals of the Stavelot Massif, as well as samples from the Visé and Bleton regions, are also extensively represented. Three very rare samples of Belgian meteorites, namely Lesves, Tourinne-la-Grosse, and St-Denis-Westrem, occur in the collection.

The Ungemach collection, acquired by the university of Liège in 1938, was considered by the international mineralogical community as totally destroyed by the fire... but indeed, most of these samples are still preserved since they were stored in their wooden transportation boxes in 1944! Nowadays, this collection constitutes the most beautiful and rich part of the historical mineral samples belonging to the Liège University. Henri Léon Ungemach (1879-1936) was a mineralogist from Strasbourg, friend of Giuseppe Cesàro and student of Georges Friedel. From the 6.000 samples originally reported in his catalogue, 360 are preserved in the collection of the Natural History Museum of Strasbourg, and approximately 2.500 are still in our collection. Most historical European mineral localities are represented, but the most exceptional part of the collection is constituted by the sulfosalts, among which occur many specimens from the German classical ore deposits (Freiberg, Andreasberg, ...) and from the Alsace mines (Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, ...).

Other significant parts of the ULiège collection concern the Cesàro mineral samples, among which occur beautiful calcite crystals from Rhisnes, the Buttgenbach collection which contains many specimens collected in Katanga, as well as the holotype depository of high scientific value.

The collection is exposed in a permanent exhibition room at the "Maison de la Science" in Liège, but also in the Geology building (B18) in the Sart-Tilman campus. Don't hesitate to contact Prof. Frédéric Hatert ([fhatert@uliege.be](mailto:fhatert@uliege.be)) for a visit of our mineral treasures.

## References:

Buttgenbach H. (1938) Le Musée de Minéralogie de l'Université de Liège. Vaillant-Carmanne, Liège, 41 p.  
Donnay J. D. H. (1945) The destruction of the Liège museum. *American Mineralogist*, 30: 81-83.