

# The historical Ungemach mineral collection at the University of Liège

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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 (1847-1920), 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 [1] 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 J. D. H. Donnay [2], 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.

Even if many mineral samples were indeed damaged by this fire, it appears that famous historical specimens are still preserved in the mineralogical collection of the Liège University, and we now realise that the description of Donnay [2] was certainly too dramatic, in order to stimulate international donations. The exquisite Ungemach collection, which was acquired by the university of Liège in 1938, was considered by the international mineralogical community as totally destroyed... but indeed, most of these samples are preserved since they were still stored in their wooden transportation boxes in 1944!

Nowadays, the Ungemach 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, ...).

## References:

[1] Buttgenbach H. (1938) Le Musée de Minéralogie de l'Université de Liège. Vaillant-Carmanne, Liège, 41 p.

[2] Donnay J. D. H. (1945) Am. Mineral. 30: 81-83