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Nopcsa's publishing venture – the life and demise of the *Palaeontologica Hungarica* in the 1920's

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Abstract – The Palaeontologia Hungarica was an international palaeontological journal, published between 1921 and 1927 in Budapest, Hungary. It was edited by István Majer, assistant professor at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, co-edited by palaeontologist Franz Nopcsa and zoologist Géza Gyula Fejérváry, both world-renowned professionals in their fields. We seek answers to the questions: 1) what endeavours created the journal and 2) what circumstances led to its closure, 3) how could a post-war, dilapidated Hungary create and maintain a world-class scientific journal, even if only for a short time. With 4 figures and 1 table.

Keywords – journal, palaeontology, publishing, scientific contacts

INTRODUCTION

For decades, issues of a journal were hidden in the library of the Department of Palaeontology of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. The folio-sized volumes named *Palaeontologia Hungarica* were covered by an exquisite, almost luxurious full-cloth binding. Golden letters on the green cloth told the world which volume and issue of the journal is under the cover, and – even more unusually – the author and title were also embossed. The state coat of arms with the royal crown and the place of publication, Budapest, can be seen at the bottom (Fig. 1). The year indicated on the inside cover was 1921–1923. How could such a luxuriously designed scientific journal, with world-class content to match its rich exterior, appear in a country that was just beginning to recover from the tragedy of the lost Great War? What forces created it, and what circumstances prevented its survival? We will try to find an answer to this in this short study.

NEW SPECIALIST JOURNALS ESTABLISHED AFTER THE GREAT WAR

Hungary lost 68% of its territory and 58% of its population after the Great War. Authors, publishers, and readers of the journals were often separated from each other. The increase in printing costs and the inflation of the currency, the crown, which peaked in 1926, all led to a radical reduction in the size of scientific journals. For example, the page number of the *Földtani Közlöny* [Bulletin of the Hungarian Geological Society] shrank to only one-tenth of its original volume during the World War with the combined volume of 1921–1922, and many journals just ceased to exist. The share capital of the Hungarian Geological Society did not yield any income, most of the members found themselves beyond the new borders and the income thus received was insufficient to publish the *Közlöny*, even with state support and patronage. Support from industrial companies that benefit from geological research is also necessary – outlined the sad situation by Béla Mauritz, the president of the Society (Mauritz 1925: 10).

In this situation, fitting into the post-war consolidation of the Bethlen government but with a completely new concept, count Kunó Klebelsberg stepped in, first as Minister of the Interior, then a year later as Minister of Religion and Public Education. He wanted to shake up the militarily defeated country, which was tied down by the many restrictions of the Paris peace treaties. He put it on an upward trajectory by promoting culture. He also used state resources to create high-quality cultural institutions. Thus, in 1923, the literary and critical journal *Napkelet* [means East] was born. As its title indicates, the journal was intended to be the opposite pole of the *Nyugat* [means West] (Tóth-Barbalics 2004). Klebelsberg also had the publication of scientific journals and the promotion of scientific book publishing at heart. He was instrumental in the birth of a new scientific journal, *Levéltári Közlemények* [Archives Bulletin], in 1923, serving as the president of the Hungarian Historical Society (Klebelsberg 1921).

BIRTH

There is little written information about the circumstances of the first publication of *Palaeontologia Hungarica*. A newspaper article many years later provides some insight into the beginnings (Anonymous 1930). According to this, István Majer – assistant professor at the Department of Palaeontology at the University of Budapest – invested all his money in publishing the first volume. For the second volume, he requested and received a loan of 27 million crowns from the aristocrat Baron Ferenc Nopcsa, the world-famous palaeontologist, which he could not repay, even after a postponement. He rejected Nopcsa's harsh

written demand in a defamation lawsuit, which he won. We do not know whether the loan was finally settled.

TYPOGRAPHY

Folio size is not uncommon among palaeontological journals, with pages cut to be larger than A4 size (in our case, the spine height is 32 cm) and a fitting, large mirror (Fig. 1). The large size of some fossils to be depicted almost requires this. Even today, in our age of uniformity, a century after the publication of *Palaeontologia Hungarica*, folio-sized journals still exist. We only need to mention the two series of the Stuttgart *Palaeontographica* or the imposing volumes of the *Bolettino Italiana di Paleontologia* published in Pisa.

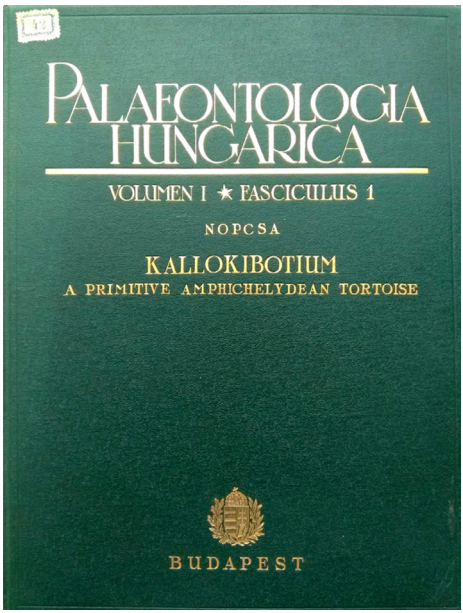


Fig. 1. The cover of the opening paper of Palaeontologia Hungarica. The paper was unusually elegantly bound in hardcover cloth with rich gold lettering

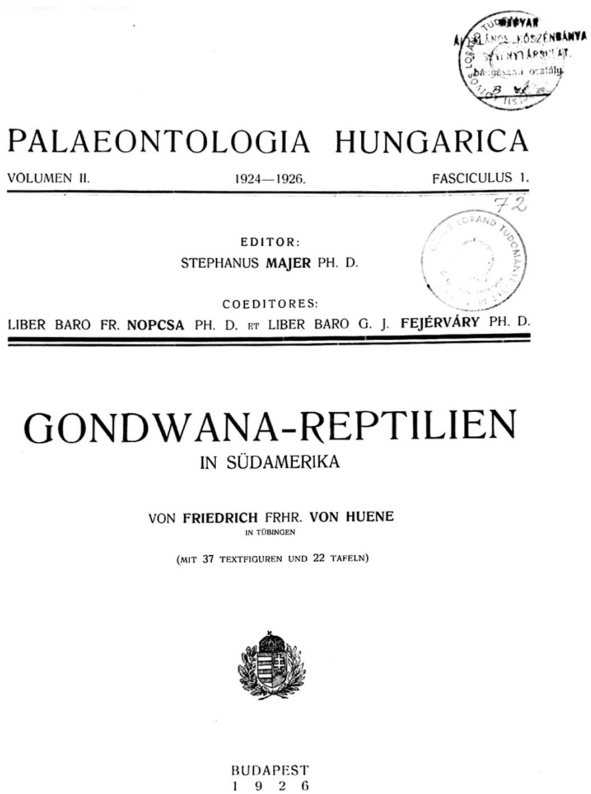
The booklets, which command respect for their size alone, were produced in the Royal National Penitentiary of Vác printing house. The text was typed and printed here, and the clichés for the figures were also made here. The photographic plates are bound after the text and glued by hand on the pages opposite the plate explanations. Therefore, the continuous Roman page numbering of the plate explanations is interrupted at each plate. These plates were produced for volume I in the workshop of Werner & Winter, G. m. b. h., Frankfurt am Main, and for volume II in Kunst- und Werbedruck G. m. b. h. printing house, in Esslingen am Neckar, both in Germany. The large number of plates (see Table 1 for details) was undoubtedly attractive to authors wishing to publish in the journal.

All the copies I examined, kept in the library of the Faculty of Science of Eötvös Loránd University, are reprints, which is also indicated on the title page (Fig. 2). Each issue, containing only one article, was individually bound in green cloth. In addition to the journal's name, volume, and issue number, the title page also included – unusually – the author's surname and the (abbreviated) title,

presenting the bound sheets as if they were separate volumes, monographs. More than one of them deserved this name.

CONTENTS

Who are the editors? István Majer (1887–1953) was an assistant professor at the Department of Palaeontology, which was not filled with a professor between the unexpected death of Imre Lőrenthey in 1917 and the appointment of Károly



PALAEONTOLOGIA HUNGARICA

VOLUMEN II. 1924—1926. FASCICULUS 1.

EDITOR:
STEPHANUS **MAJER** PH. D.

COEDITORES:
LIBER BARO FR. **NOPCSA** PH. D. ET LIBER BARO G. J. **FEJÉRVÁRY** PH. D.

GONDWANA-REPTILIEN
IN SÜDAMERIKA

VON **FRIEDRICH** FRHR. **VON HUENE**
IN TÜBINGEN

(MIT 37 TEXTFIGUREN UND 22 TAFELN)

BUDAPEST
1 9 2 6

Fig. 2. Title page of issue 1 of volume II. The monograph of Professor Friedrich von Huene of Tübingen University on the Mesozoic reptiles of South America, published with a huge amount of illustrations (36 text-figures and 22 photographic plates). This work is a fitting testament to the weight of Nopcsa's call and the demand of *Palaeontologia Hungarica* for a global outlook; note the name of editor Majer, a commoner, is prominently placed in the header, centered. The noble rank and names of the two world-famous scientists, the aristocrat Nopcsa and Fejérváry, are placed below it, centered. The names in capital letters that fill the entire line, together with the thick, double decorative molding, almost like a line pattern, highlight the central role assumed by Majer in the journal. The PhD degree after the names of all three of them is a sign that Majer considers himself scientifically equal to Nopcsa and Fejérváry

Telegdi Roth in 1947. Majer's shorter studies on Tertiary stratigraphy of the Börzsöny Mountains and Paleolithic cave bears were published in the Földtani Közlöny. Almost at the same time as he began editing *Palaeontologia Hungarica*, he also took on the editing of *Hidrológiai Közlöny* [Hydrological Bulletin], which had just separated from the *Földtani Közlöny*. It was only in 1927 that it became clear that, in addition to neglecting his duties, he had also committed financial and other abuses. Károly Papp, the head of the department, managed to get rid of him only in 1929 (Szeitz 2013: 389). Tasnádi Kubacska (1970: 54–64) provided anecdotal details about his further career.

Majer himself also tried to publish in the journal he edited. In Volume II, he planned an extensive study on the Upper Cretaceous dinosaur coprolites he believed to have identified in the beds of the Eocene coal mine of Kosd (Majer 1923: 114; Tasnádi Kubacska 1970: 64). However, this – to my knowledge – did not materialize.

The journal had two co-editors, Nopcsa and Fejérváry. Ferenc Nopcsa (1877–1933) was a palaeontologist, a world-renowned expert on Mesozoic fossil vertebrates, a geologist, and the founder of albanology (Elsie 2014) (Fig. 3). Géza Gyula Fejérváry (1894–1932), keeper of the herpetological collection of the Hungarian National Museum, was a world-renowned researcher of the (palaeo) biology of reptiles (Fig. 4).

Who were the mostly illustrious authors of the new journal? Othenio Abel (1875–1946), at that time professor of palaeontology at the University of Vienna, founder of the discipline of palaeobiology, and a close friend of Nopcsa. Kurt Ehrenberg (1896–1979), Viennese palaeontologist, Abel's student and assistant, and later his successor in the professorship at the University of Vienna. Aranka Mária Fejérváry-Lángh, Fejérváry's wife, head of the amphibian collection of the Hungarian National Museum. Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857–1935), president of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, vertebrate palaeontologist, specialist in Mesozoic dinosaurs and Pleistocene large mammals. Among many other groups, he described *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Sándor Pongrácz (1888–1945) was a zoologist, curator of the Hungarian National Museum's zoological collection. He studied fossil insects, among other things. Rudolf Richter (1881–1957), professor of palaeontology at the University of Frankfurt. He later wrote the Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology, the volume on trilobites. Georg Schönfeld (1878–1926) was a professor in Dresden, a researcher of Mesozoic and Cenozoic fossil trees. Pyotr Petrovich Suskin (1868–1928), a zoologist from St. Petersburg, a researcher of fossil and recent birds, amphibians, and reptiles, and vice-president of the Russian Academy. David Meredith Seares Watson (1886–1973), Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at University College London, was a palaeobotanist and expert on Gondwanan vertebrates and Friedrich von

Huene (1875–1969), palaeontologist in Tübingen, a world-renowned specialist in Paleozoic and Mesozoic vertebrates.

Friedrich von Huene's work spanning several continents and his vast network of contacts, including Nopcsa's role, can now be mapped out, thanks to the publication of the thorough study by Candeiro & Figueirõa (2018) and the detailed catalogue by Hinz & Werneburg (2019) of the archival material of the palaeontological collection at the University of Tübingen. The latter consists mainly of von Huene's manuscripts, drawings and correspondence. More than fifty pieces of his correspondence with Nopcsa are already known (Tasnádi Kubacska 1945); the rest are probably hidden in Tübingen.

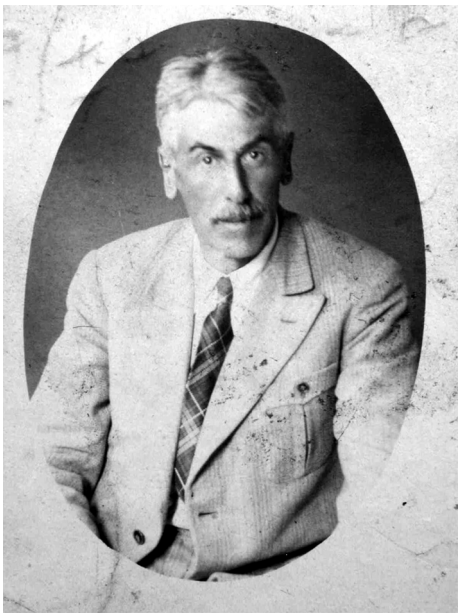


Fig. 3. The last picture of Ferenc Nopcsa. It was probably made around the time of publishing *Paleontologia Hungarica*

The international nature of the journal, which was meant from the beginning, was not only determined by the domicile of the authors, spanning six countries. Osborn's location in America meant perhaps a smaller distance at that time than Suskin's Soviet citizenship. Von Huene from Tübingen thought that his monograph summarizing his research up to that point – based largely on materials submitted by amateurs and preceding his later expeditions – would be most appropriate to be published in a journal published in Hungary.

PROBLEMS AND CESSATION

However, Nopcsa was dissatisfied with Majer's work and after a while he wanted to force him to resign from his position as editor-in-chief. Tasnádi Kubacska (1945: 277–278) briefly summarizes the fate of the journal. It started promisingly, with many plates. However, due to the increasingly late publication of individual issues and financial difficulties, Fejérváry first resigned from his position as honorary co-editor, and then Nopcsa stepped down. As the latter wrote in a letter to Majer, he proposed that Kálmán Lambrecht replace Fejérváry on the condition that his name remain on the title page of the journal as co-editor. "I

sent Majer an ultimatum," he wrote later to Lambrecht, "that Doctor [this is how he called Lambrecht] should become the managing editor, otherwise he [Nopcsa] would retire from the journal". However, nothing came of the leadership change, and the publication of *Palaeontologia Hungarica* stopped. At first, Nopcsa, who had meanwhile been appointed director of the Royal Hungarian Geological Institute, tried to continue the journal within the framework of the Institute to maintain the honour of Hungarian publishing (Tasnádi Kubacska 1945, 277–278). The details of this also await further archival research.

We do not have detailed information about the financial background. The inflation of the crown caused difficulties for all economic actors, until the fixed pengő was introduced in 1927. That year, the paper's accumulated losses amounted to 12,000 or more German marks, Nopcsa writes in his letter to von Huene dated January 3, 1928 (Tasnádi Kubacska 1945: 154). He indicates that he will later report the results in a circular – perhaps to be sent to subscribers (Weishampel & Kerscher 2013: 469–470). Despite all this, the high production quality was maintained throughout, and the production of plates, which entailed extra costs in printing and binding, was also carried out; the printing quality did not decrease until the last issue.

Fig. 4. Portrait of Géza Fejérváry. Hungarian Natural History Museum, History of Science Collection. No. 1062

Another reason for the closure may have been the problematic temperament of Nopcsa, the spiritus rector behind the journal, and his premature departure from the head of the Royal Hungarian Geological Institute (Kadić 2010: 51–56; Vadász 1933). As the full-power head of the Geological Institute with money and other resources, Nopcsa was able to support the journal, and his institute could even take over the publication (Fülöp & Tasnádi Kubacska 1969). Understanding Nopcsa's activities in this direction requires further archival research.

Ferenc Nopcsa, "an excellent mind accustomed to the broad horizons of science, stumbled in the ignored nooses of the dwarfs bustling around his feet in

his homeland. He was a nobleman, yet he could not steer the rickety chariot of Hungarian science, which he believed was stuck in a pothole, onto better paths" (Vadász 1933: 134). The nature of the traps is beautifully illuminated by the courtroom coverage of the 8 Órai Ujság on April 12, 1930, on the defamation lawsuit between Majer and Nopcsa (Anonymous 1930).

AFTERLIFE

Almost the entire series of *Palaeontologia Hungarica* can be found in the library of the Department of Palaeontology of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, each booklet bound in green cloth with a gilded embossed title. It was once the property of the Mining Department of the *Magyar Általános Kőszénbányák* (MÁK; Hungarian General Coal Mines). Elemér Vadász, himself primarily a palaeontologist, worked at the MÁK at the time (Fülöp 1971: 343); he may have acquired it. Vadász later became the head of the Department of Geology at Eötvös University. Through him, this journal was also able to reach the university. When Vadász arranged to fill the position of professor of palaeontology that had been vacant for thirty years – with Károly Telegdi-Roth – the library was divided between the two departments. Thus, almost the entire series of *Palaeontologia Hungarica* eventually came into the possession of the Department of Palaeontology.

Copies of the journal can only be found occasionally today. Based on a review of domestic and foreign online catalogues, they are not found in the collections of the National Széchényi Library (OSZK) and the former Hungarian State Geological Institute (OSZK only knows Abel's short article, probably as a reprint). The electronic catalogue of Eötvös Loránd University does not show it either, although – as I mentioned – an almost complete series can be found there. The international cumulative catalogue WorldCat (www.worldcat.org) indicates its existence in the collections of the University of Strasbourg, the Sorbonne in Paris and the Muséum National d'histoire Naturelle, also in Paris. The Natural History Museum in London, the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) in the United States, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Iowa (Iowa City), and the Council for Geoscience in Pretoria in South Africa also own the series, which is usually almost complete. It should be noted that issue 9 of volume I is not known in any of the library catalogues examined; it is also missing in the holdings of the Department of Palaeontology in Budapest.

Obviously, many more libraries own individual issues or the entire series. The proof is that the individual studies are somehow accessible to researchers, who read them and refer to them in their own works. Google Scholar knows of

eighteen citations of Nopcsa's *Kallokibotium* monograph, sixteen of which are from after 2000. Osborn is cited three times, Abel is cited two times, Richter's Trilobite study thirteen times, and Müller's *Crocodilus* twelve times. Fejérváry-Lángh's snake monograph fifty-three times, Watson's Scottish Carboniferous amphibians sixty-five (!), Nopcsa's *Rhabdodon* thirty-six times, Schönfeld's fossil trees eight times, Suskin thirty-six times, von Huene's Brazilian Gondwana vertebrates seventeen times, and Hofker fifteen times. Knowing that Google only records a few citations from before 2000 – and not all of them after 2000 – we can be sure that the studies published in *Palaeontologia Hungarica* have significantly contributed to the development of palaeontology. They have not become obsolete over the past century, and retained freshness and professional significance to this day. This is also evidenced by their references in professional works published in the last twenty years. Their authors trusted *Palaeontologia Hungarica*, sent their good works to the journal, and the journal – while it was published – lived up to its expectations.

DISCUSSION

We do not yet know whose idea was to start *Palaeontologia Hungarica*. Majer was ambitious, perhaps too ambitious. The search for fame and business success may have led him to spend his money on publishing the first volume. His collaboration with Nopcsa and Fejérváry, the two world-famous researchers, established international trust in the publication. The names of both of them on the title page guaranteed the quality and attracted authors to submit their studies. It is also likely that István Majer, of common-bourgeois origin, was impressed by the fact that his name was listed as the editor-in-chief on the title page. Below him, as they were, subordinated, the names of the two aristocrat co-editors, Baron Nopcsa and Baron Fejérváry (Fig. 2). (It was uncommon to indicate social rank in professional publications.) It is clear, however, that while Majer, whose scientific work was not particularly significant, handled the daily affairs and editorial correspondence (Tasnádi Kubacska 1945: 152), the excellent group of authors was not assembled at his request, but at the invitation of the world-famous Nopcsa and Fejérváry. In some cases, they sent significant, voluminous studies to the fledgling journal.

References in Nopcsa's correspondence suggest that he was the main mover in obtaining the studies to be published. The English palaeontologist Woodward reported that Suskin, a Saint Petersburg expert on Paleo-Mesozoic vertebrates, was working on a study for *Palaeontologia Hungarica* (Tasnádi Kubacska 1945). In a letter to Friedrich von Huene dated 1 August 1924, Nopcsa asked for

a more extensive study to be sent to the journal. He repeated his request in a letter dated 2 January 1925 (Weishampel & Kerscher 2013: 460, 462).

Why Nopcsa? When Prime Minister István Bethlen appointed him as director of the Geological Institute in the summer of 1925, Nopcsa wrote in his first budget proposal: "I took on the directorship to make the Geological Institute an internationally respected institute..." He revived the Institute's magnificent publication series, set up a printing press in the institute and had its publications and maps printed on the spot (Fülöp & Tasnádi Kubacska 1969: 63). In the autumn of 1928, he invited the congress of the German *Paläontologische Gesellschaft* to Budapest. Several *Palaeontologia Hungarica* authors, such as Abel, Ehrenberg, Kräusel, and Richter (see Table 1), also attended. The raising of Hungarian science from its isolation after the Paris peace treaties and its reconnection to the international scientific network were Nopcsa's clear, long-term goals.

While Klebelsberg only stipulated the inclusion of foreign-language summaries in state-funded journals and books (Klebelsberg 1927a: 408), "so that we can show how much Hungarian science produces" (Klebelsberg 1927b: 427), Nopcsa went further: he launched an international journal published in Hungary.

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Table 1. Bibliographic description of known issues of *Palaeontologia Hungarica*. The description is based on the cloth-bound hardcover copies kept in the Department of Palaeontology library of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (currently in the Faculty of Natural Sciences library). The editor is listed as Stephanus Majer Ph. D. Co-editors in Volume I: Liber Baro Fr. dr. Nopcsa Ph. D. and Liber Baro G. J. dr. Fejérváry Ph. D., in Volume II Majer is still the editor, the co-editor is now only Fejérváry

Year	Volume	Issue	Author	Title	Pages, figures, plates	Date of issue
1921–1923	I.	1.	Francis Nopcsa	*Kallokibotium*, a primitive amphichelydean tortoise from the uppermost Cretaceous of Hungary	1–34 p., 5 figs, 4 pls	1923
	I.	2.	Henry Fairfield Osborn	Linnaean classification and phylogenetic classification of the Proboscidea	35–54 p., 5 figs	1923
	I.	3.	Othenio Abel	Gedanken über die Ursachen der Degeneration und deren phylogenetische Bedeutung	55–62 p.	1923
	I.	4.	Alexander Pongrácz	Fossile Insekten aus Ungarn. I. Tertiäre Odonatenlarve von Tállya. – II. Die Fossiles Insekten von Ungarn und ihre Beziehungen zur gegenwärtigen Fauna	63–76 p., 2 figs	1923

Year	Volume	Issue	Author	Title	Pages, figures, plates	Date of issue
	I.	5.	Rudolf Richter	Von Bau und Leben der Trilobiten. III. Die Beziehung von Glatze und Magen. – IV. Die Versteifungen der Schale und daraus hervorgehende Konvergenzen	77–108 p., 37 figs	1923
	I.	6.	Lorenz Müller	*Crocodilus siamensis* Schneid. und *Crocodilus ossifragus* Dubois	109–122 p., 5 figs	1923
	I.	7.	A. M. von Fejérváry-Lángh	Beiträge zu einer Monographie der fossilen Ophisaurier	123–220 p., 43 figs, 5 pls	1923
	I.	8.	D. M. S. Watson	The Carboniferous Amphibia of Scotland	221–252 p., 27 figs, 3 pls	1923
		9.		Unknown / not published		
	I.	10.	Franz Baron Nopcsa	Dinosaurierreste aus Siebenbürgen. IV. Die Wirbelsäule von *Rhabdodon* und *Orthomerus*	273–304 p., 1 fig., 6 pls	1925
	I.	11.	G. Schönfeld	Zersetzungserscheinungen an fossilen Hölzern und ihre Bedeutung für die Genesis der Braunkohlenflöze, mit einem Vorwort von R. Kräusel	305–322 p., 3 figs, 1 pl.	1926
	I.	12.	Peter P. Sushkin	Notes on the pre-Jurassic Tetrapoda from Russia. I: *Dicynodon amalitzkii*, n. sp. – II. Contributions to the morphology and ethology of the Anomodontia. – II. On Seymouriamorphae from the Upper Permian of North Dvina	323–344 p., 19 figs, 1 pl.	1926
1924–1926	II.	1.	Friedrich von Huene	Gondwana-Reptilien in Südamerika	1–108 p., 37 figs, 22 pls	1926
	II.	2.	J. Hofker	*Archegosaurus decheni* Goldfuss	109–130 p.	1926
	II.	3.	Kurt Ehrenberg	Über Epiphysenbildungen auf den Hinterhauptcondylen fossiler und rezenter Bären	131 p., 10 figs	1927

Volume I was published on a total of 344 folio-sized pages, with over 160 illustrations and 20 plates. Volume II is slimmer, with only 140 pages, with over 47 illustrations and 38 plates