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OBITUARY

PROF. DR. EHRHARD VOIGT–THE LEGENDARY PALAEONTOLOGIST

Professor Dr. Ehrhard Voigt (1905–2004)

Very few men of science have ever been so active for so long in pursuit of research in Earth Science as had been Prof. Dr. Ehrhard Voigt (July 2005- November 2004), Hamburg, Germany. Voigt was a remarkable scientist, unique in his achievement of publishing continuously over eight decades.

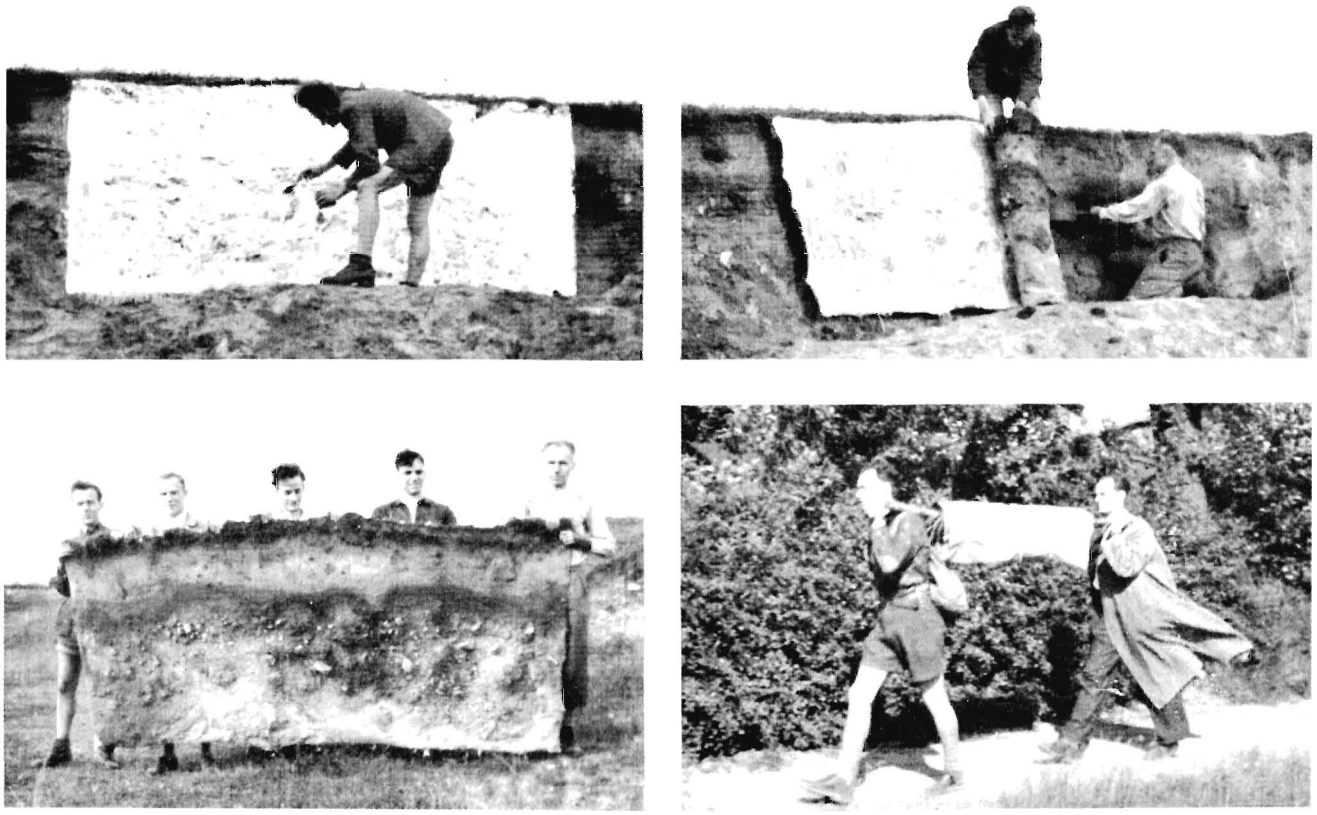
As a schoolboy, Ehrhard was already enthusiastic about collecting and studying fossils, especially those of the Bryozoa, an uncommon group of fossils among palaeontologists. In order to study his collection in a professional way, he corresponded with F. Canu of Versailles (France) and R. S. Bassler of Washington D.C. (USA), two eminent bryozoologists. Bassler visited his parent's home in Dessau to study 'schoolboy' Ehrhard's first collection of fossil Bryozoa. That his efforts were professional indeed right from the beginning, is evident from the publications, under single authorship, on systematics of these fossils in a series of five articles (a total of 127 printed pages) in professional journals; one in 1923 and four (three in Paläontologische Zeitschrift, a journal issued at Berlin) in 1924. In this first series of his publications, one article concerns ctenostome bryozoans, a group rarely handled by bryozoologists.

Prof. Voigt's passion for collection of bryozoan colonies remained with him as his avocation of walking and travelling. He reminisces (pers. comm., 2000), "*During my time as an army geologist (2nd World War) in Czechoslovakia, I discovered a rich Cenomanian bryozoan fauna at Preboj near Prague (Praha), consisting of very thin and small fragments. Two years later, after my transfer to the Russian front and after the capitulation of the German army (1945), I was interned by Russians as POW (prisoner of war). In order to save the collected bryozoans, I had put the delicate material in a small cellophane bag, which I concealed into the lining of my boots. I closed the slits with sodden bread. Once, after my capture, the Russian guards in the camp took my boots away but I was able to steal them back. It is true that I found in this camp of Morchansk an encrusting Cretaceous* "Membranipora" *at a heap of white chalk at a construction site. After my release in 1946, I was able to take the specimens back in Germany.*"

Prof. J. M. Hancock of Imperial College (London), a good friend of Prof. Voigt, informs that Voigt collected bryozoan specimens from rock surfaces even when he was temporarily released for attending to nature's call from the prison van that was bringing the POWs from Russia at the end of the 2nd World War. He used to fill the empty rooms of his house in Hamburg with his collections of bryozoans, as and when his sons vacated them.

P. D. Taylor of Natural History Museum, London remembers (pers. comm., 2002) "I have known him since 1980 and have many memories of visiting his flat in Hamburg to work with him and to study his magnificent collection of Cretaceous bryozoans... When I first visited him, he would expect me to arrive no later than 9.00 am and to leave for my hotel no earlier than 9.00 pm, and even then he would supply me with a batch of research papers to be read overnight while he himself worked long past midnight preparing specimens and his famous photocards for my visit the next day... I remember taking him to do fieldwork in the mid Cretaceous of east Devon in about 1985, accompanied by Gisela Illies, a former student of his. We stayed in a hotel in Sidmouth where Voigt was delighted to find that the sieve over the outlet of the washbasin in his bedroom had perforations of exactly the right size to retain the bryozoans he had collected during the day while letting the sandy matrix pass into the drain. Each morning he would appear at breakfast with his washed bryozoans so that we could study them as we ate our cornflakes... Even when I first knew him I was struck by how tormented he was by the fact that he would not live long enough to publish all of the vast bryozoological knowledge 'stored' in his brain; I'm sure that the problems caused by his failing eyesight and lack of a research assistant will have exasperated this frustration."

In 1929, Ehrhard Voigt received Dr. rer. nat. from the University of Halle. Between 1929 and 1936, he worked as the Assistant to the Geological Institute of that University; and became the curator of the museum of the University. In 1939, he joined Hamburg University, Germany, and served there as



Prof. E. Voigt working on Geiseltal fossil site of the Eocene sediments.

Professor for Geology and Palaeontology (1939-70), Director of Geologisches Staatinstitut (1939-68); Director of Geologisches-Palaeontologie Institut and Museum of Hamburg University (1968–70). He was associated with this institute as Emeritus Professor since 1970. From 1939 to 1945, he had to join the army and was prisoner of war in USSR from 1945 to 1946. He received the Hans-Stille Medal (Deutsche Geolog. Gesellschaft) in 1960, a honorary doctorate from the University of Bordeaux, France in 1961, the Medal of the Hungarian Geological Service (Budapest) in 1969 and the Medal of the Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften (Hamburg) in 1989. He was associated with a large number of scientific, professional societies, associations and academies. Prof. Voigt's collection of the Cretaceous and Tertiary Bryozoa at the Geologisches Staatinstitute of the University of Hamburg is the largest and most valuable collection of bryozoans of that period that currently exists. This achievement is most notable for two reasons; firstly, Prof. Voigt made the collection all by himself, and secondly, it is the second collection as the first one was destroyed during bomb raids of Hamburg in 1943. By that time Prof. Voigt had been collecting bryozoans for more than 20 years.

During the past eight decades, Prof. Voigt published over 255 papers, of which only around 50 are with his co-workers, and only 138 are on bryozoans. Seven papers including a large monograph on 'Bryozoa from the Alpine Gosau' were in press or at different stages of preparation at the time of his death. His publication list (with about 80% single-authored) and the authorship of new taxa (three new bryozoan families, 72 new genera and 128 new species of which nearly 80% are single-authored) would indicate that he worked single-handed for the major part of his career. He worked mainly on materials from the Cretaceous (chiefly Late) and Tertiary (chiefly Early) of Europe (Germany being the central area of interest) where, even for bryozoans, virgin localities were rare. He carried out extensive revision of the identification of bryozoans made by d'Orbigny, v. Hagenow, Hamm and Reuss from Cretaceous horizons of Europe and America (Reuss' collection). The use of scanning electron microscopes (SEM) in micropaleontology during the last three decades has brought to light many hitherto unknown skeletal characters of the Bryozoa that called for emendation of earlier systematic placements. Further, his involvement as army geologist (1939-1945; 1945-1946 as POW in USSR) and destruction of his 20 years' collection with over 500 originals including many type specimens at the Geological Institute by bomb raids over Hamburg in 1943 retarded the pace of his work. Prof. Voigt made seminal contribution on homeomorphy in bryozoans, bioimmuration, palaeoecology of sea-grass associations, parasitism and symbiosis and bryozoan evolution during Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) transition.

Prof. Voigt's urge for collection of bryozoan colonies

resulting in inventing and developing (1932–1949) the 'lackfilm' method of taking 'peels' of profiles of soils and soft sediments. While working on the Geiseltal fossil site of the Eocene vertebrates he took life-sized mats of 'lackfilm' peels of large profiles of unconsolidated sediments and lignite (*see photographs*) that could be rolled for transport to laboratory. One such 'lackfilm' adorned his funeral service in Hamburg on December 16, 2004. He had always been much ahead of his time in working on areas where traditional researchers were hesitant to tread. Whether the Danian epoch should belong to the Tertiary Period was the subject of an article published in 1925 (when he was only 20 years of age). The next year, his work on fish otoliths was published.

Prof. Voigt was a contributor to the Journal of the Palaeontological Society of India (Jurij Alendrovich Orlov Memorial Volume, 1975) and a reviewer of articles submitted to it. The present author had the benefit of interacting with him in revising the Stoliczka's Late Cretaceous type material and other diverse bryozoan taxa from South India (Cauvery Basin) seemingly preserving the most diverse Maastrichtian Bryozoa outside its European type locality.

Life and work of Prof. Voigt will encourage future earth scientists, especially those working on Bryozoa, to unravel many hidden facets of geological history while searching for the remnants of these colonial organisms. With all his humility, he pleads (pers. comm., 2000) *'... please do not over-estimate my work or my personality. No one would understand it if you rank me as the "most distinguished" earth scientist of the twentieth century. There are others who merit this designation... Please refer to my work and cite my research without making any qualitative assessment.'* Without using any superlatives, it may be summarised that the dawn of the twenty-first century witnesses an end to the institution that Prof. Ehrhard Voigt was, an institution built during his life time of eight decades on outstanding work and devout erudition.

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