

## FERDINAND SCHMIDT'S ACTIVITIES

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Ferdinánd Schmidt's name is probably less unknown in slovenian speleohistory than in his motherland Hungary. Biographical encyclopaedias (Szinyei 1908, Kenyeres 1969) record him as an entomologist dealing chiefly with cave fauna. However his name cannot be found in the bibliography of Hungarian caves, and Hungarian biospeleologists have not referred to his activity.

Ferdinánd Schmidt was born in Sopron in 1791 as a child of a a german-speaking family of merchants. He attended grammar school in Sopron where his teacher Vincze Farkas - the later abbot of the Tihany abbey - familiarized him not only with the hungarian language but with the fondness of nature as well. He was educated at a modern secondary school in Vienna for two years, then after a practice in Pozsony (Bratislava) he became a merchant. First he was working in his parents' shop. In 1812 - after his army years as a volunteer where he soon gained distinction with his skill and courage (he was commissioned) - he worked as an instructor in Pest and then as shop assistant in different towns. In May 1814 he settled in Ljubljana (Laibach) and was employed as managing clerk at renowned merchants finally starting his own shop in 1819. Grown rich within twenty years he ceased business in 1839 and devoted his life to science, to making the town prosper, and to relieve the poor. Besides of botany and horticulture he chiefly studied entomology and had a famous entomological collection. Several scientific societies (such as those of Moscow, Nuremberg, Halle, Pest and others) elected him as a member.

He published the results of his biological researches in slovenian caves mainly in austrian scientific reviews and journals in german language. The Würzbach encyclopedia issued in Vienna (1875) published a review of several pages on his investigations and the cave insects discovered by him already in his lifetime.

Besides science he payed attention to the commercial development of the town for which he made important financial sacrifices as well. In 1834 he founded a commercial school. Then, in 1836, he formed the friedly society of merchants. He was the member or even the leader of almost all committees displaying activities in economy and commerce of the town. Being an immigrant he was granted civic rights by the town in 1837. The imperial court appreciated his activity for promoting commerce and industry in a decree in 1839. In 1869 the emperor decorated him with the crowned golden cross of distinction and he was presented the freedom of the town of Laibach.

It is less known that - for his lifetime - he was keeping in close touch with professional institutions and specialists of his motherland too. He presented several curiosities to hungarian public collections such as the first *proteus anguineus* from his collection. In August 1847 he participated in the VIIIth Itinerary Congress of Hungarian Physicians and Natural Scientists in his native town - Sopron - where he reported the results of his researches like about the *Proteus angvinus* (that he named as "cave variature" in Hungarian - the latter word is unknown in the modern

language and might have been created from the words "variable" and "creature") as well as about several cave insects discovered by him. The text of his lectures given in Hungarian was also printed in 1863.

In his lecture on the "cave variature" (besides presenting the research history of these famous animals living in slovenian caves and the results of actual investigations) he showed three different living specimens. He gave an interesting report on his observations on the proteus specimens kept in a specially built well at his house since 1842. His researches covered the nutrition, discolouration and multiplication of the species though the latter was without significant results. In his second lecture Schmidt showed 6 kinds of insects he found in the caves of Postojna and Predjama. He considered them to be new species and asked for the help of specialists to classify them. According to a mention in the published article he kept the drawings illustrating these new, unpublished insects back for "the communications of the scientific society of my beloved motherland". Unfortunately we have no information on the publication of these drawings at all.

Schmid's activity was respected in his lifetime in Hungary too and his reports were documented in detail (Majer 1842, Römer 1863). His death in Laibach on February 16th 1878 was announced in the "Vasárnapi Ujság" as well (1878).

The detailed study of his lifework seems to be possible only by a cooperation of all the related countries.

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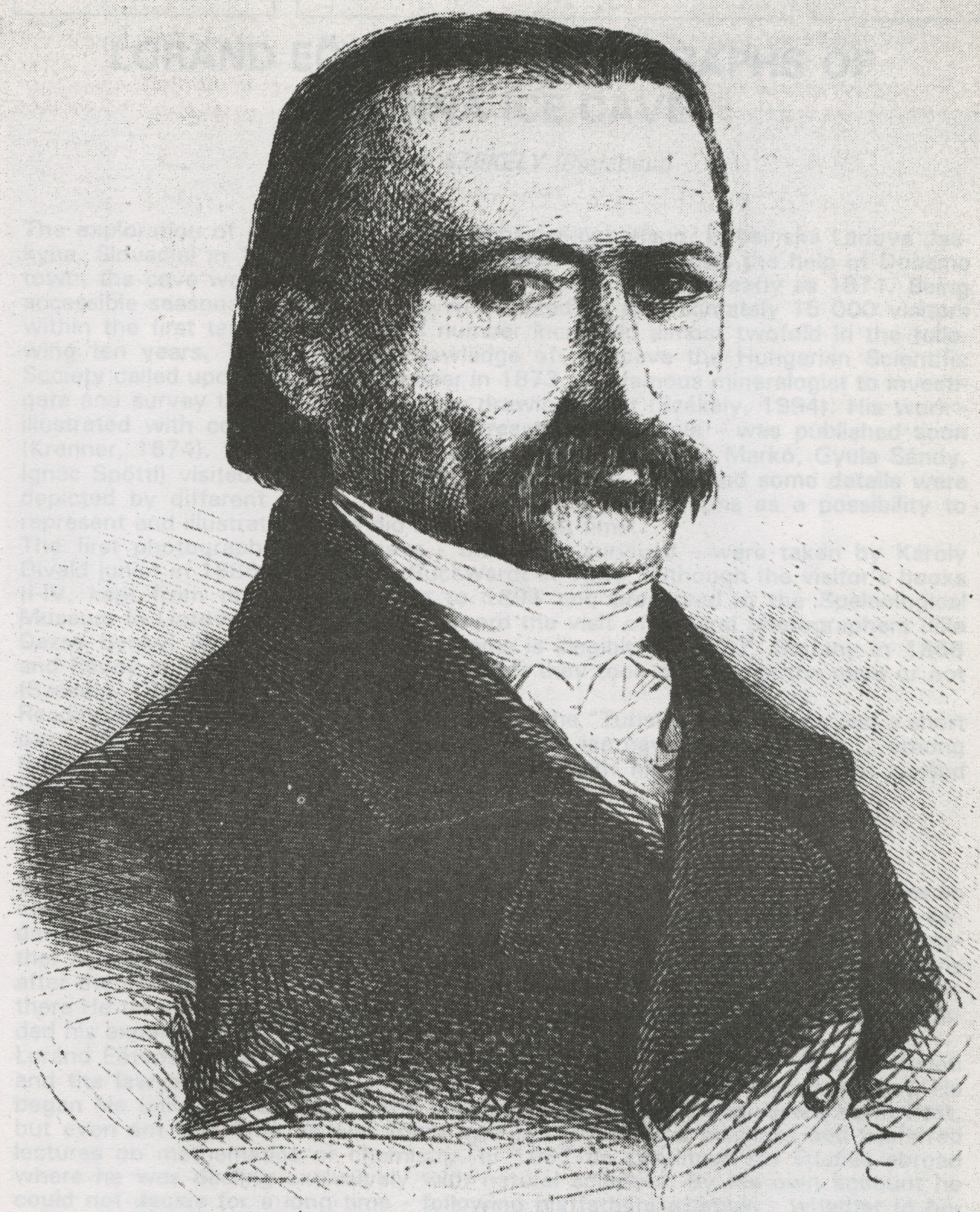
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