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## First famous Hungarian cave photographer Károly Divald

### Abstract

**The paper presents Karoly Divald, the first important Hungarian cave photographer and his work in Hungarian caves.**

As far as it can be ascertained from the documents available, the first important figure of Hungarian cave photography was Károly Divald.

He was born in Selmecebánya (now: Banská Stiavnica, Czechoslovakia), descending from a forester-miner family resettled from Reims, France, in the 18th century. He studied pharmacology at Vienna and became a chemist in Bártfa (now: Bardejov, Czechoslovakia). Besides his work, he was engaged in photography. With regard to the situation in photography techniques, several chemists can be found among the photographers of that time. The wet technique the preparation of photographie plates required knowledge in chemistry and practice in laboratory work. In 1863 Divald opened a photographic studio in Eperjec (now: Prešov, Czechoslovakia) and afterwards concentrated only on photography. He shot portraits not only in the studio, but was among the first to step out into nature and to begin to take photos of Hungarian landscapes. Accompanied by 15-20 people, he climbed the peaks of the High Tatras and the Pieniny. To make a few successful photographs, the company, loaded with the equipment, had to take long and fatiguing tours. The camera itself weighed almost 25 kg and people specialized to carry the glass plates, chemicals, canvases to shade the dark room and bars. As related by Divald's grandchild, the caravan was always led by Károly Divald, wearing a huge full-beard and holding a gigantic stick in his hands, seemingly against bears, but in truth it was his folded camera stand. The row was closed by a young apprentice, who carried food and wine.

He photographed almost all the towns and spas beyond the North-Carpathians. In the 1870s he set up collaboration with the Hungarian Carpathians Association and prepared photos into its publications. His first photo album showed the High-Tatras in 1873. His landscapes and townscapes were sold in the resorts, spas of the Tatras and also in Budapest. Increasing demand made him open new shops in Bártfa and Tátrafüred (now: Starý Smokovec, Czechoslovakia).

The spreading of the art and the growing number of photographers made Divald turn to a new activity and in 1878 he established an art printing workshop in Eperjes and Budapest and in these studios he began to reproduce photos by printing, making picture postcards. He produced 3-4 million postcards with landscapes annually. When he died in Eperjes in 1897, the studios were taken over by his sons and even in the first decade of this century Adolf reproduces his father's picture postcards in Bártfa.

Among Károly Divald's landscape photos, the pictures of caves, mostly taken in the Béla and Báradla caves, are of particular importance.

The Szepesbéla cave of the Béle Tatras (Blanské Tatry), explored in 1881, became the centre of public interest. Divald issued his photo series of this cave on hard card in 1887. On the photographs the names of halls and formations are shown in Hungarian and German (Fig. 1), while on the back the date of issue, name of the cave and the publisher are indicated (Fig. 2). It is interesting to note that among the first postcards of the cave no Divald's photos are found, perhaps, because the explorer and later operator of the cave, János Blitz, himself took photographs and preferred his own works in the publication of postcards.

Károly Divald visited the longest cave of Hungary, Baradla, open to visitors since the late 1700s, on June 6, 1890, as attested by the book of guests, and toured over the whole length of the cave (Fig. 3).

His series of 32 photographs was first published in 1890 entitled 'Pictures from the Aggtelek cave'. As it was usual in those times the pictures were published on card, with Hungarian, German and French inscriptions on their back (name of cave and formation, date of issue and name of publisher). In changing number, size and form, the photographs were published in several editions. The series of 1870x105 mm size pictures in hard cover was the predecessor of picture postcards (Fig. 4). The series was published without date indication, put probably before Divald's death (1897). In the Pallas Great Encyclopaedia (1893) the entry Baradla is also illustrated by eight of Divald's photographs (Fig. 5). Some pictures are found in the appendix to the Year-book of the Hungarian Carpathians Association.

The exact date of publication for postcards of the Baradla is not known. The evidence presently available indicates that it was only in 1898, after Divald's death, issued by his sons. The first postcards invariably show an upright and a horizontal picture together in drawn frame of paper-roll with flower ornaments. Above the pictures the name of the formation, while below the name of the cave can be read. The postcards inform about the explored length, the nearest railway station and the start of carriage drives from there (Fig. 6). For writing some words of greeting space is reserved in the bottom right corner, while on the undivided back there is only room for the address. The different colours and types of letters on the postcards prove multiple editions.

The first single-picture postcard of Baradla was issued by Adolf Divald on the turn of the century. It also showed the photos of Károly Divald. Around the picture the name of the cave, the hall or formation and the publisher are written. There is virtually no room left for the greeting words. The number next to the name of the publisher may be believed the number of photograph in the series, but the highest known figure (156) makes it improbable. This figure may be an identifier for postcards produced by the publisher. The same postcards were sold even after 1906, when the postcard with divided back appeared (Fig. 7). It is interesting that in 1930 the Hungarian Carpathians Association also issued one of Divald's photographs in reverse print, without indicating the author's name. Unfortunately, this was characteristic of early postcards, they only showed the name of the publisher, but not the photographer.

As a consequence, although postcards of the Bobsina cave (Fig. 8) are known in Divald's publication from early this century, they are not referred to Divald's photographs as other documents do not support that he visited and took photos in the cave and the postcards were issued after his death.

In addition to the significance as documents, the photographs are also important in the history of science since the figure of the picture 'Helmet of Minerva'. Károly Siegmeth was one of the great defenders and developers of Baradla, founding president of the first scientific organisation of Hungarian speleology, the Cave Committee. The figure with large moustache wearing national dress on the pictures 'Tempe valley' and 'Statue of St. Ladislas' is the legendary cave guide, János Klanicza (Fig. 9), who led tours into the cave for several decades. His marked figure allowed the identification of photographs with no date and place indication.

The name of Károly Divald does not appear in the international literature on cave photography. His works are not only unknown abroad, but also in Hungary he does not receive due respect. Although he is mentioned in the history of photography as one of the first nature photographers, the huge collection of his pictures lies unstudied on the shelves of the Photo Archive.

## References

Kenyeres, Agnes (1967): Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon - Budapest



Fig. 1

Szepes-Bélai cseppkőbarlang.  
 Bélaer Tropfsteinhöhle.  
 1887.

*1887. 16.*

Minden utazás tilos. — Vervielfältigung vorbehalten. DIVALD K. EPERJES és BUDAPEST.

Fig. 2

37	Trófoli fűzfű	"	"	füst. neje	"	"	Rozsák
38	6. Részlet	Eperjes	"	szegfűszeg és fű	"	"	Tollan fűzfűvel megrós
39	"	"	"	nyomat. miniat. Eperjéről végig	"	"	Kisvárosi utasállom. a kőművet
40	"	"	"	szegfűszeg	"	"	szegfűszeg
	"	"	"	szegfűszeg	"	"	"

Fig. 3

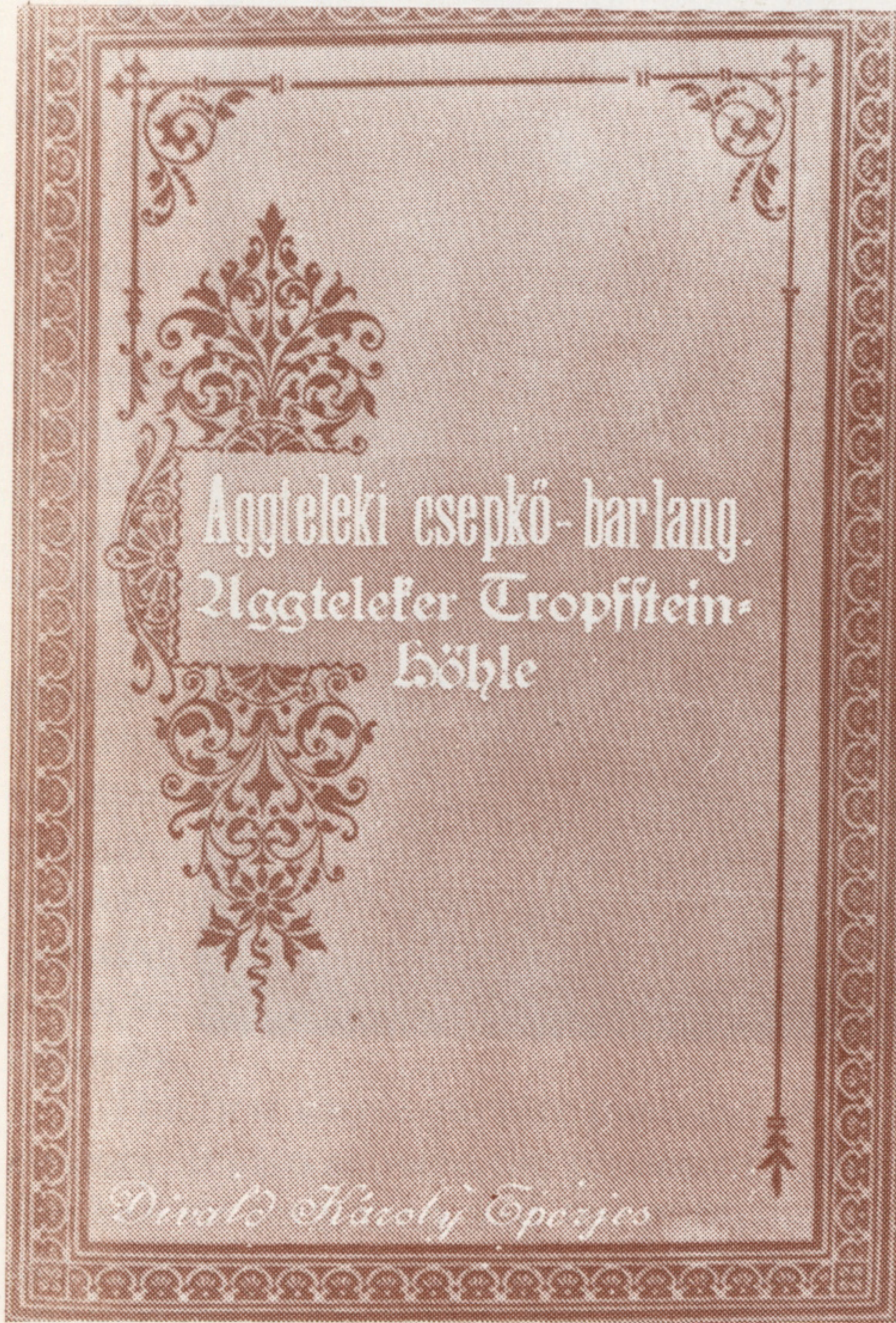


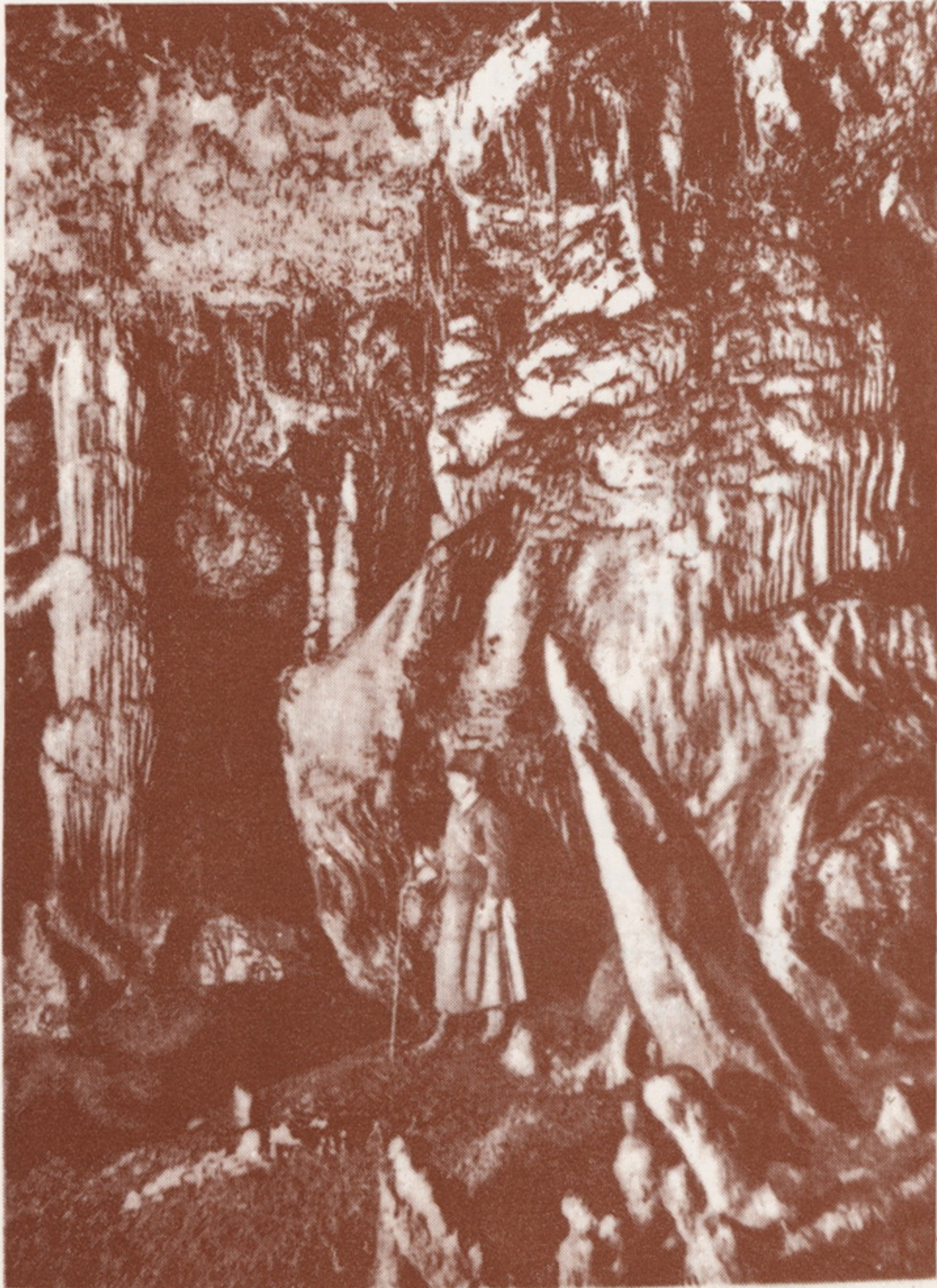
Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Vass Imre oszlop.

Aggteleki cseppkőbarlang.

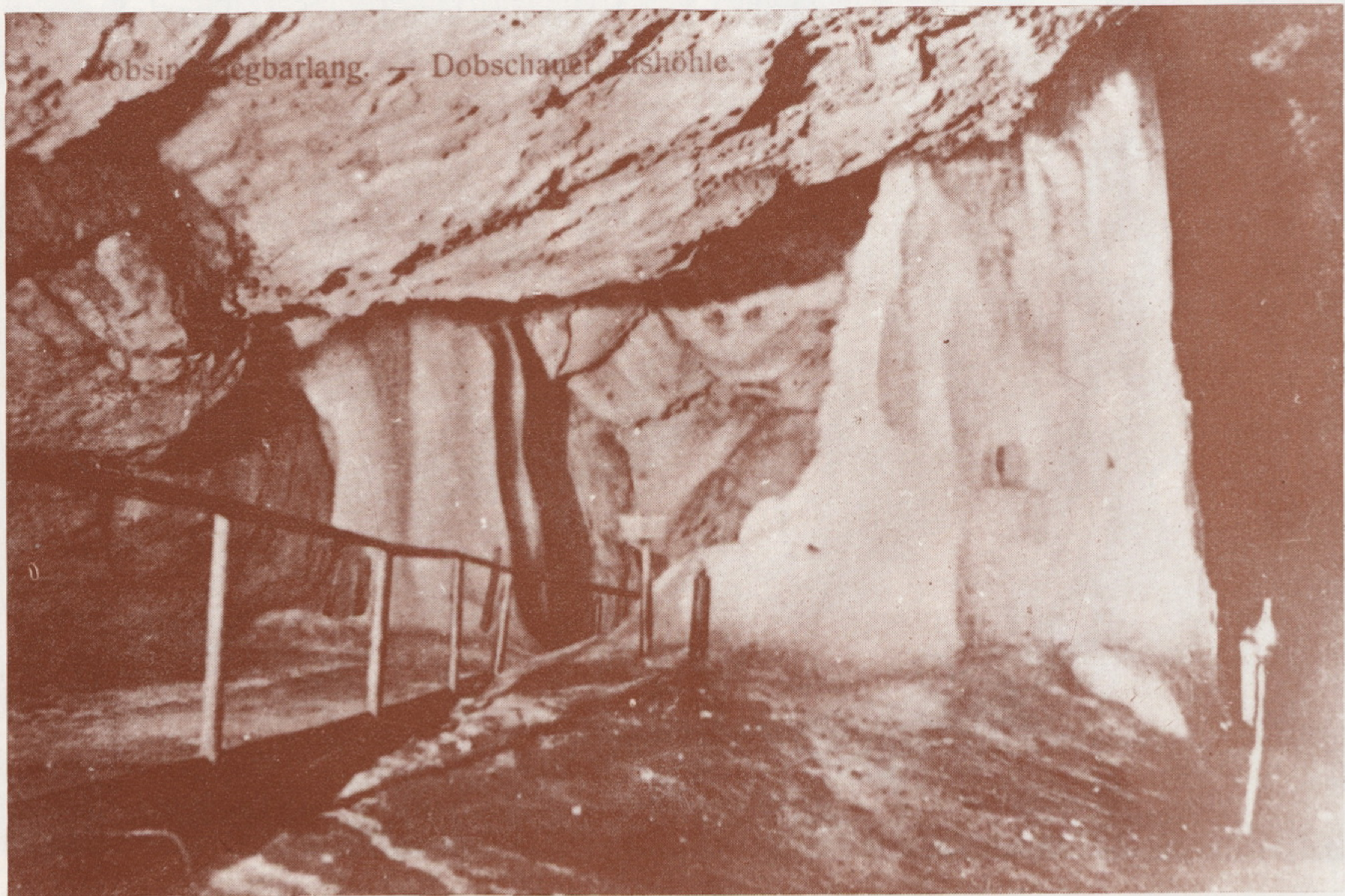
Fig. 7



Szt. László szobra. — Aggteleki cseppkőbarlang.

*Lapner György*  
*1912. évi nyári kirándulás*

Fig. 8



Dobsinai kőbarlang. — Dobschauer kőhöhle.

Fig. 9