

Remembrance of Antoni Hoffman

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Antoni Hoffman, one of the most brilliant and creative evolutionary biologists died after a long illness on 7 November 1992, at the age of 42.

Antoni (Antek to his Polish colleagues), was born on 17 March 1950 in Warsaw. In 1973 he graduated from the University of Warsaw as a master of geological sciences. The same year he received a post-graduate fellowship at the Faculty of Geology and in 1977 he graduated as a Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Warsaw.

Life in Poland was not easy when Antek Hoffman was an undergraduate and later on graduate student. The Communist Party ruled the country with absolute power and Antek actively participated in protest movements. His name was soon on the 'black list' held by the Polish secret police. When he graduated as Ph.D., a post of scientific assistant was available at the Institute of Paleobiology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. As the Director of the Institute I invited him to join us. The regulations required, however, an approval of all personal decisions by the Communist Party, which I could not obtain. In spite of the lack of approval I decided to hire Hoffman and I notified my decision the Communist Party's representative. Two hours later I was informed by the authorities of the Academy that due to 'reorganization' the post for which I intended to engage Antoni Hoffman was being cancelled. The Institute had no money to engage him.

During next three years Antek remained unemployed and made a living for himself and his family mostly by doing translations of paleontological and geological papers into English for our scientific journals. He published also several popular articles on the problems of evolutionary biology, which became the basis for his first book *Wokół Ewolucji* (On *Evolution*, in Polish), published in 1983. Working at home he managed to conduct scientific researches as well.

In 1980 he obtained a two years fellowship of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and went with his family abroad. Until the end of 1982 he was working at the Institute of Geology and Paleontology of Tiibingen University. When the Humboldt fellowship expired, Antek still could not obtain a post in Poland, due to the political situation. The Hoffmans went to USA where Antek worked as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and later on spent three years as a research scientist at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Laboratory in New York.

In 1986 the Hoffmans finally returned to Poland. In June of that year Antek obtained a post of associate professor (in Polish adiunkt) at the Institute of Paleobiology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, where he was working until the end of his days. In 1987 he became a docent, a few days before his death he was nominated full professor by the Central Qualification Commission. At the Institute in Warsaw he chaired the informal discussion seminars, and led the project on the use stable isotope records for study of changes in biosphere at the Ordovician-Silurian transition. He was surrounded by a group of enthusiastic young researchers who admired him greatly.

During his 18 years of scientific activity Antoni Hoffman published 133 scientific and popular articles, reviews and books. In addition to the mentioned book in Polish he is the author of the book *Arguments on Evolution: a Paleontologist's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989). He is also the co-editor of two books: M.H. Nitecki & A. Hoffman *Neutral Models in Biology* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987) and A. Hoffman & M.H. Nitecki *Problematic Fossil Taxa* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988).

Trained originally in stratigraphic geology, Antoni Hoffman soon changed his interests to palaeoecology and then to the evolutionary biology. It also seems that six years of expatriation caused by the Communist regime turned out to have a positive effect on his scientific development. During his stay abroad, he had an opportunity to cooperate with leading theoretical biologists, which resulted in numerous joint publications.

Most important of his achievements is probably the book *Arguments on Evolution* in which he summarized his critical work on the concepts of punctuated equilibrium, natural selection, taxonomic diversification of the biosphere and some explanations of mass extinctions. In the last few years he carried out empirical studies on the Red Queen Hypothesis, empirical studies on punctualism versus gradualism, on mass extinctions and methodological studies in biology and evolutionary palaeontology, biogeography and palaeogeography.

In his later years Antoni Hoffman turned his energies to work on organization of science in Poland. He was co-author of the High Education Law, and worked as an adviser to the Minister of Education, and an expert of the Polish *Sejm* (Parliament) on education. He was also a co-author of the natural science program now in use in the Polish high schools.

Antek had an unusually strong character. His illness (cancer of the pancreas) was discovered early in 1992. During next nine months he did not stop working hard, was optimistic and believed that the experimental immunological treatment that he was receiving would prolong his life. I talked to him by telephone two weeks before he died. He still assured me that he was doing well and made plans of giving lectures abroad in November. One can only imagine how much he could have contributed, had not the cruel death deprived so early Polish and world paleontology of one of its most original and inspiring thinkers.

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