

and geology, called planetary science.

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Conference Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Death of Dr. Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly, and 145th Anniversary of the Founding of the Hurbanovo Observatory, edited by Eduard Koči (Hurbanovo, Slovenská ústredná hviezdáreň, [2016]). Pp. 115. ISBN 978-80-85221-91-6 (paperback), 165 × 235 mm, €10.

In 2016, one hundred years have passed since the death of Dr Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly (1842–1916), one of the founders of astrophysics in Kingdom of Hungary. Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly studied physics at the University in Pest (now Budapest). Then he enrolled to study law at the University in Berlin. He had a keen interest in natural sciences and in his spare time he attended lectures held by the famous German astronomer Johann Franz Encke and physicist and chemist Heinrich Gustav Magnus. In his adult years, Konkoly was also active in the fields of meteorology and geomagnetism. In 1871 he founded his private observatory in Ógyalla (Slovak: Stará Ďala, renamed Hurbanovo in 1948), i.e. 145 years before 2016.

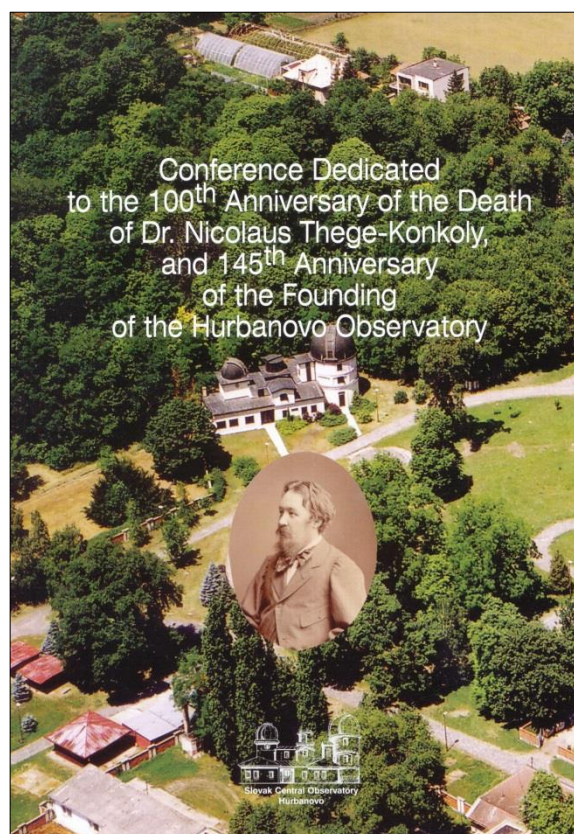
A conference commemorating both anniversaries was held in the Slovak Central Observatory in Hurbanovo, Slovakia, on 18–20 May 2016. Experts from various fields and three countries (Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic) gathered there to present papers related to Konkoly or the Observatory in various ways. The Slovak Central Observatory published a collection of papers in Slovak and English languages containing thirteen papers altogether. A version in the Hungarian language is planned as well.

The first paper focuses on the private observatory 'Júlia' located in Zvolenská Slatina (a village in Central Slovakia). The owner of the observatory, Vladimír Bahýl, describes the scientific program of the observatory (mostly observations of photometric measurements of meteors and eclipsing binaries). At the end of the paper, he also opens a discussion about who can be considered an amateur or a professional observer. He considers Nicolaus Konkoly a professional, even though he 'only' used a private observatory. As an owner of a private observatory, V. Bahýl declares that he is the scientific heir to Konkoly in the field of astronomy.

In the next paper Lajos G. Balázs deals with the scientific life, instrumentation and scientific results of Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly in the era of the rise of astrophysics. Konkoly's observation program consisted of solar physics, observing

interplanetary matter, planetary research (particularly Jupiter and Mars), stellar spectroscopy and stellar photometry. Balázs also sheds some light on collaborations between the staff (Radó von Kövesligethy, Antal Tass, Béla Harkányi and others). He writes briefly on the institutional development of the Observatory, its donation to the Hungarian state in 1899, and hard times both after the death of Konkoly in 1916 and after the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1918.

Three authors from the solar observatory in Debrecen (Tünde Baranyi, Lajos Győri and András Ludmány) write about the photoheliographic



program and sunspot database produced by their Observatory since 1958. The instruments used to obtain these results were originally housed in Konkoly's private observatory in Stará Ďala/Ógyalla. They briefly outline the development of solar physics and Konkoly's own contribution in this field.

The fourth paper, by Lajos Bartha, focuses on Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly as an engineer, an organizer and a cultural politician. Bartha illustrates that Konkoly was not only an engineer or a politician but a true 'renaissance' man: he was, among other things, a pianist, a composer, an excellent shooter, a fencer, a locomotive driver, and a river-boat captain. Konkoly was a very influential man in his circles.

In the fifth paper, Ladislav Druga summarizes the history of the Observatory from its be-

ginnings up to present day and supplements the text with rich photographic material.

Mária Gallová draws parallels and similarities between lives of Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly (1842–1916) and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919). Štefánik was a Slovak astrophysicist who worked at Meudon Observatory (France) under the tutorship of Jules Janssen at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was also a military general and a politician and played a decisive role in the creation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. Both men were avid observers and scientists not only in astrophysics but also in meteorology. Both were members of scientific societies, had some relationship to art, were politicians, etc. Although they lived in the same country they never met each other.

Ladislav Hric briefly summarizes the history of astrophysics from Konkoly's era up to the twenty-first century in the seventh paper.

In the eighth paper, Renáta Kolivošková describes the story of a 60-cm reflecting telescope made by Zeiss in Jena (Germany) in the early 1920s and mounted at Hurbanovo (then Stará Ďala) Observatory in 1928. Up until 1967 it was the largest telescope in the territory of the then Czechoslovakia. In 1930 the telescope was used by Bohumil Šternberk to photographically determine the position of a newly-discovered (dwarf) planet Pluto. This was the first such observation made from Europe. In November 1938, after the First Vienna Award, the telescope was quickly dismantled and transported to a safe place in Prešov (Slovakia) with the hope of constructing a new observatory there. In 1943, however, the telescope was mounted at the Observatory in Skalnaté Pleso, then under the directorship of Antonín Bečvář. Since 1994 the telescope has been at the Modra Astronomical and Geophysical Observatory.

Attila Mizser talks about the Observatory at Nagytagyos (near Tata, Hungary) in the ninth paper. Nagytagyos was another Observatory owned by Thege-Konkoly, which functioned during the period of 1901–1912. There was also a meteorological station, because it was primarily a meteorological observatory, supplemented with astronomical equipment from 1903.

There is then a brief notice about the whole conference session by Zoltán Orha, Hungarian filmmaker, followed by a paper on instrumentation at Hurbanovo Observatory written by Ladislav Pastorek. He traces the development of instruments and observing domes from the foundation of the Observatory in 1871 up until approximately 1910. In the 'golden age' of the Observatory there were 11 domes equipped with various astronomical instruments, some of which were upgraded by Konkoly himself (e.g.

spectrographs and spectroscopes that are now on display at the local astronomical museum).

As mentioned previously, geomagnetic research also was conducted at Hurbanovo Observatory. The history of the geomagnetic observations from their beginning up to 2016 is presented in a chapter by Fridrich Valach, the Director of the Earth Sciences Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

In the final paper of the conference, Marián Vidovenec, the Director of the Slovak Central Observatory, focused on the general historical outline of the whole Observatory and on the life of Nicolaus Thege-Konkoly.

The conference revealed that historians and astronomers from Central European countries still have a lively interest in Konkoly's personality and his scientific achievements.

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***The Lost Planets: Peter van de Kamp and the Vanishing Exoplanets Around Barnard's Star*, by John Wenz. (Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2019). Pp. xxvi + 171. ISBN 978-0-262-042864 (hardback), 135 × 210 mm, US\$24.95.**

The litany of twentieth-century 'discoveries' that have been proven false is not an attractive one for the science of astronomy. While the very nature of scientific discovery is based upon one finding being supplanted by another, the 'rabbit holes' so many astronomers have gone down in the past few decades must serve as a wake-up call to those who mislead the taxpayer who ultimately pays for much of this research.

From studies based on lunar science arose the idea, which became very widely accepted, that there was a 'Late Heavy Bombardment' of objects on the Moon around 4 billion years ago. The idea became so alluring it has infiltrated its way into the life sciences, where the energy it released has been used as a convenient way to explain the rise of life itself. Alas, it was all merely a misinterpretation of data, but one that will linger on for many years.

This book by John Wenz tells the equally forlorn tale of the discovery of exoplanets that were widely trumpeted in the press decades ago. For many it was the realisation that science fiction had become science fact. Unfortunately for the public and the careers of all those involved, it really was science fiction.

One of the centres of the activity to find exoplanets and sub-stellar objects (bodies that are too big to qualify as a planet, but too small to initiate nuclear burning) was Sproul Observatory, at Pennsylvania's Swarthmore College.