Acta Geologica Polonica, Vol. 74 (2024), No. 4, e24
DOI: 10.24425/agp.2024.152657

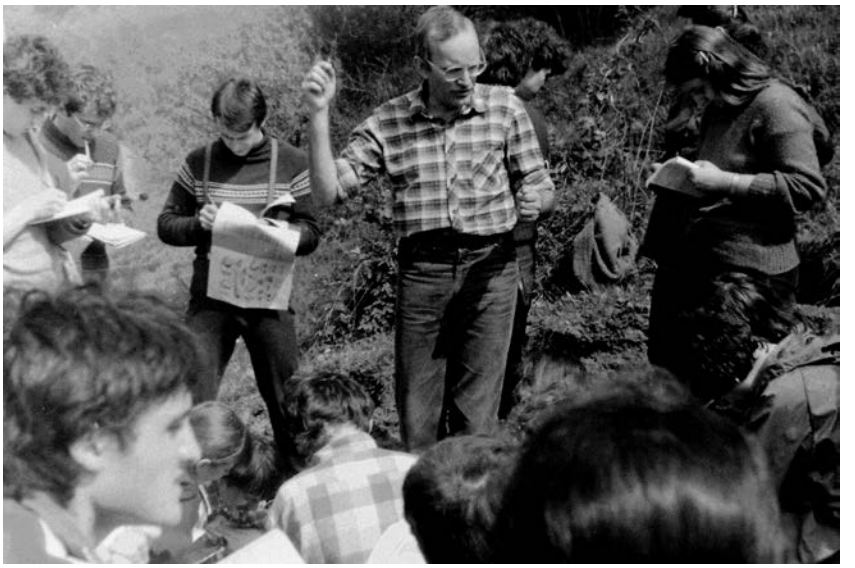
Maestro Michał Szulczewski

In 2024, Professor Michał Szulczewski celebrates his 85th birthday. This year roughly marks 65 years of his scientific activity, which began at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s with his work in the Polish Tatra Mountains. The 85th jubilee has inspired a number of Michał Szulczewski's friends and pupils, including the author of these words, to celebrate it by a special issue of *Acta Geologica Polonica*. We feel that this is the perfect and the only place for such an issue, as his most important articles have been published in *Acta Geologica Polonica*, including his M.Sc. (Szulczewski 1963a), PhD (Szulczewski 1968), and habilitation works (Szulczewski 1971). Professor Szulczewski is also up to the present a permanent member of the journal's editorial board.

This is not yet the time to make any recapitulations of Professor Szulczewski's achievements, and hopefully this time is far ahead. Therefore, there will be no proper curriculum here, as well as no complete listings of his publications, activities, formal roles, alumni, etc. First of all, Michał is still active in the scientific field, and has vast publication plans. Originally, at least two papers co-authored by Michał were planned for this volume. Now, based on the excuse that it would be awkward to publish them in a volume dedicated to himself, both papers are due to be published in the following volume (*AGP 75/2025*). Michał's scientific and publication plans are even wider and extend well beyond that. But this is just a part of the truth, which brings us to an explanation of Professor Szulczewski's alias or nickname, commonly used by his friends, colleagues and co-workers, particularly at the Faculty of Geology, University of Warsaw (although I am not sure to what extent is he aware of that). Michał is commonly referred to as *Mistrz*, which may be translated as *Master*, *The champion* or *Maestro*, probably the last being the most suitable. All the terms are well earned, as indeed he is a master and champion in many fields, and a point of reference for many of us. The term *Maestro* reflects also Professor's perfect styles, manner and way of being. However, there is also another origin of the nickname, namely it is part of the phrase: "*Maestro, no matter how hard I would try, I won't be able to do this on time*" said once by Michał to one of his co-workers. And this explains why the volume is somewhat thinner.

Maestro Szulczewski may seem grand, distant and out of reach, never forgetting roles and manners, but at the same time he has a great sense of humour, and on many occasions does not take himself too seriously. According to his own self-assessment "*most of his scientific achievements remain unpublished*" (which hopefully will change with the upcoming publications). Here is just one from among a great number of anecdotes illustrating this. The Tatra Massif, high in the mountains, spring, but an awful weather, with mixed rain and snow. Michał with a junior researcher in the field, all the time carefully keeping up appearances and addressing each other as "*Professor*" and "*Doctor*", until Maestro said: "*Don't you think, Doctor, that it's f.....ing cold?*". I also remember my first close personal encounter with Michał. I wanted to ask him about the possibility of writing an M.Sc. thesis under his supervision. We met accidentally on the staircase at the faculty, and a friend of mine, who just a few days earlier had signed up for an M.Sc. project under his guidance, said to him: "*Good morning Professor, I would like to introduce my friend.....*" but she did not finish, as Professor said: "*Oh, I see you are beginning to familiarise me with your acquaintances. How nice!*". And there I stood, red and unable to say anything. Today, after thirty years or so, I proudly consider myself not only Michał's acquaintance, but also a friend.

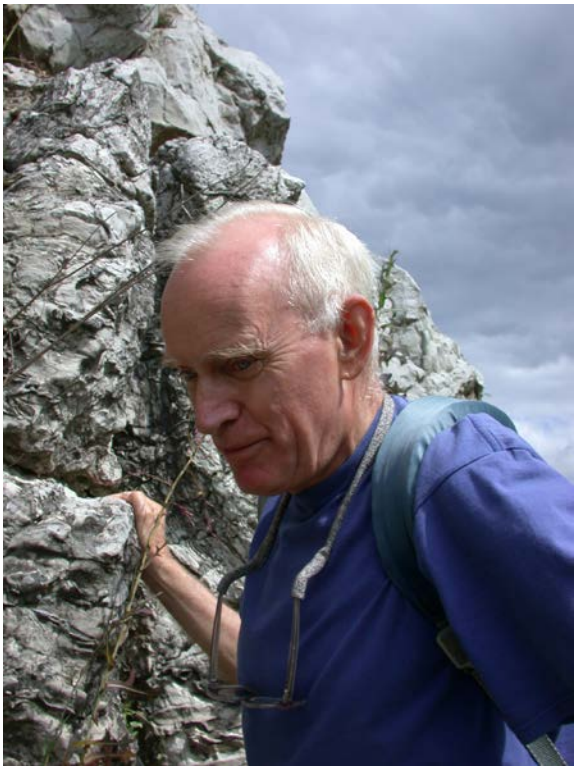
The special volume of *Acta Geologica Polonica* to celebrate Michał Szulczewski's 85th jubilee contains eight papers, which together in a very imperfect way reflect *Maestro's* scientific scope of interest. They relate to him in various ways: directly by the topic, being a continuation or expansion of his studies; by subject, alluding to problems, deposits or areas that once he was interested in; and by the authors, on whose careers he had a decisive impact, even if today



Text-fig. 1. Prof. Michał Szulczewski leading a student field trip. Holy Cross Mountains, 1979 (from S. Skompski's personal archives).

they work in fields distant from *Maestro's* main interests. By no means do these papers cover all fields of his expertise, as Professor Szulczewski is a scientist who does not accept constrains in terms of what lies within his limits. Therefore he is a sedimentologist, equally proficient in carbonate and clastic facies; a biostratigrapher, skilled in conodont stratigraphy; a palaeontologist interested in a vast range of faunal groups; even a structural geologist, particularly interested in syndepositional tectonics. In many cases, the subject of his studies requires a combination of these skills and approaches, as for example in the studies of trace fossils, combining palaeontology and sedimentology, or studies of neptunian dykes, in which an understanding of the interplay between sedimentology and tectonics is needed, and a very distinctive approach to conodont stratigraphy is essential. This reminds me of another anecdote. The faculty council was discussing potential reviewers for a multidisciplinary doctoral dissertation, and there was a general agreement that a separate expert for every field was needed, and that the council would have to invite a number of professors to do the review. And then I heard *Maestro* saying in a low voice *"...or maybe just one, but a real professor would be sufficient for the job…*" Michał is a real professor.

The first paper in this volume, by Grzegorz Racki, *An overlooked contribution to Devonian studies in the Holy Cross Mts: rediscovering Alexei Doronin's 1893 article on the Kadzielnia Limestone* relates to the Devonian of the Holy Cross Mountains, the main subject of Professor Szulczewski's geological studies for most of his career. It can be confidently stated that the first modern and comprehensive picture of the Holy Cross Devonian was presented in Szulczewski (1971), a work entitled *Upper Devonian conodonts, stratigraphy and facies development in*



Text-fig. 2. Prof. Michał Szulczewski at Wietrznia Quarry, 2003 (photo by P. Łuczyński).

the Holy Cross Mountains being his habilitation dissertation. Since then, a lot of important detailing has been made, new approaches and methods have been applied, mainly by his former students; nonetheless, Michał's principal role in decoding the Devonian of the Holy Cross Mountains remains absolutely undisputable. Among the many Devonian exposures in the area, probably the most important, both in *Maestro's* studies and generally, as a crucial place for understanding the Upper Devonian facies development and palaeogeography of this part of Poland, is the abandoned Kadzielnia Quarry (today a recreation area and a nature reserve) located in the city of Kielce. Michał has guided numerous international and Polish conference field trips to Kadzielnia (e.g., Szulczewski 1981), during which he presented the only well-preserved large Upper Devonian organic buildup in the Holy Cross Mountains, its relation to the surrounding strata and the consequences of this geological context, as well as symptoms of syndepositional tectonic activity, such as neptunian dykes (still to be described, hopefully very soon).

The paper by Grzegorz Racki presents an old 19th century overlooked publication on the Kadzielnia Limestone, which is a beautiful reference to the two great passions of Professor Szulczewski: geology and history, including the history of science. I remember his lecture *Early history of geology (Development of geological studies until the middle of the 19th century, in the context of the history of intellectual culture of Europe)* that was dedicated to students, but which drew a large audience of listeners also among professors and lecturers. Michał is fascinated in the legacy of Stanisław Staszic, commonly referred to as the father of Polish geology (see: *Nature in Stanisław Staszic's world outlook*; Szulczewski 1998). He also wrote the history of geological sciences at the University of Warsaw to mark the 200th anniversary of his *Alma Mater* (Szulczewski 2012). In preparation is his *Opus Magnum* – the history of his family presented against the background of the history of Poland in the 20th century. His ancestry, from a family with great patriotic traditions, regarded as enemies of the state during the communist times, had and has a great impact on his entire life, including the choice to study geology instead of education in the humanities, such as literature and history.

An example of the continuation of Professor Szulczewski's studies on the Devonian of the Holy Cross Mountains, particularly those devoted to the occurrence and distribution of carbonate buildups, is the second article in this volume, the work by Piotr Łuczyński and Olgierd Pedrycz: *An Upper Devonian Kadzielnia-type carbonate buildup in Skrzelczyce Quarry, southern Holy Cross Mountains (Poland).* On the one hand, it refines and expands the current knowledge on the Devonian facies development and palaeogeography of the Holy Cross Mountains area, by describing a hitherto unknown new exposure of a Kadzielnia-type limestone on the southern edge of the carbonate platform, but on the other hand, it once again validates the general tripartite division of the Upper Devonian in the Holy Cross Mountains, presented by *Maestro* (Szulczewski 1977).

Text-fig. 3. Prof. Michał Szulczewski at the Faculty of Geology, University of Warsaw, 2013 (photo by S. Skompski).

A contribution perfectly reflecting the broad scope of Professor Szulczewski's scientific interests, and alluding to him and his legacy in various ways, is the third article in this volume, the work by Jacek Grabowski, Damian Lodowski, Andrzej Pszczółkowski, Leona Chadimová, Geza Császár, Katarzyna Sobień and Balázs Szinger: *Palaeoenvironmental indices (calpionellids, gamma-ray spectrometry, magnetic susceptibility) in the Berriasian of the Tisza Mega-unit (Lipse-tető section, Mecsek Mts, Hungary) and the Central Western Carpathians (lower Sub-Tatric succession, Tatra Mts, Poland) – a compari-*

son. The Tatra Mountains, and the Jurassic deposits of the High-Tatric series were the very beginnings of Michał's geological studies, which included geological mapping of the Mała Świstówka valley, in a very challenging alpine landscape (Szulczewski 1963a), being his M.Sc. thesis, *The geology of Mała Świstówka in western Tatra*, prepared under the supervision of Professor Edward Passendorfer. If asked to name just one person to whom Michał most commonly referred to as his master and mentor, it would undoubtedly be Professor Passendorfer. *Maestro* often called him and his colleagues from the Department of Physical Geology at the Faculty of Geology, University of Warsaw as "*The Passendorfer Boys*" – a group of truly outstanding young scientists, all of whom later became professors and made their mark on various fields of Polish geological studies.

An element linking Professor Szulczewski, the Tatra Mountains and the Hungarian Jurassic exposures, are the stromatolites. *The Bathonian stromatolites in the Tatra Mts* (Szulczewski 1963b) is his first published scientific contribution, whereas *Jurassic stromatolites in Poland* (Szulczewski 1968) is the title of his PhD thesis. *Maestro* studied also stromatolites from the Villány Mountains in Hungary (Radwański and Szulczewski 1966), however he personally was unable to visit the exposures because he was denied a passport by the communist authorities. He was denied this 'privilege' for many years, which undoubtedly negatively impacted his early carrier.

In spite of the fact that Michał never personally engaged in the topic, he may be considered a mentor of Polish palaeomagnetic studies, as most (if not all) of leading Polish palaeomagnetists are his former students or scientific proteges. A contribution representing this part of *Maestro's* legacy is the work by Jerzy Nawrocki and Ryszard Habryn published as the fourth article in this volume, *Comparison of palaeomagnetic data from three Late Caledonian magmatic intrusions piercing the Upper Silesian and Małopolska tectonic blocks (S Poland), and its palaeotectonic significance*. The paper interprets data from the Bardo intrusion in the Holy Cross Mountains and compares them with those from other areas. The aforementioned work by Grabowski *et al*. has also an important palaeomagnetic component.

The fifth paper of this volume, by Alfred Uchman and Nils-Martin Hanken: *Cambrian–Ordovician trace fossils of the Basissletta region, northeast Spitsbergen, Svalbard*, relates to Professor Szulczewski in two ways. Firstly, by the region – Spitsbergen, the place of a scientific expedition organized by the Polish Academy of Sciences, in which Michał took part in 1975. Secondly by the topic – ichnofossils. *Maestro* has an outstanding collection of trace fossils from Devonian siliciclastic rocks, collected for tens of years in Bukowa Quarry in the Holy Cross Mountains. Much awaited by the geological community, the description of this material (in collaboration with Alfred Uchman) is one of Michał's pressing plans for the near future. Maybe some additional motivation to complete the job will come from the fact also that the authors of yet other contribution to this volume (the seventh article), the work by Małgorzata Kozłowska, Wojciech Kozłowski, Anna Żylińska and Zbigniew Szczepanik: *Cambrian Series 2 shallow marine siliciclastics at the margin of the East European Craton: the Ociesęki Formation in Dziewiątle Quarry (Holy Cross Mountains, Poland)*, refer to Michał's studies of the siliciclastic succession from Bukowa (Szulczewski 1996, Szulczewski and Porębski 2008) as their inspiration for the sedimentological investigation of the Cambrian deposits in the Holy Cross Mountains.

No Polish contribution to the studies of the Devonian System worldwide can be free of any links to Professor Szulczewski. Such is also the case of the work by Michał Zatoń, Rafał Nawrot, Jan Król, Mikołaj Zapalski, Aleksander Majchrzyk, Michał Jakubowicz, Andrej Ernst, Jakub Słowiński and Błażej Berkowski: *Skeletobiosis on favositid corals: a case study from the Middle Devonian of the Mader Basin, Morocco*, printed as the sixth article in this volume. Although *Maestro* never worked in Morocco, his works were at some stage of their careers an inspiration for most of the authors, many of whom are his direct or indirect successors and followers.

The last article in the volume, the work by Andrzej Borkowski, Paweł Zdanowski, Paweł Działak, Tomasz Kowalski and Tomasz Segit: *Deep biosphere in the Main Dolomite (Upper Permian) hydrocarbon reservoir* illustrates the fact that Professor Szulczewski's impact on Polish geological studies is much broader than could be expected just taking into account the scope of his scientific interests. Studies of a seemingly unrelated topic of hydrocarbon reservoirs in the Permian Zechstein deposits, according to one of the authors (Paweł Zdanowski) was possible on the level presented only thanks to the education in many fields received from *Maestro*.

As mentioned above, not all the important fields of Michał's scientific activity have found their representation in the papers submitted to this volume, just to bring up conodont stratigraphy as probably the most important missing topic. Moreover, some other very important aspects of his activity have been omitted here. For example, nothing has been said

about his devotion to classical music. Deliberately no attention is paid here to the numerous significant, time-consuming and surely exhausting official roles held by Professor Szulczewski, including senior positions in the Polish Academy of Sciences and in various consultative bodies for governmental institutions. This is not the *Maestro* I know. Here, I (or rather we, speaking for his friends from the Department of Historical Geology, Regional Geology and Palaeontology) want to pay respect to a companion of countless and endless teas and coffees in his office at the Faculty of Geology, on the famous renovated sofa inherited from Professor Jan Samsonowicz, another outstanding Polish geologist. Michał always likes his tea cup to be filled up to the brim. He has that special skill to engage participants in interesting discussions on topics usually far exceeding geology, such as history, literature, culture, politics. He has a vast knowledge and is competent in all these fields , and is therefore keenly listened to. But at the same time, he is a very good listener. Frankly, since he retired, these teas have not been the same any more.

Piotr Łuczyński

REFERENCES

Radwański, A. and Szulczewski, M. 1966. Jurassic stromatolites of the Villany Mountains (southern Hungary). *Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eotvos Nominatae, Sectio Geologica*, **9**, 87–107.

Szulczewski, M. 1963a. The geology of Mała Świstówka in western Tatra. *Acta Geologica Polonica*, **13**, 199–222. [In Polish with English summary]

Szulczewski, M. 1963b. The Bathonian stromatolites in the Tatra Mts. *Acta Geologica Polonica*, **13**, 25–145. [In Polish with English summary]

Szulczewski, M. 1968. Jurassic stromatolites in Poland. *Acta Geologica Polonica*, **18**, 1–99. [In Polish with English summary]

Szulczewski, M. 1971. Upper Devonian conodonts, stratigraphy and facies development in the Holy Cross Mountains. *Acta Geologica Polonica*, **21**, 1–129.

Szulczewski, M. 1977. Main facial regions in the Paleozoic of the Holy Cross Mountains. *Przegląd Geologiczny*, **8–9**, 428–432. [In Polish]

Szulczewski, M. 1981. Dewon środkowy i górny zachodniej części Gór Świętokrzyskich. In: Żakowa, H. (Ed.), Przewodnik LIII Zjazdu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geologicznego, Kielce 6–8 września 1981, 68–81. Wydawnictwa Geologiczne; Warszawa.

Szulczewski, M. 1996. Environmental distribution and ethology of the near-shore Lower Devonian trace fossils; example from the Holy Cross Mts, Poland. 30th International Geological Congress, Beijing, China, 4–14 August 1996, Abstracts, 2, 134.

Szulczewski, M. 1998. Nature in Stanisław Staszic's world outlook. *Prace Muzeum Ziemi*, **45**, 5–37 [In Polish with English summary].

Szulczewski, M. and Porębski, S. 2008. Stop 1 – Bukowa Góra, Lower Devonian. In: Pieńkowski, G. and Uchman, A. (Eds), Ichnological sites of Poland. The Holy Cross Mountains and the Carpathian Flysch. The Pre-Congress and Post-Congress Field Trip Guidebook. The Second International Congress on Ichnology, Cracow, Poland, August 29–September 8, 2008, 18–37. Polish Geological Institute; Warszawa.

Szulczewski, M. 2012. Nauki geologiczne. In: Wróblewski, A.K. (Ed.), Monumenta Universatis Varsoviensis 1816–2016. Nauki ścisłe i przyrodnicze na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim, 545–669. Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego; Warszawa.