In memoriam

A life dedicated to geology – a tribute to Academician Todor Nikolov, DSc (February 26, 1931 – March 26, 2021)

The eminent Bulgarian scientist, respected pedagogue and public figure, a longtime professor at Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski” and the Geological Institute “Strashimir Dimitrov”, and a full member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Academician Todor Nikolov, DSc, passed away on March 26, 2021. He died unexpectedly one month after reaching the blessed age of 90 and after publishing his next exciting book on the evolution of hominids, but not living long enough to see his latest book *The Long Journey to Knowledge*, which has been scheduled for publication in the middle of this year, come to fruition. Despite his advanced age, Acad. Todor Nikolov never stopped working and was considering writing more books. Although he left an invariable trace in Bulgarian geology, the books he would have written with his inherent experience, skills, and wisdom, would be missed by anyone interested in Earth’s history. Academician Todor Nikolov liked to share his memories of his long journey in science, and he was known to many people. Following the theme from Paul Gauguin’s famous painting “*D’où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?*”, which was a favourite title in his lectures and books, the next lines pay tribute to his life and work.

Academician Todor Nikolov was born on February 26, 1931, in the village of Varana (Levski Municipality, Pleven District, central North Bulgaria). He completed his primary education in the schools of his native village and in the neighboring village of Gradishte, and in 1949 he graduated from the high school in the town of Levski. Due to a denied note of reliability, which was a mandatory attribute in those times, Todor Nikolov was not allowed to apply for higher education, and in the 1949–1950

Academician Todor Nikolov at the presentation of his autobiographical book *Outlines of a Life’s path* (2016)

school year he worked as a teacher at the elementary school “Vasil Levski” in the village of Varana. Yet, in the autumn of 1950, Todor Nikolov was admitted to Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”, from where he graduated in 1955 as a geologist. Soon after graduation, he began working as a research geologist at the Committee of Geology in the Balkan Coal basin. In early 1957, Todor Nikolov

Collection of books by Acad. Todor Nikolov (in approximate order of their appearance): *Biostratigraphy* (1977). University textbook with glossary. Nauka i Izkustvo, Sofia, 314 pp. (in Bulgarian); *The Long Path of Life*, 2nd edition (1994). Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 163 pp. (in Bulgarian); *Principles of Paleontology and Historical Geology*, 2nd edition (1996). University textbook. Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, 384 pp. (in Bulgarian); *Guide for Field Studies in Paleontology and Stratigraphy* (2000), in collaboration with Marin Ivanov. Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, 164 pp. (in Bulgarian); *Les ammonites de la famille Berriasellidae Spath, 1922* (*Tithonique supérieure – Berriasien*) (1982). Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 251 pp.; *Global Climate Change in Earth’s History* (2011). Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 392 pp. (in Bulgarian); *Global Challenges to Humanity. Academic Lectures* (2013). Marin Drinov Academic Press, Sofia, 120 pp. (in Bulgarian); *Outlines of a Life’s path* (2016). Marin Drinov Academic Press, Sofia, 360 pp. (in Bulgarian, with English abstract); *Evolution: This Sweet Enigma* (2020). Marin Drinov Academic Press, Sofia, 360 pp. (in Bulgarian, with English abstract); *Impressions on Evolution: The Difficult Path of Hominids. Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* (2021), in collaboration with Docho Dochev. Zachary Stoyanov Publishing House, Sofia, 343 pp. (in Bulgarian, with English abstract).

became an Assistant Professor at the Geological Institute. His PhD thesis “Stratigraphy of the Lower Cretaceous in a part of northeastern Bulgaria” was defended in 1966. At the beginning of 1967, he acquired a PhD degree, and in 1968 he was elected Associate Professor.

In 1970, Todor Nikolov became an Associate Professor at the Department of Paleontology at Sofia University, and, from 1979 until his retirement in 1996, he was a Professor. For 20 years (between 1973 and 1993), he headed the Department of Paleontology (merged in 1991 into the Department of Geology and Paleontology) and held a number of other responsible positions: Deputy Dean (1972–1979) and Dean of the Faculty of Geology and Geography (1979–1980); Vice-Rector of Sofia

University (1980–1987); member of the Faculty Council (1970–1993) and the Academic Council (1979–1989) of the University. In 1983, Prof. Todor Nikolov defended his DSc thesis entitled “Stratigraphy of the Lower Cretaceous in the Mediterranean Region”. In the autumn of 1984, he was elected Corresponding Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and, from 1988 to 1991, he was a member of the Presidium of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In 1994, he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor Honoris Causa by University Paul Sabatier (Toulouse, France).

In June 1996, Todor Nikolov became a Professor at the Geological Institute, and the following year he became a Full Member (Academician) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He headed

the Department of Paleontology and Stratigraphy (1999–2003), but was also a member (1995–2010) and Chairman (2004–2010) of the Scientific Council of the Institute. Along with that, he was Visiting Professor and member of the Scientific Council at the Geographical Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2004–2009). He also held the prestigious position of Chairman of the Department of Natural, Mathematical and Engineering Sciences at the Assembly of the Academicians and Corresponding Members at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2001–2009).

The university career of Acad. Todor Nikolov was particularly intensive and diverse. He was a lecturer in Palaeontology, Biostratigraphy, Palaeoecology and Evolutionary Palaeontology, but also guided a number of special courses for students majoring in Geology, Biology and Archeology. Academician Todor Nikolov authored 15 university textbooks, methodical manuals, and articles on the organization of higher education and science. Under his guidance, more than 80 bachelor's and 50 master's theses were defended. Among his graduates stand out the names of geologists such as Sava Juranov, Stefka Darakchieva, Christo Pimpirev, Marin Ivanov, Kristalina Stoykova, Emil Vassilev, Valeri Sachanski, Polina Pavlishina, Vyara Minkovska, Samuil Benatov, and Latinka Hristova. Many of them successfully defended PhD theses under his supervision, and later became habilitated professors at Sofia University (Assoc. Prof. Sava Juranov, Prof. Christo Pimpirev, DSc, Prof. Marin Ivanov, Assoc. Prof. Polina Pavlishina), as well as at the Geological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Prof. Kristalina Stoykova, DSc, and Assoc. Prof. Valeri Sachanski). Apart from Sofia University, Acad. Todor Nikolov gave lectures at a number of foreign universities: University of Burgundy, Dijon (1968, 1974); University Paul Sabatier, Toulouse (1974, 1990, 1994, 1996); Pierre and Marie Curie University, Paris (1990, 1994); University of Athens (1987); University of Tübingen (1987); M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University (1980); Leningrad University (1989), and Elf Aquitaine (now Total SE) (1974).

Academician Todor Nikolov's research interests led him to many countries around the world: Czechoslovakia, the former USSR, Romania, France, Italy, Hungary, Greece, Poland, Switzerland, the former Yugoslavia, Germany, Turkey, Spain, and Belgium, Algeria, Morocco, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. His prestige as a serious scientist, which was established and maintained over the years, gave him leading positions in the teams of a

number of international research projects, *e.g.*, the Bulgarian team of the Bulgarian-French project, which is part of the UNESCO Tethys International Program (1986–1992); The International Geological Correlation Program (IGCP) Projects [No. 198 – Evolution of the Northern Margin of the Tethys (1985–1990); No. 262 – Tethyan Lower Cretaceous (1987–1990); No. 343 – Stratigraphic Correlation of peri-Tethyan epicratonic basins (1993–1996)]; the Project “Geological Heritage of South-Eastern Europe” (1995–1999). He participated in many international and national scientific congresses, conferences, and symposia. The contributions of Acad. Todor Nikolov cover a wide range of geological disciplines: Paleontology and Stratigraphy; Ammonite taxonomy and stratigraphy of the Lower Cretaceous; Principles and methods of stratigraphy; Sequence and event stratigraphy; Theory of Evolution; Evolution of ecosystems; Crises and catastrophic phenomena in the geological history of the Earth; Influence of orbital factors on the geological record; Regional geology and sedimentology; Paleoclimatology and paleogeography. Todor Nikolov left valuable scientific legacy, having authored and co-authored 12 monographs and books, more than 180 research articles that were published both in national and high-ranking international journals, more than 120 popular articles, numerous scientific reports and reviews, explanatory notes for geological maps, and interviews. His works are the subject of more than 2,000 citations, of which over 1,700 can be found in prestigious foreign and international publications.

Apart from his active work in the field of geology, Acad. Todor Nikolov held the highest administrative positions in Bulgaria, having been member (since 1973) and Chairman (1992–2009) of the Bulgarian National Committee on Geology; member of the Bulgarian National Committee for IGCP (1975–1989); Deputy Chairman (1979–1987) and Chairman (1987–2002) of the National Commission on Stratigraphy; member (1978–1987; 1995–2006) and Chairman (1995–1998) of the Scientific Committee on Geological and Geographical Sciences at the Supreme Attestation Committee of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers; Chairman (1987–1990) and member (2006–2011) of the Presidium of the Supreme Attestation Committee of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers; member of the Expert Committee on Earth Sciences (1995–1998) and the Board (1996–1999) of the National Scientific Fund at the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Sciences; Chairman of the Program Council at the Bulgarian Antarctic Institute (1998–2007). His signifi-

cant scientific contributions and dedication to the geological science earned him the great recognition from both the Bulgarian State and the scientific institutions from abroad, by awarding him the Jubilee Medal of the Hungarian Geological Institute (1976); Honorary Medal of Charles University in Prague (1980); Order of Cyril and Methodius (1982); Order of St Kliment Ohridski (1988); Gold Medal of Paul Sabatier University, Toulouse, France (1994); Gold Medal with Band Blue of Sofia University (1996); Honorary Medal of Marin Drinov of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2001).

Academician Todor Nikolov was an active member of many Bulgarian and foreign scientific organizations: member (since 1953) and Honorary Member (since 2015) of the Bulgarian Geological Society; member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria (since 1957); Société Géologique de France (since 1968; foreign associate member since 1978); Association des géologues du bassin de Paris (since 1968); Association des Membres de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques (since 199); Honorary Member of the Serbian Geological Society (since 2001); Bulgarian Ecological Society (Founding member since 1999); National Geographic Society (since 2007). The high competence and the ability to bear responsibility, developed even in his early years as a scientist, determined the participation of Acad. Todor Nikolov in the editorial boards of a number of Bulgarian scientific periodicals: *Travaux sur la géologie de Bulgarie* (1963–1967); *Bulletin of the Geological Institute* (1967–1970); *Review of the Bulgarian Geological Society* (1968–2000; Editori-

al Secretary, 1968–1970; Chief Editor, 1980–1982, 1998–2000); *Priroda i znanie* (1985–2000); *Priroda* (1986–2000); *Palaeontology, Stratigraphy and Lithology* (Chief Editor, 1990–1993); *Geologica Balcanica* (1982–1993, member of the Advisory Scientific Board); *Geology and Mineral Resources* (since 2014); *Comptes rendus de l'Académie bulgare des Sciences* (since 1996; Chief Editor since 2006). He was also Chief Editor of the monographic series *Les fossiles de Bulgarie* (1990–2004).

In one of his last interviews for Dimitar Tomov, in the newspaper *Trud*, Acad. Todor Nikolov was worthily called The Earth Academician, as he was a man who knew well the changeable geological past of our planet and was concerned about its future, but also a man who was understandable and accessible when communicating with his readers. In opinions expressed in the same interview, Ms. Lyubka Alexandrova (Mayor of Levski Municipality) emphasized that Acad. Todor Nikolov was “a great person, whose worthy biography represents the long path to the self-knowledge of a man who has always been firmly connected with his homeland; a world celebrity, who started from a small country house and reached the heights of world science.” In the last years of his life, Acad. Todor Nikolov published superb articles dedicated to the pioneers of Bulgarian geology, but also to their followers, of many of whom he was a contemporary and friend. He was one of the most influential Bulgarian geologists and left a great gap in Bulgarian science. He was a tireless and world-class researcher who will forever remain in the hearts of all who knew him.

On behalf of the Bulgarian members of the Editorial Boards of
Geologica Balcanica and *Review of the Bulgarian Geological Society*