
Curriculum Vitae Professor Johannes Kuno Walther

Name: Johannes Kuno Walther
Life Dates: 20 July 1860 - 4 May 1937

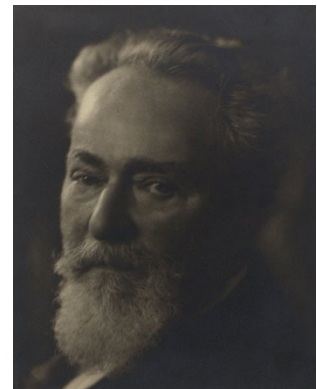


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Johannes Walther was a German geologist and palaeontologist. He was a pioneer in sedimentology and paleoecology, and many of his scientific findings are still relevant to geological research today. An outstanding example hereof is Walther's law of facies, which bears his name. From 1924 to 1931, Johannes Walther served as fourteenth President of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina.

Academic and Professional Career

Johannes Walther first studied botany, zoology and philosophy at the University of Jena from 1879 to 1882. One of his teachers was the zoologist Ernst Haeckel, with whom Walther remained in close contact throughout his life. After graduating as a doctor of philosophy (Dr. phil.) in 1882, Walther studied geology and palaeontology in Leipzig and Munich.

In 1883, he moved to Italy, where gave lectures at the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn in Naples. He also began to conduct marine geological studies in the Gulf of Naples. After this, he embarked on an educational journey to North Africa.

In 1886, he earned his qualification to become a professor (Habilitation) in geology and palaeontology at the University of Jena. Other expeditions took him to Egypt, Greece, Scotland, East India and Ceylon. He was particularly interested in the coral reefs of the Sinai Peninsula.

In 1890, he was appointed Associate Professor at the University of Jena, and set off on another expedition, this time to North America. Walther's expeditions helped resolve geological questions and principles that had previously remained unsolved. He visited all continents except for South America and Antarctica. He studied many large coral reefs, such as those in the Red Sea, and his

observations helped promote marine geology in Germany. Walther also contributed to the study of deserts. He recorded his work in multiple specialist books such as “Allgemeine Meereskunde” (General Oceanography) published in 1893.

In 1894, at Ernst Haeckel’s suggestion, he accepted the appointment to a newly-created endowed professorship, known as the Haeckel Professorship, at the University of Jena. In the same year, he established the law of facies correlation. Walther’s law of facies explains that facies lying next to each other during undisturbed stratification can come to lie on top of each other in a geological profile following a disturbance, such as migration of facies. This means that, generally speaking, facies seen lying on top of each other today were once lying beside each other in the fossil era.

On 18 October 1906, Walther was appointed full professor of mineralogy at the University of Halle, where he was also appointed director of the Mineralogical Institute. He immediately took advantage of this opportunity to rededicate this institution as the Institute of Geology and Mineralogy. In 1914, Walther transferred to a new post as full professor for geology and palaeontology in Halle.

In 1913/14, he was a visiting professor in London.

In the years that followed, Walther embarked on some more expeditions and educational journeys that took him to the Urals, the Caucasus and the Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan.

In 1927, he was a visiting professor at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

In 1928, Johannes Walther was given emeritus status.

Honours and Awarded Memberships

Johannes Walther was a member of several academies and scientific associations, such as the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina (1892), the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union and the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig (both in 1930). He also became an Honorary Member of the Thüringischer Geologischer Verein (Thuringia Geological Association, TGV) in 1930. Johannes Walther was also a member of the Hallescher Verband für die Erforschung der mitteldeutschen Bodenschätze und ihrer Verwertung (Association of Halle for the Research and Use of Natural Resources of Central Germany) (1917/18).

President of the Leopoldina

On 6 October 1924, Johannes Walther succeeded August Gutzmer as the nineteenth President of the Leopoldina. His tenure was plagued by many problems; for one thing, it coincided with the Great Depression.

Nevertheless, Walther began his work by implementing reforms that had been planned for some time. He held regular meetings for members living in and near Halle, the academy’s location, which later took place on a monthly basis. He focused on the Executive Board’s ability to work, and the conservation of the library, which his predecessor August Gutzmer had considered to sell to a federal

administration. Walther was also keen to keep the academy up to date: He specifically recruited sponsors from the industry, managing to get key industry players to become members of the academy, such as the chemist and entrepreneur Carl Bosch, the airship builder Hugo Eckener, the entrepreneur Carl Friedrich von Siemens and the steel magnate Albert Vöglér. The cooption of further members generally improved during Walther's term: In 1925, 130 male scientists and in 1926 another 100 male scientists and one female scientist joined the academy.

For Walther, it was a matter of course that the Leopoldina should honour one of its most prominent members, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in the run-up to the 100th anniversary of his death. He thus organised a ceremonial meeting of the Leopoldina dedicated to the works of the poet and natural scientist in the assembly hall of the University of Halle on 2 March 1929. At the event, Walther was asked to publish a special volume of the Leopoldina in honour of his long-standing project "Goethe als Seher und Erforscher der Natur" (Goethe as an Observer and Researcher of Nature). The volume was published in 1930.

When Johannes Walther returned from a trip to the Mediterranean region in 1931, he found the Leopoldina in a miserable state. The academy's financial situation was catastrophic due to bank crashes, probably coupled with the misconduct of one of the staff members. Seeing no alternative, Johannes Walther resigned in October 1931 and left his official duties to his deputy.

The physiologist Emil Abderhalden was elected as his successor in 1932. A personal dispute between Walther and Abderhalden led to the former president's resignation from the Leopoldina on 17 January 1935 – an isolated incident in the history of the academy.

About Johannes Kuno Walther

Johannes Walther was born on 20 July 1860 to the pastor Kuno Walther and his wife Luise Walther, née Schwabe, in Neustadt an der Orla (Eastern Thuringia). The father served as ecclesiastical superintendent in Weida (Saxe-Weimar).

Johannes Walther attended secondary school in Eisenach (Thuringia) but due to health issues, his attendance was interrupted several times, leaving him unable to graduate. Despite his lack of a degree, Walther, who was interested in natural sciences from an early age, was accepted at the University of Jena.

In 1899, he married Janna Hentschel. The couple had a son, Hellmut (1900) and a daughter, Sigrun (1908).

During World War I, he volunteered as a typist.

Johannes Walther died during a stay at a health resort in Bad Hofgastein (Austria) on 4 May 1937. He was buried in his parents' grave in Eisenach.