



History of sciences

Discovery and study of dinosaurs from Spain: The contribution of Albert F. de Lapparent

*Découverte et étude des dinosaures en Espagne : la contribution d'Albert F. de Lapparent*Xabier Pereda-Suberbiola^{a,*}, José Ignacio Ruiz-Omeñaca^{b,c}^a Universidad del País Vasco/EHU, Facultad de Ciencia y Tecnología, Dpto. Estratigrafía y Paleontología, Apdo. 644, 48080 Bilbao, Spain^b Museo del Jurásico de Asturias (MUJA), 33328 Colunga, and Departamento de Geología, Universidad de Oviedo, c/Jesús Arias de Velasco s/n, 33005 Oviedo, Spain^c Grupo Aragosaurus-IUCA (www.aragosaurus.com), Paleontología, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad de Zaragoza, Pedro Cerbuna 12, 50009 Zaragoza, Spain

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ABSTRACT

Albert F. de Lapparent (1905–1975), the scion of a family of famous French geologists, was a dinosaur palaeontologist. He explored many territories in Europe, Saharan Africa and Asia in search of fossils. The studies he undertook in Spain, which resulted in a dozen publications between 1955 and 1969, are an important part of his research on dinosaurs. Lapparent et al. discovered about thirty dinosaur localities, mostly of Cretaceous age, in several Spanish provinces, including Albacete, Castellón, Cuenca, Soria, Teruel and Valencia in the Iberian Range, and Lleida (or Lérida) in the Pyrenean region. In 1958, Lapparent published the discovery of dinosaur eggs in the Tremp Basin (Lleida), the first ones found in the Iberian Peninsula. His 1960 work on the dinosaurs of Galve (Teruel) was the first monograph on the subject published in Spain. In 1965, Lapparent was also the first to publish the discovery of dinosaur footprints in Spain, more specifically in the province of Valencia.

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R É S U M É

L'Abbé Albert F. de Lapparent (1905–1975), membre d'une célèbre famille de géologues français, fut un paléontologue spécialiste de dinosaures. Homme de terrain avant tout, il explora de nombreux territoires en Europe, en Afrique saharienne et en Asie, à la recherche de restes fossiles. Les études menées en Espagne, qui ont donné lieu à une douzaine de publications entre 1955 et 1969, constituent un volet important de sa recherche sur les dinosaures. Lapparent et al. ont découvert une trentaine de gisements, pour la plupart d'âge Crétacé, dans plusieurs provinces espagnoles, dont celles d'Albacete, Castellón, Cuenca, Soria, Teruel et Valencia dans la Cordillère Ibérique, et de Lleida (ou Lérida) dans la région pyrénéenne. Lapparent publia, en 1958, la découverte d'œufs de dinosaures dans

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Abbreviations: IGAL, Institut Géologique Albert de Lapparent (now part of the Institut polytechnique LaSalle-Beauvais, Beauvais, France); MCNV, Museo de Ciencias Naturales de Valencia, Spain; MNCN, Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid, Spain; MNHN, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France; MPT, Museo Provincial de Teruel, Spain.

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le Bassin de Tremp (Lleida), les premiers trouvés dans la Péninsule ibérique. Son travail de 1960 sur les dinosaures de Galve (Teruel) fut la première monographie sur le sujet publiée en Espagne. Enfin, Lapparent fut également le premier à publier, en 1965, la découverte d'empreintes de pas de dinosaures en Espagne, dans la province de Valencia.

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1. Introduction

Albert Félix de Lapparent (1905–1975) is one of the leading personalities of French vertebrate palaeontology in the 20th century (Fig. 1). He was the scion of a family of famous French geologists (Montenat, 2008). His grandfather, Albert-Auguste de Lapparent (1839–1908), was a renowned geologist and a prolific author who popularized geology in France with the publication of a number of original textbooks, such as his *Traité de Géologie*. His uncle, Jacques de Lapparent (1883–1948), was a well-known professor of mineralogy and petrology in Strasbourg and Paris.

Albert F. de Lapparent was born in 1905 in Le Mont-Dieu (Ardennes) and spent his childhood in the Ardennes and in Provence. His father, Pierre C. de Lapparent, was an agriculturist. Albert was the eldest of nine brothers and sisters. In 1923, he entered the Seminary of St. Sulpice near Paris and was ordained as a priest in 1929. He studied geology at the Sorbonne in Paris. From 1932, Lapparent taught geology at the *Institut Catholique* of Paris (as had his grandfather, Jean Boussac and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin previously; Montenat, 2008). Lapparent produced a doctoral thesis on the sedimentary geology of Provence, under the supervision of Charles Jacob, which he defended in 1938. This work (Lapparent, 1938) was awarded the Cuvier Prize of the *Académie des sciences*.



Fig. 1. Portrait of Albert-Félix de Lapparent (1905–1975). Institut Géologique Albert de Lapparent (IGAL) archives, Institut polytechnique LaSalle-Beauvais.

Fig. 1. Portrait d'Albert-Félix de Lapparent (1905–1975). Archives Institut Géologique Albert de Lapparent (IGAL), Institut polytechnique LaSalle-Beauvais.

Lapparent was mostly a field man. He soon became familiar with the geology of the sedimentary basins of France and participated in the preparation and revision of a number of geological maps at a scale of 1/80,000 (Bordet, 1977). From 1946 to 1975, he explored large regions of northern and central Africa, Afghanistan, Iran and Oman, mapping the field, studying the stratigraphy and collecting vertebrate fossils (Bordet, 1977; Montenat, 2008).

From 1944, A.F. de Lapparent was a researcher at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS). In 1959, he was appointed director of the IGAL, an institution founded in tribute to his grandfather. He served as president of the *Société Géologique de France* in 1960, and became corresponding member of the *Académie des sciences* in 1970. In 1974, Lapparent was made director of the French scientific mission in Afghanistan. He died in Paris in 1975 at the age of 69.

Lapparent published 277 notes and articles on geology and palaeontology (see Bordet, 1977 for a complete list). About one fifth of these publications dealt with dinosaurs. The importance of this research has been evoked in biographical works (Bordet, 1977; Montenat, 2008), but the contribution of Lapparent as a dinosaur palaeontologist has never been treated in detail. The present work focuses on the role played by A.F. de Lapparent in the discovery and study of dinosaurs in Spain.

2. The dinosaur research of Lapparent

Albert F. de Lapparent became interested in dinosaurs when he found fragmentary remains during the course of his doctoral thesis in Provence. Jean Piveteau, Professor of Palaeontology at the Sorbonne, encouraged him to become a dinosaur specialist, one of the few at the time in France who worked on this topic. From 1938 to 1975, Lapparent published about 55 articles on dinosaurs (see bibliography in Bordet, 1977).

One of the most important contributions made by Lapparent was the discovery of dinosaur remains in the field. He found new dinosaur sites in several countries, in Europe (France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Svalbard in Norway) and in Asia (Iran), and more especially in Africa. In the beginning of the 1940s Lapparent made two expeditions to Morocco, where dinosaur remains were found in Jurassic rocks (Taquet, 2010). Lapparent was the pioneer of dinosaur research in the Sahara (Taquet, 2007). From 1946 to 1959, he led nine expeditions to collect Cretaceous vertebrate fossils in what are now Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, Niger and Chad. He discovered some 35 localities with reptilian remains, including bones and footprints of dinosaurs. His memoir on the dinosaurs of the “Continental Intercalaire” of the central Sahara (Lapparent, 1960a) was the starting point for studies of the terrestrial vertebrate faunas

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