



European Association of Geochemistry

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GEOCHEMISTRY AT THE CROSSROADS: WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE?



Eric Oelkers

I returned last June from the Goldschmidt Conference in Knoxville, USA, invigorated. Few things have been more exciting to our community than the growth of the Goldschmidt Conference. Just 16 years ago I attended the fourth annual Goldschmidt meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, with 450 participants. The most recent European Goldschmidt meeting in Davos last year was attended by just over 3000 scientists and the Knoxville meeting by 2200.

As much as by the booming attendance, I have been impressed by the high profile of some of our plenary speakers. In Davos, Sir David King, former chief science advisor of Great Britain, urged us to consider the challenges of global sustainable development. This year in Knoxville, Senator Lamar Alexander chose our conference as a forum to promote his efforts for the widespread use of nuclear energy, as our community has provided much of the scientific basis for the safe storage of nuclear waste.

The attendance of these and other high-profile speakers at our recent Goldschmidt Conferences demonstrates that the world is looking to us for solutions to key global problems, including how to best manage our resources, how to arrest global warming, how to address future energy needs, and how to manage waste products. But I wonder if our community is up to the challenge. Is our goal to work towards addressing these critical societal problems or is it to maximize the number of citations to our publications? Evidence suggests we as a community are unsure. For example, through recent efforts, our community understands better the weathering rate on Mars than the chemistry of many major elements on the Earth's surface. We are at a crossroads. How will we as a community proceed?

If the geochemical community does not provide solutions to these critical societal sustainability issues, who will? And if some of our community embraces these challenges, how can we adequately publicize the advances? How will we enable the public to make enlightened, scientifically sound choices rather than accepting the cheaper and superficial solutions often championed by government and industry? I urge our scientific societies and future Goldschmidt organizers to build on the momentum of the last two Goldschmidt meetings to further encourage our community to focus on solving critical global problems and to find new and creative ways to inform the public about how geochemistry can provide new, safer and sustainable solutions.

Eric Oelkers, EAG President



GOLDSCHMIDT 2010 FOR AN EAG MEDALLIST: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE



Karim Benzerara

The 2010 Goldschmidt Conference was as usual very exciting. For a geobiologist, it is clearly the place to be, considering all the people from the community you can meet there. Even though I was initially not sure to attend, the trip to Knoxville became a must when I was informed that I would receive the Houtermans Award. I was first notified by the president of the European Association of Geochemistry, Eric Oelkers, on my birthday (elegant thought, Eric!). I read the announcement letter after a birthday party, and I admit that I was not able at that time to fully realize its significance. I

was unaware that close friends had put my name forward, so I was genuinely surprised. Of course, I felt honored at once to receive this award from my peers. But after a few days of receiving e-mails from friends and colleagues, the honor grew stronger. I can now tell what this award represents to me: it is first a pleasure—a pleasure to share it with my former advisers, including Jean-Alix, Thierry, Philippe, and my PhD and postdoc supervisors, François and Gordon. I guess that you always try to make these people proud of you. I also share this recognition with all my past and present collaborators, with whom I already share the unique thrill of understanding something new. When you get a paper rejected or proposals turned down, such an award provides some relief, a little self-confidence, and it tells you that you are not completely wrong. A piece of this award thus goes to Andreas, Céline, Fériel, Martin, Nicolas, Olivier, Purificacion, Tolek and Virginie. Finally, I share this award with my former and present students. I have been lucky to have supervised very talented students since I returned to Paris in 2005. Jennyfer, Sylvain, Kevin, and now Estelle, Matthieu, and Julie have been working or are working on very diverse topics, such as the preservation of fossils and the fate of organic carbon in metamorphic rocks, biomineralization of Fe by bacteria, and modern and Archean stromatolites. Finally, it is rewarding to contribute to the recognition of geomicrobiology. Some of our elders (not that old actually) did a lot at the end of the 20th century to bring the field into the forefront of science. It is thanks to them that a new breed of geomicrobiologists, ready to handle both biology and geochemistry tools, can now grow and participate in the bright future of geomicrobiology.

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Contributions from the geochemical community are welcome, and should you wish to post information, please contact Marie-Aude Hulshoff at office@eag.eu.com.