



In memoriam: Lajos Tamássy

Professor Emeritus Lajos Tamássy died on 12 February, 2019, as a result of age-related complications following an accident at home. He served the Institute of Mathematics of the University of Debrecen until his death, for sixty-six years.

Lajos Tamássy was born on 17 April, 1923 in Debrecen. His father's branch of his family, which was of German origin, had lived in Debrecen since the 1750s. His father and grandfather were both hardware merchants. He attended elementary school in his native town, but at the age of ten he moved to Pécs in southwestern Hungary to continue his school studies at the Miklós Zrínyi Realgymnasium. He graduated in 1941, in the third year of World War II. He performed military service until the end of the war, and could return home only in 1946. In the autumn of that year, he started his studies in mathematics, physics and descriptive geometry at the University of Debrecen (Lajos Kossuth University at that time).

While still a student, he took part in the work of the Institute of Mathematics as a teaching assistant. He graduated from Kossuth University in 1951. After that, for a short time, he taught mathematics and physics in a secondary school in Debrecen. The next short stage of his career took place at the University of Szeged, where he spent three semesters as an assistant lecturer. This transitional period of his life came to an end in 1953. In January of that year, he was appointed to Kossuth University as an assistant professor. He taught here for forty-one years, until his retirement in 1994, but he gave lectures on differential geometric structures up to very recently, in the 2010s.

He earned his University Doctorate in 1957. This was followed by academic degrees awarded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: ‘Candidate of Mathematical Sciences’ (upper equivalent to PhD) in 1962 and ‘Doctor of Mathematical Sciences’ in 1973. He rose through university ranks to become a full professor in 1974. Starting in 1975, he served for fifteen years as head of the Department of Geometry. These were years of renewal and growth for the Department. He had a special interest and concern for young researchers; he had fifteen or so doctoral students. From 1988 until his death he was the editor-in-chief of *Publicationes Mathematicae Debrecen*.

Lajos Tamássy, following his mentor Ottó Varga, in his research work focused on different areas of differential geometry. His interest included affinely connected and tensorially connected manifolds, line element manifolds and their Finsler metrizable manifolds, manifolds with an area measure, metrically homogeneous (‘monochromatic’) Finsler manifolds, interrelation between Finsler manifolds and manifolds with a distance function, and weakly symmetric Riemannian manifolds. His eighty or so scientific publications are cited in more than 750 papers. Lajos Tamássy’s method of thinking is well-characterized by the following famous quote from Kant:

‘All human knowledge begins with intuitions, proceeds from thence to concepts, and ends with ideas.’

He was inspired by exceptionally fine intuition to conjecture – and prove – many subtle results about abstract geometrical structures.

After 1990 he was awarded a number of prestigious academic and national prizes and honours: the Szele Tibor Medal, the Szent-Györgyi Albert Prize, the Eötvös József Wreath, the Knight’s Cross, the Officer’s Cross and the Middle Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit. He obtained the highest distinction of the University of Debrecen, the Honorary Medal, last November.

In addition to his professional interests, he enjoyed playing tennis and walking. He loved the poetry of János Arany, and had a thorough knowledge of history, both ancient and modern. He followed with deep interest and an open mind the most recent news of domestic politics as well as the global trends of world development. Lajos Tamássy was wise, generous and modest. Throughout his life, he firmly kept his Calvinist belief and religiosity. The greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36–40) were the most significant guidelines in his life.

He is survived by his wife of more than sixty-six years, Ilona Lentei, a professor of theoretical physics at the University of Debrecen. He will be sorely missed by her, his colleagues, students, many friends and by all who knew him.

József Szilasi