

## Good traditions deserve to be continued and supported

This special issue of the *Estonian Journal of Earth Sciences* is dedicated to the memory of a well-known Estonian palaeoichthyologist and geologist Elga Mark-Kurik (Fig. 1). She passed away on 6 November 2016 in her 88th year of life devoted mostly to studies on Devonian vertebrates and stratigraphy. While studying at the Geology Department of Tartu State University through 1947–1952, she got interested in vertebrate palaeontology. In her diploma paper she described new finds of *Holonema* (Mark 1953a, 1953b). At this point it is proper to note the role of Prof. Karl Orviku, later a member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences (EAS) and director (1954–1968) of the Institute of Geology, EAS. During his university years after World War II, K. Orviku was a mental leader of the Geology Department and, proceeding from his excellent knowledge of Estonian geology, study history and needs of society of that time, used to recommend to students topics for their thesis studies. Elga Mark was a talented hard-working student taking great interest in her topic. From September 1952 she continued her scientific career among researchers of the Institute of Geology,



**Fig. 1.** Elga Mark-Kurik with a specially designed scarf on her 80th birthday in 2008.

EAS (later at Tallinn University of Technology) for the whole life (formally up to 2013). During her doctoral studies (*aspirantura* in terms of that time) at the EAS (1953–1955), she was mentored by a leading vertebrate palaeontologist of Russia Prof. Dmitry V. Obruchev (Fig. 2) (Palaeontological Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow). This contact was highly important for the development of her scientific competence and cooperation with colleagues from Russia and elsewhere. After acquiring the degree in 1955, she became a junior scientific worker, three years later a senior scientist, and worked as a leading scientist from 1989 through 1992. The following period of substantial reforms in the organization and financing of Estonian science made Elga's position at the institute rather insecure. Still, she had some project-based connection with the institute and so we can summarize that Elga was a successful member of the institute for 64 years. Such a long career contains many noteworthy details that cannot be included here but are found in a paper by H.-P. Schultze, S. Turner and A. Grigelis of 2009 (Great northern researchers: discoverers of the earliest Palaeozoic vertebrates. *Acta Zoologica (Stockholm)*, **90** Suppl. 1, 3–21). Only a specific result about the origin of gnathostome internal fertilization, which Elga obtained together with a group of colleagues from different countries and was published in *Nature* a year before her death, should be added as an achievement in palaeontology the most praised by the press of Estonia. In the booklet *Estonia in Research and Innovation* (2016, published by the Ministry of Education and Research), this result was mentioned among 18 prominent ones from past till present, including the names like K. E. von Baer, E. Öpik and developers of Skype. The attitudes towards such lists of achievements may vary, but being acquainted with Elga's work during her lifetime, we can say that she was undoubtedly a devoted follower of the earlier great Baltic vertebrate palaeontologists.

The set of papers of this special issue, entitled *Devonian and Its Fossil World*, contains nine papers submitted by close colleagues or even unofficial students of Elga mainly from the parts of Europe where she worked during her long active research period. The submitting authors of the first paper of this set Newman et al. declare that their manuscript is based on an unfinished version written by Elga and they consider



**Fig. 2.** Young Elga in 1961 in the Institute of Geology, EAS together with her previous supervisor and a monograph co-author Prof. D. V. Obruchev (right) and Dr L. B. Halstead Tarlo (British Museum), an early visitor from the west to Soviet Estonia.

her the senior author of the paper. The Editor-in-chief thanks the authors for such a gentlemanlike behaviour.

The papers mostly concentrate on descriptions of new taxa (Mark-Kurik et al., Szrek & Wilk, Ivanov & Plax, Elliott et al.) and some other aspects of palaeo-ichthyology including morphology, assemblages and habitats of vertebrates (Glinskiy & Pinakhina, Lebedev et al., Pinakhina & Märss), but also other fossils (Rozhnov), sedimentology and stratigraphy (Lukševičs et al.) are represented. The general topics of the issue seem to be very similar to those we know from the bibliography of studies by Elga Mark-Kurik (see the newest edition at <http://doi.org/10.15152/GEO.19>). The editors of the *Estonian Journal of Earth Sciences* thank all authors who helped us to publish the memorial issue. We also thank all reviewers for their contribution to this publication: A. Alekseev (Moscow), C. E. Brett (Cincinnati), C. Burrow (Queensland), C. Duffin (London), M. Duncan (Dublin), D. Goujet (Paris), V. Hairapetian (Isfahan), A. Ivanov (St Petersburg), P. Janvier (Paris), O. Lebedev (Moscow), J. Long (Bedford Park, South Australia), E. Lukševičs (Riga), T. Märss (Tallinn),

D. P. Plax (Minsk), H.-P. Schultze (Kansas), P. Szrek (Warszawa), J. Zajic (Praha).

Looking back on the history of vertebrate palaeontology in the East Baltic and Estonia in particular, we can see that several well-known scientists making use of local geological conditions have produced an impressive amount of significant results. This has been ‘normal’ beginning with E. Eichwald and Ch. Pander in the 19th century and with W. Gross, A. Heintz and others in the early years of the 20th century. This tradition was continued also by a younger generation including E. Mark-Kurik and V. Karatajūtė-Talimaa (Lithuania) with their students, but the 21st century did not add any new names here. Partly the reason seems to be a general dominance of micropalaeontological studies, but the situation in Estonia is complicated by inadequate procedures of fundamental science financing. The content and authorship of this special issue with several new names from other European countries evidence that in general the situation in palaeoichthyology is not at all so bad as it looks to us in Estonia. It means that good traditions are worthy to be continued and supported.

Dimitri Kaljo  
Editor-in-chief