

ARMIN ÖPIK 100



A. Öpik in Canberra, 1982. Photo from *BMR Journal of Australian Geology and Geophysics*, 9(2), 1984 (1985), by the permission of the Director of the Australian Geological Survey Organisation.

Armin Alexander Öpik was an outstanding Estonian and Australian geologist-palaeontologist, the best-known in the world geoscientist of Estonian origin. His course of life between 24 June 1898 and 15 January 1983 was divided into two fundamentally different parts by his emigration in 1944.

The first period in A. Öpik's life comprises his childhood at Lontova near Kunda, schoolyears at the Tallinn Nicolai (now Gustav Adolf) Gymnasium (graduated with a gold medal in 1917), enrollments in Moscow University and military school (which Armin and his brother Oskar chose due to the difficult economic situation of the family during the wartime), marriage to Varvara Potashko (died 1977), geology and mineralogy studies at Tartu University in 1922–26, MSc in 1926, PhD in 1928, work as a lecturer in 1929–30, as a professor of geology and palaeontology and Director of the Geological Institute and Museum of Tartu University in 1930–44. At the same time he took part in the activities of the Society of Estonian Naturalists (secretary 1932–36, vice-president 1936–40, president 1944), was a member of the Estonian Geological

Committee, Institute of Natural Resources, the editor of a popular journal *Estonian Nature* (1938–40), etc.

The Australian period in A. Öpik's life began in 1948. Before that he was forced to live for some years in a displaced persons' camp in Germany. Supported by an old friend C. Teichert, A. Öpik began to work at the Bureau of Mineral Resources of Australia in Melbourne and Canberra, holding different positions. He remained at the Bureau until the compulsory retiring age of 65. Afterwards he was employed on the contractual basis for several years so that he could complete his studies on Cambrian fossils of Australia. His last paper describing dolichometopid trilobites was published in 1982, only a year before he passed away.

A. Öpik was a geologist with a wide spectrum of interests from economic geology (phosphorites, clays) to dynamic geology and palaeobiology, but his main topics have always been stratigraphy, and especially palaeontology. The monographs *Brachiopoda Protremata* (1930), *Über Klitamboniten* (1934), *Trilobiten aus Estland* (1937) and several papers about ostracodes written during the Estonian period made him well known in the scientific world. From the Australian period, besides important papers on regional geology and stratigraphy, his monographs on Cambrian trilobites, agnostids in particular, are worthy of note.

In a bibliography published in *BMR Journal of Australian Geology and Geophysics*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1984 (1985), and reprinted in *Historical Record of Australian Science*, 6(2), 1985, altogether 150 papers by A. Öpik were quoted, divided nearly exactly between the two periods of his life. Both above sources contain also nice biographies and overviews of A. Öpik's activities, written by his colleagues and friends J. N. Casey, M. F. Glaessner, J. H. Shergold, and C. Teichert, and personal reminiscences by his daughter N. Romot. In Estonia the most comprehensive summaries of A. Öpik's achievements were published in *History of Geological Sciences in Estonia* (1986, in Russian) and in *Geology and Mineral Resources of Estonia* (1997; eds. A. Raukas and A. Teedumäe). A detailed biography of the first part of A. Öpik's life was published by A. Rõõmusoks (1989).

Armin Öpik was elected an Honorary Fellow of the Geological Society of London (1938), a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Sciences (1962), to Honorary Membership of the Geological Society of Australia (1965). In 1962 he received the C. D. Walcott Medal from the US National Academy for his Cambrian studies.

The above list of appreciations proves that also a scientist who publishes mostly in national editions (e.g. *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis* in the 1930s) can be world famous if his scientific contribution is of adequate level.

This issue of the *Proceedings of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, Geology* commemorates the centenary of Armin Öpik with the publication of a set of papers on Ordovician palaeontology and stratigraphy of Estonia.

Dimitri KALJO