



IN MEMORIAM: IZOLD PUSTYL'NIK
(17 March 1938 – 2 May 2008)

Izold Pustyl'nik, eminent astronomer and senior research associate at the Tartu Observatory, and member of SEAC (La Société Européenne pour l'Astronomie dans la Culture), died in the early morning of May 2, 2008.

Izold Pustyl'nik was born on March 17, 1938 into a family of millers in Odessa, Ukraine, as an only child. During World War II he was evacuated together with his mother to Uzbekistan. He lost his father in the war. After the war they returned to Odessa where Izold graduated from secondary school with high grades and from Odessa University *cum laude*. His interests in astronomy developed under the guidance of V. Tsessevich who was one of the leading researchers on close binary stars.

After a short period as a young scientist in Odessa and Kiev he applied in 1962 for a postgraduate position at the Institute of Physics and Astronomy in the Academy of Sciences of the then Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. Remarkably, only three months after starting his postgraduate studies, Izold delivered his first academic seminar report at the Institute in Estonian. His skills in acquiring new languages were impressive: in the Institute's personnel records of 1992 Izold rated his command of Russian, Estonian, English and Polish as excellent; Ukrainian, German and French as languages he could read and translate; and Hungarian as a language he commanded at conversational level.

Following his postgraduate studies, Izold obtained the degree of Candidate of Science from the University of Tartu in 1958. In 1994 he was awarded a DSc from Saint Petersburg State University.

During the entire time he worked at the Tartu Observatory, Izold researched close binary systems – stars that, by orbiting very close to each other around a common centre of mass, help us to learn more about stars in general than can be done by studying single stars alone. He even defined a new category of stars – gas-eclipsed close binaries, which are binaries orbiting around each other in a common gas envelope. During the last decade he studied the subdwarf components of pre-cataclysmic binaries, trying to understand their structure, spectral features and evolution.

Though mainly a theoretician, Izold was active – and, over a very long period in his earlier academic career, also involved – in observing binary systems.

In recent years Izold took an interest in famous astronomers connected both with Estonia and Russia. Together with Vitalii Bronshten, he published a monograph on Ernst Julius Öpik, one of the best-known Estonian astronomers. Izold also wrote about Stanislavs Vasilevskii, a Latvian astronomer whose talent had remained hidden in the tumult of the 20th century, and thoroughly investigated the life and work of Erich Schoenberg, the German-Estonian astronomer who worked at the Tartu Old Observatory.

Izold's interests were not limited to the life and work of famous astronomers: he also attempted to draw parallels between the views of ancient astronomers and contemporary thought. At the 2002 Tallinn conference celebrating the passage of 150 years since the measurement of the Struve Geodetic Arc – a long meridian arc stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea that has been inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List – Izold analysed Friedrich Georg Wilhelm Struve's geodetic and astronomical measurements in the light of contemporary astronomical understanding.

In the mid-1970s, during the surge of national awakening in Estonia, astronomer Heino Eelsalu began to trace back Estonian national identity, almost lost by then, and focused on the interpretation of various myths connected with the starry sky, together with the examination of archaeological artefacts from an astronomical viewpoint. In so doing, he laid a solid foundation for the field of archaeoastronomy in Estonia. Eelsalu's enthusiasm fired many younger colleagues, Izold among them, for whom a new window had been opened onto the world. Izold became one of the main organisers of the 2002 International Conference of SEAC, which was held in Tartu, Estonia. At the conference he also delivered a weighty paper 'Does modern astrophysics

widen the horizons of archaeoastronomy?' (published in the SEAC Proceedings, 2002).

Izold's fine language skills allowed him to cooperate with astronomers from many countries of the world. His active lifestyle marked him out and he was elected onto the boards of several international organisations. For instance, Izold had been a member of the Euro-Asian Astronomical Society virtually since its establishment.

Izold was also one of the main instigators of Euro-science Estonia. By a cruel irony, Izold was gone by the opening of the 2008 international seminar that he had summoned. The seminar was dedicated to the astronomer Ernst Christoph Friedrich Knorre who worked in Tartu before Struve's era.

Izold Pustyl'nik will be deeply missed by his colleagues in the Tartu Observatory and SEAC. He was a fine member of our observatory and interlocutor on scientific issues and life in general.

Tõnu Viik, Tartu Observatory

Translated by Kait Tamm