

Obituary

HUGO STRUNZ (1910–2006)



(Photograph courtesy of *Der Aufschluss*)

More than 50 years ago, at the University of Chicago, I remember Professor D.J. (Jerry) Fisher recommending *Mineralogische Tabellen* by Hugo Strunz as the best mineralogical classification system extant. He was referring to the first edition of the book, published in 1941. This was high praise indeed for a young mineralogist just 31 years of age when the book was published, and foreshadowed a brilliant career.

Hugo Strunz was born on 24 February, 1910 in Weiden in Oberpfalz, Bavaria, Germany. In 1929 he began his mineralogical studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and the Technische Universität in Munich, obtaining a Dr. Phil from the former in 1933, and Dr. Sc. Techn. from the latter in 1935. His mentors there were B. Gossner and H. Steinmetz. He spent a semester with W.L. Bragg at Victoria University in Manchester, and the years 1935 to 1937 with P. Niggli at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zurich.

In 1937 he joined the Mineralogical-Petrological Institute at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin as a scientific assistant to Paul Ramdohr. There he qualified as a university lecturer in 1939, and established a mineralogical collection at the Museum of Natural History, becoming curator of the collection in 1943.

At this stage, his career became clouded by the war, which was increasing in intensity. A few years before his death, I queried Hugo about the war years, and whether he had been militarily involved. He said that after a short period of basic training he obtained a medical discharge because of a heart condition. He referred to his anti-Nazi credentials by pointing to the dedication of the first edition of his *Mineralogische Tabellen* to V.M. Goldschmidt. Surely he would have got into trouble if this had come to the attention of the authorities at the time. I encouraged him to write about his experiences in Berlin during its

devastation toward the end of the war, and he responded “later”.

After the war, Hugo Strunz taught briefly at the Philosophical-Theological University in Regensburg where he established a State Mineralogical-Geological Institute. In 1946 he settled in at the Technische Universität, Berlin, becoming full professor in 1951 and working there until his retirement in 1978, except for a year spent as research professor at Harvard University in 1954. He restored the Institute for Mineralogy and Crystallography at the Technische Universität, eventually becoming its director.

During his career, which continued unabated after his retirement from the Technische Universität, Hugo Strunz made enormous contributions to mineralogy. Apart from his teaching in mineralogy and crystallography, from which several thousand students benefited, he published over 200 scientific papers on many aspects of mineralogy, with particular emphasis on crystallochemical aspects. He published a number of books, arguably the most important of which, *Mineralogische Tabellen*, has gone through ten editions, the latest of which was published in 2001 in English and is aptly entitled *Strunz Mineralogical Tables*. During the sixty years between the first edition in 1941 and the latest one, the Strunz classification system, which is based on chemical composition and crystal structure, was constantly being revised and updated, but the original concept remained

intact, and is the classification basis for many of the important mineralogical collections throughout the world. Strunz’s pre-eminent position in mineralogical classification was recognized by his election to the chairmanship of the IMA Commission on Classification of Minerals, in which capacity he served for many years.

Another project to which Hugo Strunz devoted much time and effort was the total revision and re-editing of the standard German textbook *Klockmanns Lehrbuch der Mineralogie*, written in collaboration with Paul Ramdohr and published as the 16th edition. In the years before his death he was working on a new edition which, unfortunately, he was unable to complete.

Hugo Strunz has received many honours for his contributions to mineralogy, including honorary memberships in the mineralogical societies of USA, Great Britain, Germany and the USSR, of the geological societies of Bulgaria and Hungary, and the Gemmological Society of Japan. He was a senator of the German Academy of Natural Scientists Leopoldina, and was awarded the Boricky Medal of the Karls University Prague and the Bundesverdienstkreuz first class of the Federal Republic of Germany. He served as president of the International Mineralogical Association from 1970 to 1974. His name is forever enshrined in the mineralogical literature by the eponymous minerals strunzite, ferrostrunzite and ferristrunzite.

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