

## A.J.P. Oort, 1903–1987

J. Dekker

Professor Emeritus Arend Joan Petrus Oort, Jo to his friends, died April 26, 1987, at his home in Wageningen, the Netherlands. Jo was born at Oegstgeest in 1903 and received his training in biology at the University of Utrecht. In 1928 he received his master's degree with the highest qualification (cum laude), and two years later he was awarded the Ph.D. degree.



In 1929 he was appointed with the Wageningen Agricultural University and in 1933 he became assistant to the late professor Quanjier in the Laboratory on Mycology and Potato Research, the present Laboratory for Phytopathology. For many years Oort investigated fungus diseases of cereals, such as eyespot, take-all, and ergot of rye, but his main interest in the years before World War II concerned the loose smuts of wheat and barley. He studied epidemiological aspects of these diseases and improved the hot-water treatment in use for the control of seed infection. For screening hybrids for resistance he developed a very useful inoculation method and published valuable data on the susceptibility of a large number of wheat and barley cultivars. Studies on physiologic specialization led him to discern six races on nine groups of wheat cultivars. On the basis of work with the *Triticum-Ustilago* system, he suggested in 1944 what Flor later called a gene-for-gene relationship. The published report of this investigation has remained unnoticed, probably because it was published in Dutch during the war.

In 1949 Oort succeeded Quanjier in the chair of plant pathology and as head of the laboratory. Under his directorship an expansion of research efforts in ecological as well as physiological-biochemical direction took place. He initiated research on the epidemiology of *Phytophthora infestans*, which led to the

elucidation of the overwintering of this pathogen in the potato tuber. He stimulated research on another important disease, yellow rust of barley and wheat, which led to the elucidation of the life cycle of the causal pathogen. He also promoted the study of soilborne pathogens and suggested the use of antagonists. He took the initiative to establish, in 1950, a Research Unit on Chemotherapy of Plants, in close cooperation with the Institute for Organic Chemistry at Utrecht. This research unit, which he personally led during almost 20 years, contributed significantly to the discovery and knowledge of systemic fungicides, which nowadays have revolutionized control of fungal diseases in many crops. In addition, this research unit carried out physiological-biochemical research to further elucidate the host-parasite relation and also studied nonfungicidal compounds, which influence this relation in favor of the host.

During almost two decennia Oort gave guidance to research and teaching in the Laboratory for Phytopathology. His own lectures were clear and well prepared. In addition, he took the initiative for several new courses, to be given by his coworkers. Oort's influence on phytopathology in the Netherlands has been great. His sharp intelligence, his wide scientific knowledge and interests, and his critical attitude were not only important for his many students and coworkers, but they also gave him much influence in important committees, boards, and similar bodies.

For his scientific achievements Oort was awarded membership of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences in 1958 and an Honorary Doctorate of the State University at Gent, Belgium in 1963. On the occasion of his retirement, at the end of 1968, the Queen awarded him an order of knighthood: "Ridder in de orde van de Nederlandsche Leeuw." After his retirement, he resumed his personal research activities for another 12 years. Until the end of his life he kept abreast of the developments in the laboratory and he stayed in close contact with the staff and coworkers. We will miss his amiability and his sparkling and inspiring mind.