

## Ogledi o Vladimiru Prelogu [Homage to Vladimir Prelog]

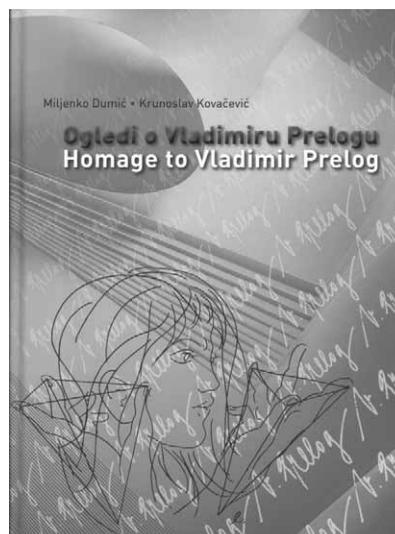
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A Croatian and Swiss Nobel Prize laureat Professor Vladimir Prelog (Sarajevo, 23 July 1906 – Zürich, 7 February 1998) was an inspiring teacher and dear friend of three generations of the most distinguished Croatian scientists. Two of them, Professor Miljenko Dumić, PhD (Prelog's postdoctoral student, 1983/85) and Krunoslav Kovačević, PhD (Prelog's predoctoral student, 1981/82) prepared an exciting book on his life, topics he dealt with, people he worked with or was a friend with, and interests he had. They did not want to make just another biography of Professor Prelog, because a lot of books have been published before to mark his 100th birthday anniversary. They decided to compile a lot of reprints of a number of articles dedicated to Professor Prelog written by his contemporaries, his students and colleagues during the period from 1951 to 2008. The book also contains many original photographs of Prelog himself as well as of many people close to him, and other materials released in his honour (stamps, medals, memorial plaques, names of streets, schools, busts, etc). The scientific articles of Prelog himself are not given, since they have already been included in his bibliography.

The book is divided into several sections: *Foreword* (pp. 8–31), *Homage to Vladimir Prelog* (pp. 32–97), *Afterword* (pp. 98–111), *Selected articles* (pp. 113–596), *From the referees' reports* (pp. 597–598), *About authors* (pp. 599–600), *Author index of selected articles* (p. 601) and *Index of all articles* (pp. 602–616). Besides, the authors prepared an accompanying DVD of 1529 pages with a list of all the articles and corresponding texts, some of them given in Croatian and English, others in the language they originally appeared or in the English version only.

In *Foreword* the authors described the way they prepared this unique book. From the vast number of documents regarding Professor Prelog's fascinating personality and his scientific work, the authors selected, analyzed, commented where necessary, and presented in chronological order only those which were, according to their opinion, the most important and worth to be published. Their intention was to build an image of Professor Prelog as a complete personality and a scientist to whom the development of both the world and Croatian science can be attributed.

In continuation of *Foreword* the authors gave a brief account of the main relevant stages in Professor Prelog's life: *Before 1941; After World War II, until 1975; After receiving Nobel Prize in 1975; 1986 – Birth anniversary symposia in Rehovot, Zagreb and Zürich; Prelog's last visit to Zagreb in 1989; Year 1991 and later; Celebrating Prelog's 90th birthday in 1996; After Prelog's passing away in 1998 and References.*

In the pre-war period (1935–1941), Prelog's name was mentioned for the first time in the Almanac of the Croatian University in Zagreb (1940). At that time he was a lecturer and Head of the Department of Organic Chemistry at Technical Faculty, where he educated young organic chemists for the work in pharmaceutical industry ('Kaštel' later known as 'PLIVA'). After the Second World War a lot of texts (in Croatia and abroad) evaluated Prelog's scientific achievements (170 articles) and his pioneering contribution to the synthesis of adamantane, nature of enzymatic reactions as well as his contribution to reforming the chemistry studies at the ETH Zürich, Switzerland and introducing group leadership. A great number of reviews about Prelog followed after his receiving the Nobel Prize in 1975, especially those containing comprehensive descriptions of all phases of his life and his scientific results in the areas of chemical topology, biocatalytic enzyme reactions, alkaloids, steroids and isolation and structure determination of antibiotic boromycin. On the occasion of his 80th birthday, three scientific symposia were held at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Israel, in Zagreb, Croatia and in Zürich, Switzerland. At the same time ETH established *Prelog Lecture* symposium with a winning lecture awarded by *Prelog Medal*. Professor Prelog never broke connections with Croatia, the land of his origin. He visited Croatia and Zagreb many times. His last visit was in 1989 when he was named honorable citizen of the City of Zagreb, awarded *Božo Težak* medal of the Croatian Chemical Society and met all his former colleagues and collaborators from Zagreb – from the University, Ruđer Bošković Institute and PLIVA Research Institute.

In 1991, when Croatia was attacked and pushed into terrible war, 112 Nobel laureates from all over the world signed the famous 'Appeal for Peace in Croatia' and Professor Prelog was among the first ones. This gesture affected the public opinion and politicians, and sped up the international recognition and independence of Croatia. How deeply he was shattered by the war is visible from an interview where he called the war 'the crime of insanity or the insanity of crime'.

The year 1996 was a great occasion for many to remember Prelog's 90th birthday due to numerous reminiscences given about Prelog and his work by his close collaborators and students in a special issue of the journal *Croatica Chemica Acta* entitled 'Surprise Festschrift'.

*Homage to Vladimir Prelog* the authors begin with the quote of Albert Eschenmoser, a great organic chemist and Prelog's collaborator and friend: 'The name of Prelog, the scientist, will live on in the annals of chemistry. For those who are so fortunate to have known him, it is Vlado, the human being, who will be remembered with great affection'. These warmly and appreciating words describe Professor Prelog as one of the most brilliant chemists and noblemen of the 20th century. Chemistry was not only his profession but also his life philosophy. He dedicated himself to chemistry already as a 15-year-old boy, and his wish 'to do something useful for the society' found a complete fulfillment in the chemistry of natural compounds and pharmaceutical chemistry. Prelog's most important contribution to science consists in the fundamental phenomenon of chirality expressed by his quote 'The world is chiral and clinal: enjoy the symmetry wherever you find it'. Together with Cahn and Sir Ingold, Prelog developed a comprehensive system for categorizing and specifying molecular chirality named CIP rules, which today represents the basic language of chemists, biochemists, and biologists to describe the exciting world of chiral molecules. For his extraordinary achievements in stereochemistry, being the culmination of his scientific opus, he received the Nobel Prize in 1975, and appreciation of his colleagues as the leader of an epoch in stereochemistry.

The reminiscences of his students and collaborators tell of Prelog's fascinating ability to bring science close to everyone. He was a brilliant teacher, skilled and successful in transferring knowledge through a teaching style which could not be copied. Prelog's teaching and scientific work was pivotal in bringing up three generations of Croatian chemists, biochemists and biologists through Prelog's 'Zagreb School of Organic Chemistry', acknowledged in the world. During his stay in Zagreb (1935–1941) he educated 20 students and research fellows at the Technical Faculty, University of Zagreb, and accepted 17 students and collaborators as pre- or postdoctoral students to his laboratory at the ETH in Zürich. Most of them became distinguished professors of organic chemistry and biochemistry at Universities in Croatia or successful scientists in industry, especially in PLIVA.

On the occasion of Prelog's 90th birthday, PLIVA and Croatian Chemical Society established the yearly *Vladimir Prelog Award for Organic Chemistry* to successful young scientists with significant results in the field of organic chemistry. Since 1996 nine laureates have received this award, and I can proudly say that two of them (Linda Tomašković and Marin Roje) are the former students of mine at the Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology, University of Zagreb.

Professor Prelog kept close relations with Croatia and Croatian scientists until he passed away. He frequently participated at the biennial Symposium of Croatian Chemists, and was in contact with Croatian institutions (Faculty of Science, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, Croatian Academy of Science and Arts, Ruđer Bošković Institute, PLIVA, INA and Croatian Chemical Society). He was the honorary president of 'Ružička Days' and *Almae Matris Croaticae Alumni* (AMCA), as well as honorary member of many associations and academies. Prelog was elected honorable citizen of Zagreb (in 1989), Sarajevo (in 1992) and Osijek (in 1994), and some streets in Zagreb and Sarajevo are named after him. The Chemical and Geological Technical School in Zagreb changed its name into *Vladimir Prelog Science School*, and the same did the Academic Choir *Chimicae ingeniariae alumni*, founded in 1991 within the Society of graduated students and friends of the Chemical Technology at the University of Zagreb, changing the name in 2004 into the *Academic Choir Vladimir Prelog*. The celebration of Prelog's 100th birthday anniversary was crowned with a millennium photo of Croatian chemists forming with their bodies Prelog's profile, taken by the famous photographer Šime Strikoman at the Marulić Square in Zagreb in the vicinity of the Faculty where Prelog was teaching.

In *Afterword* the authors expressed in poetic words the passing away of this charismatic scientist, intellectual giant, true genius, the scientist-humanist with a big heart and noble soul, who selflessly built the bridges between people. For Croatian chemists he was a brilliant and ingenious teacher, founder of PLIVA's Research Institute, and above all, he was a Croatian patriot. The 'King of Chemistry' as chemist Barry Sharpless called him, left his kingdom and as the living history of chemistry, went into the history of chemistry.

The most precious part of this book is the section entitled *Selected articles*. On 483 pages the authors presented a collection of original articles written by Prelog's contemporaries, (students, colleagues, collaborators, Nobel laureates or just friends). The articles appear in different languages such as Croatian, German, English, French, Czech, Spanish and Portuguese and are a precious memory of an extraordinary personality, the time he was living and working in, as well as of Croatian and world scientists close to him.

At the end of this review I have to express my admiration for an excellent graphic design and attractive final layout of this book done by Snježana Engelman Džafić and LASERplus agency. I am especially delighted with the cover page drawing of the Rassi maid (racemate), made by a Swiss painter Hans Erni for the Prelog's Nobel lecture and his 'ex libris'.

Finally, I congratulate the authors Professor Miljenko Dumić, PhD and Krunoslav Kovačević, PhD for giving us the opportunity to enjoy reading this wonderful book. On each page of this book the reader can feel the authors' high respect, deep admiration, sincere gratitude to, and long-lasting warm friendship with Professor Prelog. In my opinion, this is the most glittering monument the authors have made to their unforgettable teacher and friend.

This excellent and unique book must find its place in the home of every Croatian chemist and especially on the shelves of the primary and secondary school libraries. Younger generations must get to know this remarkable personality, who was a fighter his whole life for their better education and better future.

Jasna Vorkapić-Furač