

**PRIKAZ KNJIGE****BOOK REVIEW**

Nenad Trinajstić

*100 hrvatskih kemičara*  
[A Hundred Croatian Chemists]

Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 2002

The book *100 hrvatskih kemičara* (*A Hundred Croatian Chemists*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 2002) was written by Professor Nenad Trinajstić, a member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The book has 207 pages and consists of the author's Foreword, 100 photographs and 100 biographies. It represents a novelty in the modern Croatian scientific writing. This is the first work in the Croatian language that discloses a number of details from the lives and careers of 100 Croatian chemists, both women and men. I received the manuscript for review in the autumn of 1998, but the book came off the presses only in January 2002. Thus, I witnessed the search for sponsors, dramatic moments for the book's destiny and this is why I highly appreciate the efforts invested into preparation and publication of the book by the editorial team and the author, Professor Trinajstić.

It is mentioned in the Foreword that the main motivation to the author was the fact that very little had been written about Croatian chemists. Since early seventies Professor Trinajstić had been tirelessly and persistently searching for information, which he carefully collected from family archives and other sources, as well as from the scientists themselves. Many data presented here for the first time will be also useful for further research and documents on the history of Croatian chemistry. The book also opens a new type of modern lexicographic-biographical research in Croatia, which includes sketches from the lives of not only deceased but also of living leading Croatian intellectuals in the sphere of chemistry.

A hundred Croatian chemists may seem many for so small a country, but there are still some prominent chemists that have not been studied in this way. They would also deserve being written about. Knowing the author's thoroughness, I am certain that he was unable to collect enough data to present the lives and works of other prominent chemists in a worthy man-

ner, so he chose to omit them rather than to present them only partially. Chemists included in the book are those working from 1876 up to the present day and born before 1960. Year 1876 was chosen as the starting point because it was then that the first Chemical Laboratory was established at the University of Zagreb. Chemists were included into the book according to their achievements, such as Nobel Prize winners, members of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, full professors, editors of our leading chemical journal *Croatica Chemica Acta*, etc.

The author utilized different data sources: *Yearbooks of the Croatian (Yugoslav) Academy of Sciences and Arts*, Memoirs for deceased Academy members, records of the Croatian Chemical Society and its journal *Croatica Chemica Acta*, the book *Who is Who in Croatia*, *Croatian Lexicon* in two volumes, the monograph *Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, University of Zagreb, 1919-1999*, *Croatian Biographical Lexicon* and *Works*, published by the Lexicographic Institute »Miroslav Krleža«, journals *Kemija u industriji (Chemistry in Industry)*, *Priroda (Nature)* and *Rugjer*, book *Prominent Croatian Scientists in America* in two volumes, as well as various private archives and correspondence, family sources, and data acquired directly from the scientists.

The biographies provide the answers to the achievements in different chemical disciplines in Croatia, as well as the answers to why just a certain type of research was done in the given time period. Successful research in natural sciences is unconceivable without a leading scientist who dedicated his whole life to science, and this book is just about such scientists. They shaped chemistry in Croatia but chemistry in turn influenced their lives. I am quite certain that no scientific results can be achieved in natural sciences without exceptional efforts, self-discipline and persistence of equally exceptional people. It should be noted here that the definition of success in science is not only a result of scientific freedom of an individual but also the metaphysical influence of luck.

Biographies of Croatian chemists, though based on facts and data from their lives, collected over years from their families, friends and colleagues, reflect also the author's perception of the person whose life story he is telling in the manner of a first-rate scientist and narrator. All biographies are written in simple style, with small digressions in available details. Each biography is accompanied with a black-and-white photograph of the chemist in question and text extends over two pages, which gives the book a uniform rhythm and indicates the author's excellent conversance with biographical writing and the circumstances prevailing in these parts. The book abounds in interesting biographical facts, some of which are mentioned for the first time, and makes a gripping literary reading.

A few words about the design of the book cover. The book was first conceived as a modest and simple edition. At the last moment, however, it was provided with a special cover. The selection of scientists for the cover may be questioned, except for the portraits of the Nobel laureates, Ružička and Prelog. All the others come from the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology. The publisher might have chosen them because they had most of their textbooks and books printed by Školska knjiga. All of the 100 chemists deserve to be on the title page, but I would personally like to see there at least one of my professors from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, including the author of this book. I hope that most readers will not be attracted solely by the title page of the book but that they will curiously leaf through it. The intention of the book is also to influence school curricula, through which students would get to know Croatian chemists and their scientific work. Young people will learn about the history of our chemistry, and they might be inspired to choose chemistry as their future vocation after finishing secondary school. Thus, I stress again that the highest value of this book lies in its rousing the curiosity and interest in Croatian scientists – chemists. In most European countries, whose circle we wish to join, science is amply present in education, culture and development. In this context, the book *A Hundred Croatian Chemists* presents the biographies of our prominent chemists in a competent and interesting way. I do believe that it will make an interesting reading not only for natural scientists and historians, but also for the general public.

I congratulate Professor Trinajstić on his enthusiasm and perseverance in collecting the material for *A Hundred Croatian Chemists* and its publication. Such and similar works will save from oblivion many facts from the history of Croatian natural science – chemistry.

*Sonja Nikolić*