

## BOOK REVIEW

MARIJA KAŠTELAN-MACAN

### Living heritage of Vladimir Prelog

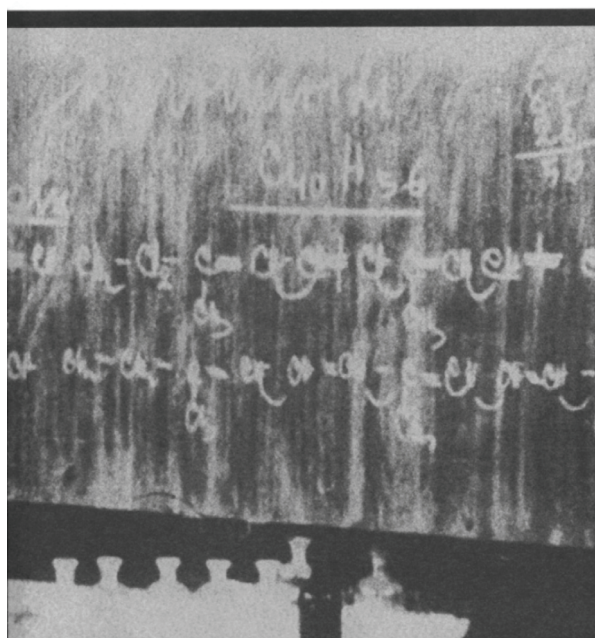
[*Živa baština Vladimira Preloga*]

Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, Zagreb, 2008,  
pp. 159, ISBN 978-953-6470-42-6

Dr. sc. Marija Kaštelan-Macan, professor at the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, wrote this book as a memento of the days when Vladimir Prelog (Sarajevo, July 23, 1906 – Zürich, January 7, 1998; Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1975) was in Zagreb, first as a lecturer and then as an associate professor at the Department of Chemical Technology, Technical Faculty. Prelog spent only seven years in Zagreb (1935–1941) but his impact on the Croatian chemistry is felt even today. During his stay in Zagreb, Prelog prepared with his students a number of interesting organic compounds, some of pharmaceutical and medical interest, such as, for example, sulphanilamide, which was patented under the name Streptazol and used in treating influenza. One of Prelog's most interesting preparations in Zagreb was the first synthesis of adamantane, a  $C_{10}H_{10}$  cage, performed with his doctoral student Rativoj Seiwerth (Osijek, 1916 – Zagreb, 2000).

This book contains a summary of the activities undertaken in Zagreb and Croatia to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prelog's birth. These activities were organized under the auspices of the Croatian Parliament, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of Croatia and the University of Zagreb. A two-year project was sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Culture and UNESCO with the aim to acquaint Croatian public with the life and achievements of this exceptional scientist. We should remember that Prelog left Croatia in December 1941 and was out of the focus of Croatian public attention for half a century. The project was led by the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology (formerly the Department of Chemical Technology) and was co-organized by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Prelog was a honorary member of the

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Academy), the Ruđer Bošković Institute and the Pharmaceutical Company PLIVA (during his stay in Zagreb, Prelog collaborated with Kaštel, the predecessor of PLIVA; for example, Streptazol was a result of this collaboration). An organizing committee, consisting of ten people and headed by Professor Kaštelan-Macan, coordinated all the anniversary activities. She was therefore the right person to prepare this book.

The book *Living Heritage of Vladimir Prelog* is structured as follows: Prologue, Activities Dedicated to Mark the 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of the Nobelist Vladimir Prelog, Vladimir Prelog, Prelog's Memorabilia at the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, Minutes of the Department of Chemical Technology Sitings 1935–1941, Conclusion and Appendices.

In the Prologue (3 pages), the author explains why she has prepared the book. The first chapter entitled *Activities Dedicated to Mark the 100<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of the Nobelist Vladimir Prelog* (24 pages) contains a summary of the activities related to the celebration of Prelog's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, such as the science festival, wreath-laying ceremony at the tomb owned by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts where the urn with Prelog's ashes is placed (Prelog was cremated in Zürich), meeting at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts dedicated to Prelog, scientific meeting entitled *Vladimir Prelog and Croatian Chemistry*, concert of the Academic choir Vladimir Prelog, four lectures and the opening of a public garden and unveiling of the busts of three great Croatian men who went to school in Osijek: bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (Osijek, 1815 – Đakovo, 1905; founder of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts), the first Croatian Nobel Prize winner in chemistry Leopold Ružička (Vukovar, 1887 – Mammern, Switzerland, 1976), and Prelog, 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of Croatian chemists dedicated to Ružička and Prelog, presentation of Prelog's work to high-school students, unveiling of Prelog's bust at the Pliva Research Institute, presentation of the Croatian edition of Prelog's scientific autobiography *My 132 Semesters of Chemical Studies*, unveiling of Prelog's bronze portrait in the vestibule of the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, etc. Prelog's brief biography is given in the second chapter entitled *Vladimir Prelog* (16 pages). The third chapter *Prelog's Memorabilia at the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology* (24 pages) displays Prelog's cupboard with samples of compounds he made in Prague and

Zagreb, Prelog's notebook in which he wrote names and formulae of the prepared compounds and methods of their preparation, and copies of a number of Prelog's personal documents, such as his birth certificate, school-leaving certificate (he was not a particularly good high-school student; at that time he had some other interests, such as track and field athletics), Ph.D. diploma, marriage certificate, etc. The fourth chapter is entitled *Minutes of the Department of Chemical Technology Sitzings 1937–1941* (4 pages) and contains brief summaries of eight meetings of faculty members from March 15, 1937 to January 26, 1941. In the Conclusion (3 pages + 15 pages of photos), the author describes how, while coordinating the festivities related to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Prelog's birth, she learned a lot about Prelog and the colleagues with whom she collaborated. The book ends with two appendices: the first contains a list of publications about Prelog in the period 2006–2008, TV and radio broadcasts, public lectures, etc. and the second provides a list of compounds that Prelog made in Prague and Prelog and his collaborators in Zagreb.

Every Croatian chemist should possess this book as a document about the greatness of a humble man. Prelog was one of the most important chemists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but when asked about his discoveries, he used to say I discovered nothing, I only saw what others did not. I think this a proper epitaph for this great scientist.

*Nenad Trinajstić*