



Editorial

The initial period of biochemistry in Lublin

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On September 23, 1944 thus before the end of the war a university was set up which was named after Maria Curie-Skłodowska (UMCS). Already on September 26 the first meeting of scientists took place, described by Professor Blauth-Opieńska as a “meeting on barrels since no chairs were available and although formal inauguration of the first academic year took place on January 1945 the first lectures began as early as September 1944”. These facts prove that the scientists were determined to rebuild Polish science.

In Lublin a group of scientists was present at that time who had survived the pogroms of Hitler and Stalin and who undertook the difficult task in organizing a university which had not been present in this town before the war. This made finding a location as well as even rudimentary equipment even more difficult.

The first President of UMCS was Professor Raabe, and the vice-president Professor L. Hirszfeld, who in 1944 asked Professor Janina Blauth-Opieńska to head the Department of Physiological Chemistry. Blauth-Opieńska, who did her Ph.D. with Professor Będziński at the University of Warsaw and collaborated with Professor Parnas in Lwów and Professor Weigl during the war in Lwów rapidly obtained her Doctor of Science and became a professor in 1948, and invested great energy in organizing the Department. After

the war most scientists had left Lublin moving to other cities, in order to start to organize biochemical institutions there. In her memoirs Professor Blauth-Opieńska wrote that for a year the department did not have a permanent location, and only in 1946 did they receive “a building of monumental value, the former seat of the high rabbinical school the Jeszybot. The lectures took place in the great workshop hall whereas in the smaller rooms we organized laboratory exercises and started research”. The greatest and most difficult task facing Professor Blauth-Opieńska was to form scientific cadres “therefore I offered positions of junior assistants to my best students. Graduate students who had majored in pharmacy and chemistry came to work in the department”. A serious difficulty was the fact that the authorities had blocked the possibility of obtaining Ph.D. titles in the way this had been done before the war. The authorities decided to reorganize science according to the Soviet system. Professor Blauth-Opieńska learned about this in Warsaw and rapidly returned to Lublin and in 1951 a commission was set up and the best assistants received doctorates, among others the later Professor Tomasz Borkowski. Thank to this move the status of the Department became stronger. Professor Blauth-Opieńska also writes about the enormous difficulties in obtaining equip-

ment and reagents and excursions to all parts of Poland, especially Silesia.

The undertaken scientific work was related to the investigations of J. Parnas and concerned phosphorylation in bacteria. This first work was published in 1949 in *Nature*. Another subject continued for a number of years were chromatographic techniques. The work was the subject of numerous publications and also monographs.

In 1949 the Medical School was separated from the UMCS and this fact caused a need for research in the Department of Physiological Chemistry in collaboration with the clinics. Professor Blauth-Opieńska complained sometimes that this pressure made theoretical work impossible. In the first years of the

existence of UMCS biochemical investigations were also performed in the Department of Plant Physiology. The Chair of Biochemistry was separated only in 1953 from the Department of Plant Physiology on the request of Professor Adam Paszewski, who was the Curator of that Chair until 1959 when it was taken over by Professor Trojanowski. Then the research of the department took a technological and applied direction.

Professor Blauth-Opieńska has great merit in creating a scientific institution in Lublin. Her collaborators and students have continued teaching and research contributing to obtaining an important position for the new biochemical institution.