

Editorial

Fifty years of *Acta Biochimica Polonica*

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Over the fifty years since the publication of *Acta Biochimica Polonica* we have witnessed an extraordinary development in the biological sciences. In this period a large number of new journals have appeared, of which a considerable number deal with highly specialized areas. *Acta Biochimica Polonica* has remained as planned fifty years ago, i.e., a quarterly publishing experimental work in various fields of biochemistry and biophysics, in later years expanding to include review articles and short communications, as well as papers on molecular biology.

In the early years the principal task was to join the stream of world science broken off during the war. An article by Professor Mozolowski, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of *Acta Biochimica Polonica*, reported how important and highly valued in the world were the prewar achievements of Polish laboratories. This article was planned for appearance in the first volume, but censorship prevented its publication. Efforts to reanimate Polish biochemistry preceded the launching of the journal. The beginnings were very difficult. The war had totally cut off access to information about basic research, which had continued despite wartime conditions. The war, which caused tremendous losses in scientific personnel, prevented the training of new researchers and led to tremen-

dous material losses. All of us who had to deal with these problems remember the time when pH indicator strips were divided into several pieces, and when we ourselves had to construct laboratory equipment. We had to synthesize enzymatic substrates and cofactors using the simplest organic compounds. It was indeed an impressive fact that studies were started in five university centres at the start of the academic year in 1945, despite the lack of textbooks and basic laboratory equipment. Research began slowly to move forward. Attempts were made to relate to the broken thread of research pursued by Jakub K. Parnas, Stanisław Przyłęcki and Leon Marchlewski. The first reports were presented at the congresses of the Polish Physiological Society which was constituted by 1950.

In September 1953, at a session of the Biochemistry and Biophysics Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences (P. A. N.), a decision was taken and accepted by the Second Division of P.A.N. to issue a biochemical journal that would enable publication of experimental works. A name for the journal was adopted and the Committee of Biochemistry and Biophysics of P.A.N. was to publish it. In March 1954 the first Editorial Committee was constituted with I. Reifer as chairman, W. Mozolowski as deputy chairman, and I. Mochnacka. The introductory issue of the first volume of

Acta Biochimica Polonica in 1954 appeared in 700 copies. From the start the motor and driving force of the editorial board was Professor Mozołowski; with tremendous devotion, energy and initiative he fulfilled the function of chief editor (officially from 1956). His deputy editor and close collaborator was Professor Irena Mochnacka, who took over more and more of the editorial responsibilities as the illness of Professor Mozołowski worsened. After the latter's death, she became chief editor of the journal in 1968. Together these two took on the tremendous burden of overcoming meritorial, organizational, and technical difficulties. In the first years of the journal's existence the task of the editors was to be, in the words of Professor Mozołowski's editorial comment: "not only to review the results of research, but also to serve as a school for writing experimental papers". There is no Polish biochemist starting on his or her career after the war who did not pass through that school or was not promoted by *Acta Biochimica Polonica*. By assuming these functions, editors were also reviewers and even supervisors of certain research projects. They took full responsibility for each and every published paper. Maintaining the standard of publication took much effort. At first the papers were printed in Polish; but by volumes 4, 5, 6, and 7 more and more papers appeared in English. By 1961, the language of publication was only English, and the National Science Foundation financed the translation of work published in Polish in the preceding years. A requirement for publishing in the journal was a Russian translation of abstracts. These were incorporated in the journal, but at a later date they comprised a supplement. In 1985 this requirement was lifted; and Polish translations of the abstracts were also cancelled.

A very active participant in discussions concerning the journal was Professor J. Heller, (Fig. 1) then chairman of the Committee of Biochemistry and Biophysics P.A.N. He was instrumental in getting the journal indexed in Current Contents in 1961. Also, first of the

People's Democracies, he obtained Poland's representation on the Committee of Editors of Biochemical Journals. These achievements enabled information about the work of Polish laboratories to reach broad circles of world biochemistry. Mention should be made of the initiative of the publishers of Chemical Abstracts, which financed summaries in the form of abstracts of Polish chemical and biochemical research, thus adding to the dissemination of information about Polish accomplishments. Much interest was aroused by the work of Professor Shugar's group published in our journal, which raised our index of citations. Also appearing in the journal was the work of world known biochemists, such as H. von Euler, P. Karlson, S. Ochoa, and K. Mothes.

When Professor Mochnacka took over the function of editor-in-chief of the journal, her deputy in the years 1968–1971 was K. Bełżecka. This latter function was taken over by myself in 1971. The editorial office owes a debt of gratitude to Anna Olszańska, a close collaborator of Professor Mochnacka with whom contact still remains active. Professor Mochnacka followed the same principles in conducting the journal as laid down together with Professor Mozołowski. She continued to edit the journal into the last years of her life with the same accuracy and sense of mission toward Polish authors. After her death in 1979, I followed the principles on which the journal was based from its inception. The expanded scope of the subject matter on which submitted papers were based, as well as maintenance of a high standard, demanded more editors. It was accepted that two reviewers would evaluate each submitted paper. A new broadened Editorial Advisory Board was called into existence. At the same time, higher quality of paper, better graphic design, and deadlines for issuing the numbers of the journal were demanded. Holding to these deadlines turned out to be impossible during the period of martial law (1981). Censorship of all journals, including scientific ones, was then in force. Although these stric-

tures did not last long, they led to disturbances in the publication schedule of the journal. In this situation the editors met with comprehension on the part of the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia. However, our enormous financial difficulties related to changes in the principles of financing the journal, as well as publishing delays, caused a break in the indexing of papers published in *Acta Biochimica Polonica* by the Philadelphia Institute for over two years.

The eighties brought a clear return to the promotional and educational tasks concerning authors working in smaller research centres, who reported their findings at the annual congresses of the Biochemical Society. Over this period there was a marked outflow of papers by well-known Polish biochemists to prestigious journals abroad. In an attempt to compensate for this, special issues were devoted to papers by students and collaborators of nestors of Polish biochemistry as well as work representing Polish biochemical centres, including the jubilee issue of the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Another initiative was to organize thematic blocks by invited biochemists, frequently related to Polish or international conferences. These initiatives are still continuing today.

In view of changes in the financing principles in P.A.N., and the termination of subsidizing publications by the Academy divisions, the journal was taken over in 1993 by the Polish Biochemical Society, and publication subsidies then came from the Committee for Scientific Research (K.B N.). Apart from the financial aspect, this decision was supported by the majority of the Editorial Advisory Board members. Financial support was also forthcoming from the funds of the Committee of Biochemistry and Biophysics. Thus *Acta Biochimica Polonica* had two publishers. Assistance was also provided in the past, and still continues, from the Institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences: Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics, the Nencki Insti-

tute of Experimental Biology in Warsaw as well as the Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry in Poznań.

For a number of years Professor L. Wojtczak has filled the post of chairman of the Editorial Advisory Board and reviewers from other countries have become Board members. Frequently experts outside the Board are called upon to act as reviewers.

At the end of the eighties, after a marked decline in the number of papers submitted, there occurred a rapid – nearly threefold – increase in the number of published papers by 1997 and at the same time a gradual rise in our citation index. For a number of years now *Acta Biochimica Polonica* has been publishing annually 100 to 140 papers which includes many from research centres in other countries (in 2002 making up about 30% of all papers).

In parallel with work on the subject matter of the journal, publishing techniques have been improving. In 1990 computerization was introduced accompanied by arduous efforts for obtaining equipment. Progress in this domain is relatively recent. An upgrading in the rank of the journal is an outcome of improved editorial equipment, the skills and efficiency of the editorial secretary, Małgorzata Basaj, and the excellence of the final preparation of texts by Dr. Daniela Barszcz. A breakthrough in the journal's history occurred with the gradual entry of *Acta Polonica Biochimica* to the internet, beginning in 1997 with tables of contents and abstracts, followed by full texts of papers in 2000. This took place with the aid of the Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics P.A.N. and, from 2001, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling of Warsaw University. In 2003 it became possible to present on MEDLINE the full version of publications. This achievement was obtained with the inspiring participation of M. Basaj during the present editorship of the journal by Professor Liliana Konarska, editor-in-chief since 1999, whose energy has contributed both to the modern-

ization of publishing techniques and to the increased inflow of submitted papers.

Looking back over the fifty years of the life of *Acta Biochimica Polonica*, and viewing the latest issues of the journal, we are entitled to

say that over its long course of development the journal has reached a level which does not differ from that of other well known biochemical journals.



Figure 1. Józef Heller and Irena Mochnacka, 1958