

Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology

Nencki Award for prof. Angelo Azzi

2016-10-19



The 2016 Nencki Award was presented on October 17th to prof. Angelo Azzi of the Vascular Biology Laboratory, Human Nutrition Research Centre on Aging, Tufts University in Boston, USA. The Award Ceremony took place in the conference hall of the Nencki Institute Neurobiology Centre. Prof. Azzi's research and career was outlined by Prof. Malgorzata Kossut (laudation) and Prof. Maciej Nałęcz, followed by the lecture of the Laureate on „*Molecular mechanisms of vitamin E action: some light at the end of the antioxidant tunnel*”.

Professor Angelo Azzi, born in Italy, graduated from the Medical Faculty of the University of Padua (M.D.) in 1963. He spent then 2 years at the Department of Biophysics University of Pennsylvania, under the leadership of Professor Britton Chance. After coming back to Italy Angelo Azzi has made his first PhD in Pathophysiology (1969), and the second PhD in Biochemistry (1970), both at the University of Padua. Since 1977 he worked at the University of Bern in Switzerland, where in the years 1983-2004 served as a director of the Institute of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of this university. It was the same institute, which in 1876 was created and directed by Marcel Nencki (1876-1896). The picture of Nencki hung in the office of Professor Azzi, who often spoke of Marcelli Nencki and of his collaboration with the Nencki Institute in Warsaw,. After taking the Swiss retirement in 2004, Professor Azzi moved to the US, where he created the Vascular Biology Laboratory at the Tufts Univeristy in Boston, which he is still heading today.

Professor Azzi published ~400 articles, cited over 14 000 times. His most cited (420 times) paper is *Inhibition of cell-proliferation by alpha-tocopherol - role of protein-kinase-C* Boscoboinik D., Szewczyk A., Hensey C., Azzi A. (J. Biol. Chem. 1991).

Prof. Azzi was an invited speaker at ~200 international meetings, he serves as Editor-in-Chief of *IUBMB Life*, and Editor-in-Chief of *Molecular Aspects of Medicine*, as well as Review Editor of *BioFactors*.

Angelo Azzi has focused his research on biochemistry and biophysics of biological membranes, on processes of transport through biomembranes, and on bioenergetics, with particular interest in the structure-function relationship in respiratory chain complexes in mitochondria, especially mechanisms of action of the b-c1 complex and cytochrome oxidase. During the last 20 years his scientific interests shifted to molecular function of tocopherols and carotenoids, with particular emphasis on the role of vitamin E.

For many years Professor Azzi had close contacts with UNESCO. He served as Member of the International Scientific Advisory Board to the UNESCO's Director General, as President of UNESCO Global Network for Cell and Molecular Biology and as Member of the Scientific Board of UNESCO International Programme for Basic Sciences. He was also active in many international scientific organizations being a President or Member.

Professor Azzi has been awarded a honorary doctorate from the University of Buenos Aires, and from the University of "Roma 3" in Rome. But for us it is probably the most important that Professor Azzi since 1994 has been a Foreign Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and that his contacts with Polish science, and with the Nencki Institute in particular, go back more than 40 years. These close contacts with the Nencki Institute started in the late 1970s and led to many publications, and scientific collaboration with numerous research groups in the Nencki. Several researchers from the Nencki Institute were trained in the laboratory of Professor Azzi. This fruitful collaboration produced all together 45 collaborative publications (44 research articles and reviews and 1 book).

During particularly difficult years 1980s in Poland, Prof. Azzi was helping the Nencki Institute by supplementing precious reagents and small laboratory equipment to groups collaborating with his laboratory. He was also admitting students from the Nencki Institute to numerous advanced courses of FEBS that he was organizing, and he wrote support letters for researchers from the Nencki Institute, helping in their efforts to get outside positions, or financial support.

In the 1990s, when the political situation in Poland has changed, and when Professor Azzi formed the UNESCO Global Network of Molecular and Cell Biology (MCBN), he invited the Nencki Institute as a Polish coordinating hub of the Network. This allowed to obtain substantial financial support both from UNESCO and from the Polish State Committee of Scientific Research. The Polish MCBN was granting small research grants, fellowships and conferences support to many research groups in Poland, at the same time placing the Nencki Institute in a position of a national coordinator of new activities. All this would not have been possible without the idea, inspiration and the initial help of Angelo Azzi.

The Nencki Award was established by The Scientific Council of the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology to honor distinguished scientists who were also friends of our Institute, who helped us in ours scientific efforts, with whom we shared our research passions, and with whom we closely collaborated.

Photo: A. Mirgos