

European Women in Chemistry

On the occasion of the International Year of Chemistry 2011, which has been dated to the centennial anniversary of Marie Skłodowska-Curie's Nobel Prize award in chemistry in 1911, a number of actions are taken to promote the knowledge on the accomplishments of women in this traditionally male-dominated discipline. While publishers like Wiley have dedicated certain journal issues to "women in chemistry" by compiling articles submitted by female correspondence authors (*Angew. Chem. Int. Ed.* **2011**, 50, issue 4, *Eur. J. Org. Chem.* **2011**, issue 20 and 21, etc.) in celebration of this event, the European Association of Chemical and Molecular Sciences has entrusted the two editors Jan Apotheker and Livia Simon Sarkadi to put together a book on the biographies and stories of (European) women's contribution to chemistry.

The volume starts with a foreword of the current IUPAC president Nicole Moreau, pointing out the importance of (male or female) role models for personal identification and potential decisions on future careers. In this context it might be of interest that in 2010 the statistics of the German Chemical Society still report only a small percentage of women holding a professorship in chemistry (10.4 %) displaying a remarkable imbalance if compared to the number of habilitands/assistant professors (ca. 30 %) or even of first year students (45 %), and also falls behind the overall ratio of female professors in Germany (ca. 18 %).

The book itself collects 54 quite short biographies (2–5 pages), spanning nearly the last millennium, however, of course, with "modern chemistry" still being a rather young science putting the focus on the last century (major achievements of more than 40 of the selected women can be dated within the 20th century). Excluding chemists that got famous elsewhere than in science (such as politics—to mention a few: Margaret Thatcher, Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, Angela Merkel) the book of course includes the four female Nobel prize winners (Marie Skłodowska-Curie, her daughter Irène Joliot-Curie and Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin as well as the recent awardee Ada Yonath) but also provides brief descriptions of the lives of scientists from alchemists to the current only woman being a Max-Planck director in a chronological order. While biographies of the most famous female chemists including the one's that were missed out in being awarded the Nobel prize are rather easy available, the information on the other women, who struggled their own fight or worked very closely together with their well-established husbands, is hard to find. Therefore it can be

considered a major merit of this book to shine light on these often unknown, but very successful women. Here it is interesting to see how their preconditions, such as an educated and wealthy family background, or their working environment (e.g. close collaboration with their husbands) resemble.

However, the choice of candidates for this book is not always transparent, especially as the own fixed criteria (European, chemistry) are not always met. With respect to a chemists' "speciality", the name reactions, one misses for example Irma Goldberg or Gertrude Maud Robinson, who worked hand in hand with her husband Robert Robinson, but also published papers without him.^[1] Major achievements in the field of photography and the "copy rapid process" should have allowed for dedicating a chapter to Edith Weyde who conducted her research first with IG Farben and later with Agfa filing more than 100 patents. The reader also misses the mentioning of Margot Becke-Goehring, who became the first female president of a German university in Heidelberg in 1966.

It also should be mentioned that at least some of the chapter contributions miss the necessary diligence and correctness, which one would expect for this compilation. For example, if not familiar with the case of Rosalind Franklin the reader will not come to know about Wilkins being a colleague of Rosa in the lab of Sir John Randall—his name just suddenly appears.

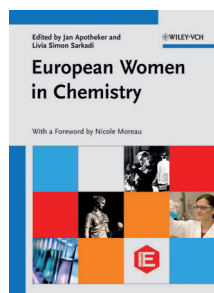
The major problem of this book is, that it is—despite the highly interesting content—sadly not really fun to read. This might be partly due to an attempted structure for the single chapters providing a short summary, then providing a description of the life situation and curriculum vitae followed by information about the scientific achievements. This causes, especially in the shorter chapters, lots of overlap and repetition. But also the partly uninspired writing and the photographs of insufficient quality contribute to this experience.

However, the compilation of these biographies is beneficial and as a seed to pique people's curiosity this book, which is very reasonably prized, can still be a valuable starting point to find more information about those and other women chemists and thus importantly, by their extraordinary fates and difficult lives they will continue to influence students.

Kirsten Zeitler

Universität Regensburg (Germany)

DOI: 10.1002/anie.201104675



European Women in Chemistry
Edited by Jan Apotheker and Livia Simon Sarkadi. Wiley-VCH, Weinheim 2010. 256 pp., hardcover, € 24.90.—ISBN 978-3527329564

[1] For a recent critical perspective on name reactions associated with women, please see: J. A. Olson, K. M. Shea, *Acc. Chem. Res.* **2011**, 44, 311–321.