

ORIGINS OF THE JOURNAL

Khimiya Geterotsiklicheskih Soedinenii

The journal CHC was initially created by the Latvian Academy of Sciences, by its Institute of Organic Synthesis (which at the time was within the system of institutes of the Academy of Sciences), and during its entire history has been published and nurtured by the Institute. The founder and first director of the Institute was the initiator for creation of the journal: Academician Solomon Aronovich Hiller.

I will attempt to reconstruct, from memory and my old notes, an outline of the events leading to creation of the journal. This was at the tail end of the "Khrushchev thaw," a very contradictory era when not a few unimplemented reforms were conceived in the USSR existing at that time, but in any case attention was focused on both some decentralization of the government and "scientific and technical progress," and the role of chemistry in the life of society and government was especially accentuated.

I remember, on one fine day in the beginning of 1964, the director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry, S. A. Hiller, called me and said that a government resolution had been passed concerning publication of new scientific journals, and it was proposed that these journals be published not only in Moscow and Leningrad but also in Ukraine, Belorussia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Latvia, in order to decentralize publication of scientific literature in the USSR and to raise the level of science. They expected a proposal from the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR concerning which journals on current divisions of science it could take on itself; a chemical journal should also be among them. And then Hiller posed the question of which type of new journal we might propose. I said that probably the journal could be specialized in the field of drug chemistry. No, that wouldn't work, he thought about it but publication of the new *Khimiko-Farmatsevticheskii Zhurnal* [Pharmaceutical Chemistry Journal] was already planned in Moscow. But the Institute of Organic Synthesis might publish the journal *Geterotsiklicheskie Soedineniya* [Heterocyclic Compounds] (incidentally, this was the initially mentioned name of the planned journal).

To be sure, at the time the Institute was only involved in the chemistry of furan, and mainly in the practical aspects at that, while research on nitrogen-containing heterocycles (a major division of the chemistry of heterocyclic compounds) was rudimentary. But then among the fields investigated by organic chemists in Riga, research on cyclic β -diketones (under the direction of Academician G. Vanags) was flourishing.

I asked, "And where would Professor Vanags' research be published?". Academician Hiller reasonably responded that diketones are a relatively narrow class of compounds for which no one would create a separate journal. Moreover, Vanags and his students had already partially turned to synthesis of polycyclic nitrogen-containing heterocycles based on 1,3-indanedione derivatives. And the new journal in fact was intended not so much for chemists in Latvia as for development of a current organic chemistry division in the Soviet Union as a whole, and the chemistry of heterocyclic compounds is just such a division, and in addition this is the chemical basis for new drugs and natural compounds, fully corresponding to the profile of the Institute of Organic Synthesis which would have to nurture the new journal. "And we will invite Professor Vanags to be a member of the editorial board. And I will invite you to join the editorial board, to help with organization of the journal." Academician Hiller concluded the conversation with a broad gesture.

It was clear that for him, the question concerning the type of journal had already been decided, and he was talking with me (as with probably other chemists) to test out his ideas and arguments (by the way, this method was typical for Solomon Aronovich; he sharpened his ideas in polemical conversations over the telephone or face to face). Thus I was pulled into the orbit of the new journal, and in the very early days of its organization, together with M. G. Voronkov (who at the time was working in Riga, at the Institute of Organic Synthesis) and K. Venters, we were S. A. Hiller's assistants in this task.

It cannot be claimed that S. A. Hiller enjoyed the full support of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR at that time, and so he often resorted to the help of leading scientists in Moscow.

Before long (this was in April 1964), Solomon Aronovich reported that a positive decision had been made concerning the question of the new journal. To be sure, he was concerned about competition from Armenian colleagues, since according to information available to him, the Vice President of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR, A. L. Mndzhoyan, was thinking of something similar. In Yerevan, A. L. Mndzhoyan was already publishing scientific collected works on synthesis of heterocyclic compounds that were quite popular at the time.

I remember that at the time in Moscow, in the organic chemistry department of M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, an informal meeting took place on the initiative of S. A. Hiller. It was organized by Professor Yu. K. Yur'ev, who at the time was assistant to the department head, A. N. Nesmeyanov. Yu. K. Yur'ev, a well-known organic chemist and student of N. D. Zelinsky, was Hiller's main patron and advisor in matters dealing with the new journal. I was also lucky enough to know Professor Yu. K. Yur'ev rather well, since earlier we had jointly studied 5-nitroselenophene derivatives he had synthesized (polarographic study of these compounds was part of my Candidacy dissertation, defended in 1960 at the academic council of the chemistry division of Moscow State University; by the way, I was the first Latvian chemist to defend a dissertation at Moscow State University). In Riga, along with studying 5-nitrofurans, Yu. K. Yur'ev was also conducting a microbiological study of nitroselenophenes.

This year, marking the 250th anniversary of Moscow State University, I am especially pleased to emphasize the role also played by the celebrated university in creation of our journal about heterocycles. Getting ahead of myself, I can say that cooperation between the three organizations: the Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis, the Chemistry Division of Moscow State University, and the N. D. Zelinsky Institute of Organic Chemistry (Academy of Sciences of the USSR), was the basis for creation and further operation of CHC. Although the journal was always published and edited in Riga, over its entire existence reviewers and scientific editors of the papers also were actively working in Moscow. In some sense, the journal from the very beginning has been a joint "scientific project" of Riga and Moscow organic chemists (here we should also note the role of Professor Ya. L. Gol'dfarb and his students from the Institute of Organic Chemistry). And at the very beginning, it was precisely the support of the Academician A. N. Nesmeyanov (Secretary of the Division of General and Technical Chemistry, Academy of Sciences of the USSR) and Professor Yu. K. Yur'ev of Moscow State University that decided the destiny of the new journal in favor of Riga rather than Yerevan.

S. A. Hiller thought it was necessary to include major prominent scientists from Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk and other centers for heterocyclic chemistry in the USSR as much as possible in the composition of the editorial board.

In one of the S. A. Hiller's working meetings at the end of April 1964, the first editorial board of the journal was appointed, which in addition to the Riga members included A. N. Nesmeyanov, Yu. K. Yur'ev, Ya. L. Gol'dfarb, N. I. Shuikin, I. Ya. Postovskii, A. L. Mndzhoyan, A. N. Kost, B. A. Porai-Koshits. Shortly thereafter, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR finally approved the editorial board of the following composition: G. Vanags, K. Venters (executive secretary), M. G. Voronkov (assistant editor), S. A. Hiller (editor-in-chief), Ya. L. Gol'dfarb, B. V. Ioffe, A. N. Kost, N. K. Kochetkov, M. Lidaks, A. L. Mndzhoyan, I. Ya. Postovskii, J. Stradins, Yu. K. Yur'ev. Thus about half (6 individuals) of the first editorial board was from Riga, the rest represented the scientific centers of Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Yerevan.

In the beginning, the most active of the editorial board members from outside Riga and S. A. Hiller's main advisor and "lobbyist", as already mentioned, was Professor Yu. K. Yur'ev, whose paper on the reaction of furan with acrylonitrile also started off the first issue of the journal. Because of his assistance, many "stumbling blocks" in the path of the new journal were overcome and, if my memory does not fail me, he also brought S. A. Hiller together with A. N. Kost, who played a prominent role in the later destiny of the journal: in 1973, he became assistant editor and the main "ideologist" of the journal. The brilliant heterocyclic chemist A. N. Kost, a man of tremendous erudition, exerted considerable effort to building up and raising the level of the journal.

Yu. K. Yur'ev himself, like the unforgettable Academician G. Vanags, was not there in that noteworthy year of 1965; they were able to participate only in the very beginning of the activity of the journal.

A. L. Mndzhoyan also agreed to join the editorial board, but was unable to participate in its meetings. He died in February 1970 on the way to the Yerevan airport, just as he was planning (for the first time!) to fly to Riga for a meeting of the editorial board of the journal. Academician I. Ya. Postovskii from Sverdlovsk showed benevolent concern for the journal. Shortly before founding of the journal, his colleague I. N. Goncharova moved to Riga for family reasons and began to work in the heterocyclic chemistry laboratory headed by S. A. Hiller. By the summer of 1965, she had replaced K. Venters in the position of executive secretary of the journal. For 32 years, she has conscientiously and vigorously performed all the daily tasks for the journal.

Other members of the editorial board actively participated in its work, in word and deed. During S. A. Hiller's lifetime, the following were added to the board: Professor A. A. Ponomarev (Saratov), Professor Z. V. Pushkareva (Sverdlovsk), Professor A. M. Simonov (Rostov-na-Donu), and A. A. Potekhin (Candidate of Chemical Sciences) (Leningrad). The meetings of the editorial board generally were held twice a year, alternately in Riga (at S. A. Hiller's) and Moscow (Academician's N. K. Kochetkov's, being the Director of the N. D. Zelinsky Institute of Organic Chemistry, Academy of Sciences of the USSR).

The first papers in the new journal were acquired mainly from manuscripts submitted to the *Zhurnal Obshchei Khimii* [Journal of General Chemistry], where at the time a huge unrealized "portfolio" had accumulated: to empty it, 38 papers were transferred to Riga, and 12 papers were available locally. This was enough for two issues. These first two issues were put together in September 1964, right after summer vacation. By the middle of October, the portfolio of the young journal already numbered 170 papers. At that time Solomon Aronovich was ill: he had been hit by a motor vehicle and he was working in his apartment, giving his instructions for the journal.

I was entrusted with making arrangements with the artists for the journal cover. My friends Aleksandrs Stankevichs and Gunars Tsilitis, one of the best graphic artists in Latvia, agreed to do this job. We collected about 20 different scientific journals from around the world and set off with this stack to the ailing Hiller in his apartment. The discussion took more than an hour. Solomon Aronovich emphasized that it was very important for the existence of the journal that it be outwardly attractive and distinctive, and at the same time it shouldn't look like advertising but should retain a strictly scientific and discreet appearance. Of all the samples, the ones most to our liking seemed to be the covers of the international journals *Tetrahedron* and *Talanta* at that time. Over a period of several weeks, the artists made 5-6 sketches, and the optimal version was selected from among these. If my memory does not fail me, it was precisely during design of the cover that the final name of the journal, *Khimiya Geterotsiklicheskih Soedinenii*, was made official, due to the suitable triad arrangement of the separate capital letters (although in any case, the artists must have worked up an alternative version *Geterotsiklicheskie Soedineniya*). This journal cover has been retained up to the present day.

Then an editorial introduction was composed for the first issue of the journal. S. A. Hiller was in charge of polishing the text: this was an agenda document about the profile, goals, and sections of the newborn journal (*Khimiya Geterotsikl. Soed.*, 1965, No. 1, pp. 3-4). The purposes outlined in the introduction were not substantially adjusted afterward; it was only on the initiative of Professor A. N. Kost' that, beginning in 1972, a section for scientific reviews was added and a section for short communications was deleted.

After the first issues of the journal were published, it became obvious that the planned size and publication schedule (6 issues per year, 10 printer's sheets each) could not ensure publication of all the materials. Manuscripts were delayed for up to two and a half years, despite the fact that a significant number of papers devoted to heterocyclic compounds, in accordance with tradition, continued to also be submitted to other USSR journals. The editorial board then had to restrict the theme of the journal, excluding almost entirely the chemistry of natural and heterocyclic organoelement compounds.

Some restrictions on acceptance of manuscripts, however, did not save the editorial portfolio from overload. The problem was partially solved in 1967, when the size of an issue increased up to 12 printer's sheets with the same publication schedule (6 issues per year), and was optimally solved in 1970 when the journal started to come out every month with a size of 9 printer's sheets per issue.

Even more important for the new journal was the fact that starting in 1965, in parallel with the Russian language edition, the journal began to be also published in its entirety ("from cover to cover") in the English language in the US by the Faraday Press publishing house (later Consultants Bureau). This allowed it to become, along with the journals *Journal of Heterocyclic Chemistry* (USA) and *Heterocycles* (Japan), an international forum for this division of chemistry.

The geographical distribution of cities in the USSR from which at that time papers were submitted to the journal was described in a paper by J. Stradins and I. N. Goncharova (*Izvestiya Akademii Nauk LatvSSR*, No. 3, 29-36 (1976)). Altogether there were more than 50 cities. Papers began to be submitted from abroad, increasingly from Eastern Slavic countries and "third world" countries.

On 20 June 1974 in Riga, there was a meeting of the editorial board of the journal, the last one under the direction of S. A. Hiller. Topics discussed at that meeting included the structure of the journal issue, reviewing, drawing in foreign scientists as authors of reviews, questions concerning the quality of the papers, improvement of the quality of identification of new substances, speeding up the transit time for papers, etc. Present at that meeting were: S. A. Hiller, Ya. L. Gol'dfarb, I. N. Goncharova, B. V. Ioffe, A. N. Kost, A. A. Potekhin, Z. V. Pushkareva, and J. Stradins. At the end of the meeting, someone suggested marking the 10th anniversary of the journal with an unofficial dinner. In fact, the organization of the journal began specifically in summer of 1964, while the first issue was sent to press on 19 February 1965. We gathered in the Riga restaurant, discussed the past and future of the journal, talked about scientific and nearly scientific matters, told jokes, without suspecting that this would be the last time this group would meet together.

S. A. Hiller fell ill after his 60th birthday, went to the hospital with stomach cancer, and passed away in his prime.

The man who had guided the journal for 10 years (1965-1975) was an excellent editor; he decided all the basic questions concerning development of the journal, also scrutinizing the purely technical details, even down to the fonts, the layout of the material, etc. Hiller knew how to find a common language with both the employees of the publishing house and with the scientists who were members of the editorial board. He did not personally decide specific questions but rather counted on his closest assistants, among which Professor A. N. Kost of Moscow State University held a special position. S. A. Hiller's organizational talent was also displayed in knowing how to attract assistants and how to rely on them.

After S. A. Hiller's death, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, on the recommendation of G. I. Chipens, who was the successor to S. A. Hiller as director of the Institute of Organic Synthesis, entrusted me with the responsibility as editor-in-chief of the journal. I fulfilled this role for 10 years (1975-1985), relying on members of the editorial board, especially A. N. Kost, Ya. L. Gol'dfarb, L. I. Belen'kii, I. N. Goncharova, and on the corps of scientific editors who were loyal to the journal. The journal was able to survive and grow, but this is the subject of another story. I also recall struggles over the "size" of the journal and the regular organization of reviews, publication of separate collections based on journal reviews, discussion of new name reactions, papers on the history of chemistry, and also some arguments with Soviet censorship (Glavlit), to be sure not so much over scientific secrets but rather about mentioning the last names of chemists who had emigrated to Israel.

In my personal archive, as evidence of that era I have stored quite interesting business and personal correspondence with Professors A. N. Kost, Ya. L. Gol'dfarb, I. Ya. Postovskii, M. G. Voronkov, O. Yu. Okhlobystin and others (e-mail and the internet, you see, did not yet exist back then).

Starting in 1985, Academician E. Lukevics has worked as the editor-in-chief of the journal: an extensively and broadly educated chemist who in addition has a special talent for editing scientific papers. The journal has maintained its importance even in the new historical situation, and has even ventured into broader international waters. The editor-in-chief can be credited with the fact that in a very complex situation, the journal has been able to hold on to its scientific level and prestige and size (the fate of the other three scientific journals created in Riga in 1965 was less fortunate).

I remember in discussions in 1964, when the journal was founded, it was said: "Special demands are made on a journal published on the periphery. It should be a model in all respects: appearance, contents, the caliber of authors that can be recruited, how it resonates within the scientific world. If this is not so, then the journal weakens and dies within 3-5 years."

The past decades have shown that the journal was successfully created just as it was conceived, and the reality has even exceeded the initial intentions.

J. Stradins