IN MEMORIAM

Today we bid farewell and pay in reverence our last respects to the great scientist, the symbol of Bulgarian molecular biology, Professor Roumen Tsanev. All of us, his students and colleagues, unwittingly held the belief that he will always be among us, that we will see him every day. We were planning happily to celebrate his 85th birthday … Today, it feels impossible to accept that we shall never meet him again along the corridors of the institute, that we shall never again attend his seminars, discuss his latest scientific ideas and papers, or enjoy his sense of humour.

Roumen Georgiev Tsanev
5.10.1922 – 23.07.2007

Few scientists are truly pioneers of an entire scientific field. Professor Tsanev was one of them: the founder of molecular biology and molecular cytology in Bulgaria. After graduating in medicine at Sofia University in 1946, his seeking spirit and great scientific curiosity led him to experimental research. As an assistant at the newly founded Institute of Applied Biology and Development of Organisms at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), he was fortunate to meet two great Bulgarian scientists - Doncho Kostov and Metody Popov. Undoubtedly, working with these scholars left a deep imprint in the young assistant who was just discovering science. After fifteen years full of creative ideas and enthusiastic work, Dr. Tsanev became an Associated Professor and head of the Department of Cytology and Cytochemistry. In 1961, the Department grew into the Central Laboratory of Biochemistry at BAS, which eventually formed the nucleus of the Institute of Molecular Biology. For more than 20 years he was director of the Institute and during this time the Institute of Molecular Biology gained worldwide recognition. Professor Tsanev contributed to the prestige of the Institute to his last breath.

Professor Tsanev’s dedication and great creative potential was the driving force for the successful development of molecular biology in Bulgaria. His broad scientific interests covered fundamental fields, such as biochemistry of nucleic acids, structure and function of chromatin, replication and transcription, mechanisms of cell proliferation and differentiation, cytokine networks, as well as mathematical modelling in biology. He believed that molecular biology will create new powerful tools to better human health. He made immense contributions to the development of recombinant human interferon-gamma, the elucidation of its functions and clinical applications. Professor Tsanev has published more than 200 original scientific papers in the most prestigious international journals, cited more than 1800 times. His vast scientific achievements have been recognised through the numerous national and international awards he received. He was a member of editorial boards of international scientific journals, foreign societies and academies including: Academia Europaea (London), Czech Academy of Sciences, Polish Histochemical Society, British Biochemical Society, International Society of Biophysics, honorary membership of French Society of Dermochemistry.

In his search for knowledge, Professor Tsanev was always ready to share his ideas with his students. As a lecturer, he taught thousands of Bulgarian biologists, medical doctors and even physicists. Some of them, inspired by Professor Tsanev’s independent spirit and enthusiasm, have become his disciples in science. The school of molecular biology established by him gained international reputation - still recognised by his name.

The academic atmosphere and creative spirit established at the Institute of Molecular Biology are entirely due to its founder. This is the spirit that prevailed at scientific seminars, at the Schools on Structure and Function of Chromatin, readily attended by leading international scientists, at organised congresses, as well as at the “five o’clock” teas where newly developed scientific ideas were being shared … He managed to transfer his inexhaustible energy for research to his colleagues.
The spirit of Professor Tsanev is best symbolised by Faust’s words:

“О, дайте ми крила да литна от земята, след слънцето поел, да бъда там до край!”

As if dedicated to the present day, Professor Tsanev wrote the following verses:

Човек и прост, човек и гений,  
човек и беден и богат,  
щом всички са веднъж родени,  
ще се простят със този свят!

Човекът създал е създаден  
със дни отрано преброени.  
Живот тъй кратък му е даден –  
защо със дни така спестени!

Човек създал е създаден  
със дни отрано преброени.  
Живот тъй кратък му е даден –  
защо със дни така спестени!

Часовник всяка клетка има –  
той времето ни отброява!  
От нас той част е неделима –  
показва колко ни остава!

Че ще умреш не е беда!  
Тук временно домът ни е!  
Но пък оставиш ли следа,  
Това е равно на безсмъртие!

And we wonder which trace is deeper, the one that Professor Tsanev has left in science, or the one deep in our souls.

Dr. Tsanev, we will greatly miss you!

We deeply bow to you!

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1 “Oh, give me wings to fly off from the ground,  
Following the sun to be there till the end”

(Free-style translation of Roumen Tsanev’s translation of Goethe’s verse)

2 Simple man or genius, poor man or rich man,  
Once born, will bid farewell to this world!  
Man was created mortal, days numbered from the start.  
A life so short, why is his time so sparingly given?  
Every cell has a clock counting each second.  
Inseparable part of us, measuring the time left!  
Dying is not a misfortune, our home is temporary here!  
But if you leave a trace,  
It equals immortality!

(Free-style translation of Roumen Tsanev’s verses)