



ALEKSANDAR DESPIĆ (1927–2005)

Aleksandar Despić was one of the most important Serbian scientists in the second half of the 20th century and probably the most important electrochemist in the Central and Eastern Europe of that time. He is the most distinguished founder of the Belgrade School of Electrochemistry. He graduated from high school in his native Belgrade in 1945 and completed his studies at the Faculty of Technology in 1951. The last two years of his studies, he worked as a demonstrator at the Department of Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry, under his professor Panta Tutundžić and as a scholarship holder at the same Department, in 1953, he was elected assistant.

A turning point in his scientific career was probably the scholarship hereceived in the autumn of 1953 from the British Council, for improvement under Professor John O'Mara Bockris at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London. However, due to a confluence of circumstances, that cooperation didn't start until four years later, and not in London but at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Since Bockris received an invitation from USA, his colleague G. J. Hills took him in his team. In London, Despić received his PhD in 1955 at the London University and thanks to a recommendation by Professor Hills, he became a senior scientific associate to professor Bockris when he was putting together his first research team at the University of Pennsylvania. That is how in autumn of 1957, Despić found himself at the centre of electrochemistry, and during his stay in the USA, he devoted most of his time to the studies of electrochemical kinetics, and especially metal deposition and dissolution reaction processes. Over time, Bockris' laboratory became one of the two most distinguished laboratories in the world, next to the laboratory of Alexander Naumovich Frumkin in Moscow, and Aleksandar Despić has also made not small contribution to that.

After returning from the USA in 1959, Despić continued his work at the Faculty of Technology where he soon became an assistant professor (1959), associate professor (1964) and full professor (1971). For a long time, he has held classes in numerous subjects for undergraduate and postgraduate students,

such as Physical Chemistry, Colloid Chemistry, Chemical Kinetics, Kinetics of Electrode Processes, *etc.* He was a mentor for 71 graduate theses, 38 magistral theses and 16 doctoral theses. With his associates Dragutin Dražić and Ozra Tatić Janić, he wrote an exceptional textbook *Basis of Electrochemistry*, which is still as current as it was almost half a century ago when it was created. He was elected corresponding member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1965, and a regular member in 1976. From 1992 he was a member of the European Academy for Surface Technologies, for a number of years, a national representative at the International Society of Electrochemistry (ISE), and from 1977 to 1979 its Vice-President; he was the President of Serbian Chemical Society from 1973 to 1977 and in 1978, he was elected its Honorary President. Scientific and research body of work of Aleksandar Despić (he published 183 scientific and 32 professional articles, he is a (co-) author of 18 studies, 27 patents and 18 textbooks and monographies), as well as his entire contribution to the scientific and professional organisations are impressive (more information about this, as well as his entire life, can be found in the book *Famous Serbian Chemists (Znameniti srpski hemičari)*). However, he is also remembered for his social and organizational engagement, first of all, in the area of science and promotion of science, as well as general social issues. We should just mention that he is one of the founders and directors of the Centre for Electrochemistry and Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies. However, his most significant contribution in this field must be the establishment of the Museum of Science and Technology in 1989, where he served as its first Director until 1999. In early 1980s, he also initiated establishment of the Foundation for Young Talents.

During the hard times of the break-up of Yugoslavia, with his social engagements, most of all through SASA, where he served as the Vice-president (1981-94) and President (1995-99) in those years, he strived to contribute to finding the most comprehensive solutions for the complex circumstances in the country.

At the end of his life, carefully and thoroughly, like in everything he did in his life, he took care of his legacy. In his testament titled *Bequest*, he distributed all of his property - his books with dedications he left to the Library of SASA and the rest to the Library of the University of Banjaluka, and partly to the schools in Republika Srpska; his written legacy he bequeathed to the Archive of SASA. With his Bequest, he also established Foundation of Zorica and Aleksandar Despić, with headquarters at the Museum of Science and Technology, to which he also bequeathed his apartment and summerhouse. The aim of the Foundation is to help procurement of objects, production of models and replicas, purchase of books, magazines, films, *etc.*, all of the things that shall contribute to the popularisation of science and technology through the Museum's activities.

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