

Preface

When the first volume of *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* was completed in 1947 the initiator of this journal, H.G.K. Westenbrink, could not have dreamed that some four decades later 1000 volumes of BBA would occupy the shelves of science libraries. Westenbrink and his cofounders (among them C.F. Cori, K. Linderstrøm-Lang and Cl. Fromageot) had marshalled a strong team of board members (see facing page) to foster the international character of BBA, which was at that time published in three languages. The revival of the basic life sciences after the Second World War gave impetus to the new-born journal in disseminating information about fresh and exciting developments in biochemistry and biophysics on a global scale. Nevertheless, the early years of the journal were not without difficulties, in particular for the publisher, Elsevier, as has been described by E.C. Slater in his book '*Biochimica et Biophysica Acta: The Story of a Biochemical Journal*'. In this comprehensive account the author also describes the growth explosion in the 1960's; it appeared that between 1947 and 1965 BBA had shown a uniformly logarithmic growth with a doubling time of 4 years, and BBA thus became one of the largest journals in its field. The growth levelled off in the seventies, perhaps fortunately, as otherwise, according to Slater's calculations,

we would now have to handle some 500 volumes per year!

During the journal's history many hundreds of scientists have served as members of the Editorial Board, many thousands have acted as reviewers and tens of thousands of our colleagues and predecessors have submitted their best work for publication in BBA. The present Volume is meant as a tribute to them all.

At a meeting of the publishers and Managing Editors in November 1987 it was decided to publish a Celebration Volume in which particularly significant articles which had appeared during the early years of the journal would be reprinted together with a short commentary from the original author(s). These essays might highlight the impact of the paper and give the author an opportunity to reflect on how the seminal ideas arose at that time, and to outline how they contributed to our present knowledge of the subject. In this way the readers might also obtain some insight into the human context of great discoveries which furthered our understanding of life processes. The selection of the articles was carried out independently by the individual Managing Editors and the criteria used to choose papers included factors such as novelty, impact or the initiation of a new research area. Other articles were chosen



(Left to right) Hendrik G.K. Westenbrink, Carl F. Cori, Kaj Linderstrøm-Lang and Claude Fromageot (photograph courtesy of Professor Pierre Jollès, University of Paris V, Paris France)

because they presented new experimental approaches or new theories. We also included some papers which were illuminating despite the fact that later work showed their conclusions to be questionable. The final selection was based upon the degree of overlap between the separate proposals of the Managing Editors. It appeared impossible to produce a normal-sized volume that would do justice to all scientists who published their most important work in BBA. We therefore apologize to all the authors of the seminal papers which could not be accommodated within the framework of the one special volume generously provided by the publisher. At the same time we thank the authors who reacted enthusiastically to the invitation to write an essay.

The selection exercise clearly confirmed the importance of "Preliminary Notes" and also revealed that BBA was a leading journal during the explosion of nucleic acid research. This is reflected in the present volume by articles which include essential chemical and physical studies on the structure, replication and biosynthesis of nucleic acids. These, together with fundamental papers on the mechanism of protein biosynthesis and enzyme induction, illustrate that many important aspects of the evolving molecular biology were covered by the journal. The reader of the early volumes of BBA will encounter an abundance of basic articles on protein structure and on the mechanism of enzyme action. In the period 1950–1960 many important discoveries were also made on intermediary metabolism, compartmentalization, enzyme regulation, metabolic control and hormone action. In early BBA one can find many 'first examples' which initiated an entirely new area of research. Conspicuous research achievements in bioenergetics are well represented and include papers on photosynthesis, oxidative phosphorylation and on various intricacies of mitochondrial processes. Preceding the boom in research on biological membranes, the

journal had already published a number of pioneering studies on membrane permeability and transport. In retrospect, it appears that papers published in the 1950's on phospholipid structure and turnover were fundamental for recent exciting developments on transmembrane signalling. In the years that followed, many of the pages of BBA were devoted to articles dealing with the large area of membrane research.

The publisher and Managing Editors of BBA counteracted some of the difficulties of the enormous growth of the scientific literature for the reader by introducing at a relatively early stage various sections devoted to areas of topical interest. The sectionalization of BBA started in 1962 with, for example, Nucleic Acids (now: Gene Structure and Expression), Enzymology (now: Protein Structure and Molecular Enzymology) and Lipids. A Biophysical section was divided in 1967 into the well-known sections, Bioenergetics and Biomembranes. This philosophy was followed up by introducing in 1982 the section Molecular Cell Research, which included the important area of hormone and neurotransmitter action. At present, BBA is published in seven primary sections with two separate review series (Cancer; Biomembranes), which together offer a comprehensive coverage of current biochemistry and molecular biophysics.

During its early development, BBA was managed by Westenbrink and later by Slater from their laboratories in The Netherlands assisted only by a part-time secretary. Now, BBA has four Receiving Centres located in the U.K., U.S.A. and The Netherlands. The six Managing Editors, along with a staff of five biochemists and many secretaries, act together with over a hundred members of the Editorial Board and are supported in their work by about 8000 reviewers worldwide. A fair and rapid system of peer review (average of 2.6 assessment per manuscript) is greatly aided by the use of a central computerized data-base and on-line connections between the receiving centres, thereby ensuring rapid publication. In accordance with the intentions of the founders, BBA is a truly international journal, receiving manuscripts from some 50 countries and being distributed throughout the world. Biochemistry and Biophysics are vast and productive disciplines which continue in their steady progress to take new and exciting directions of research.

As in the past, the journal will continue to share in the publication of outstanding research achievement and when, in some 20 years, the bimillennial Volume is in preparation, it will be clear that, again, many seminal papers will have been published in the early 1990's in BBA.



Laurens L.M. van Deenen

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on behalf of the Board of
Managing Editors of BBA