THE 3rd TANNIN CONFERENCE—RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

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It is rather trivial to conclude that a symposium entitled "The 3rd Tannin Conference" might have been nothing else than the continuation of two earlier events that dealt with more or less the same topics. The first of these, the "North American Tannin Conference", was held in Port Angeles, Washington, in 1988 with the objective, as stated in the foreword to the book developed from the contributions to this meeting,[1] "to bring together people with a common interest in condensed tannins and to promote interdisciplinary interactions that will lead to a better understanding of these important substances". This event apparently filled a gap in communication of scientists in this field, stimulating a "2nd North American Tannin Conference" that took place in Houghton, Michigan, in 1991. After a significant pause, the "3rd Tannin Conference" was held in Bend, Oregon, in 1998 and it provided the basis for this book.

At first glance, a strong continuity appears to be characteristic of these meetings according to their common title "Tannin Conference". However, by analogy to the permanent phylogeny of living biological systems, also these symposia were subject to significant evolution. It is apparent that the previous term "North

Plant Polyphenols 2: Chemistry, Biology, Pharmacology, Ecology, Edited by Gross et al. Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, New York, 1999

American" has been deleted from the title of the third meeting after recognizing the growing international significance and acceptance of this series. Less apparent, but more significant, are pronounced changes with respect to the number of symposium attendants and particularly to the emphasized topics, as documented by the size and contents of the books developed from these meetings.

Sixty-nine participants were recorded for the initial Tannin Conference, and their contributions were published in a book comprising 34 chapters on 553 pages under the title *"Chemistry and Significance of Condensed Tannins"*.[1] Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of these papers dealt with structure determinations, chemical reactivities and technical applications of a class of flavonoid derivatives that is preferentially called proanthocyanidins at present. The 2nd Tannin Conference could already welcome more than 100 attendants. The proceedings of this meeting, published as *"Plant Polyphenols. Synthesis, Properties, Significance"*,[2] not only grew considerably in size to as much as 64 chapters on 1,053 pages, but also now covered the previously widely neglected classes of hydrolyzable tannins and other polyphenolic compounds. Notably, over-proportional increase of the (bio)synthesis section from three to seven chapters and particularly of the section "Biological Significance" from seven to as much as 19 contributions has to be recognized.

Right from the beginning, it was planned that this most recent book of the series, developed from the "3rd Tannin Conference" and entitled *"Plant Polyphenols 2. Chemistry, Biology, Pharmacology and Ecology"*,[3] should not exceed the size of the preceding volume. As a consequence of the increasing popularity of the Tannin Conferences, documented by more than 150 participants from all continents attending the third meeting of this series, it became inevitable to separate submitted contributions into about 50 oral lectures of presumed general significance, thought to provide the basis of this book, and into about 60 posters relevant to more specialized questions. There were many harsh decisions to be made in this selection process, and the editors apologize to the authors for real or imaginary injustices. It should be mentioned in this connection that extended two-page abstracts of all contributions to the "Third Tannin Conference", i.e., both oral and poster presentations, have been published in a separate booklet[4] (229 pages) that is available through the conference editors for all those wishing to receive additional information about subjects and authors beyond the topics described in this book.

Inspection of the Table of Contents of this 3rd Tannin Conference proceedings book, *"Plant Polyphenols 2. Chemistry, Biology, Pharmacology and Ecology"*, reveals that its main emphasis has again changed as compared to the preceding volume. The chapters dealing with biosynthesis, chemical and biomimetic syntheses, biotechnological applications, and molecular biology of tannins have considerably gained in extent. Particularly noteworthy are the newly introduced sections related to the potential medical implications of plant polyphenols, as exerted by their manifest antioxidant, antimicrobial, and anti-tumor activities, which clearly demonstrate the scientific trends that have emerged over the past years and which certainly will dominate this field in years to come. It will be interesting to learn what topics emerge in an eventual 4th Tannin Conference. Not

much fantasy is required to predict that tannins, or plant polyphenols in general, will gain considerable impact on many facets of human life and welfare, and these developments will certainly be reflected by the topics of a future meeting of this style.

In contrast to all these apparent changes, we appreciate the existence of a true fix-point in this endeavour, namely the constant support of Plenum Press (now Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers) over the past decade, which has made it possible to publish the proceedings of the three Tannin Conferences, making the results and ideas discussed at these meetings available for the international tannin family. It is hoped that this fruitful relationship will persist also in the future, allowing more projects like this to become reality.

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