

Editorial

Do you know Alfred Werner? I frequently ask students this question when travelling to seminars or conferences at other Universities. Generally, the answer tends to be “no” rather than “I have heard about him” – and even some colleagues are not fully aware of his seminal achievements and his ongoing influence on today’s research. This does not come as a stunner, although ‘Werner-type complexes’ are present in most contemporary, inorganic and general chemistry text books. However, the ingenious and innovative spirits of original researchers behind concepts of general relevance are frequently less popular than illustrative follow-up works bringing these concepts to a full bloom. Nobody will seriously challenge the statement that many accomplishments in inorganic chemistry and in neighboring fields are ultimately based on Werner’s ideas and work, along with the contributions of his coworkers.

To fully honor Werner in that respect and to highlight his personality and achievements in the community, the Centenary of his Nobel Prize was celebrated around the world. Given that Werner spent most of his scientific career at the University of Zurich, we celebrated the Centenary of his Nobel Prize last year with a number of events for schools, the public and the scientific community. In cooperation with Gymnasium (high school) teachers, a ‘Werner Lab’ course was developed which will remain an integral part of the ‘Science Lab’ at UZH in the coming years. Werner’s experiments are very well suited for educational purposes, because reliving his experimental conclusions is a challenging and inspirational adventure that is not too risky or difficult for today’s school labs.

A true highlight of our celebrations was the international symposium with expert speakers from all over the world. An excellent indicator for Werner’s reputation is thereby probably the fact that all invited guests almost immediately agreed to contribute, and that no one declined! Topics covering the history of inorganic chemistry in chronological order from Werner’s times to today’s top notch research honored Werner’s seminal work and its impact on chemistry in various ways. Resulting from these presentations, this themed issue collects articles that, as the symposium itself, focuses on historical and scientific aspects related to the person and the achievements of Werner. At this point, I hope for the reader to experience some moments of scientific surprise when diving into the articles. Finally, I also express my gratitude to all colleagues and coworkers who made the Werner Centenary a great success and pleasure.

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