



PROFESSOR DOCTOR JERZY MELKE (1941-2013)

On March 4, 2013, Professor Jerzy Melke, experienced and particularly thorough scholar of soil chemistry, revered pedagogue and a generous man has passed away in Lublin, Poland. He was the organizer of the laboratory of soil chemistry in the Faculty of Soil Science of the Institute of Earth Sciences in the Department of Biology and Earth Sciences of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (since 2011 - Department of Soil Science and Soil Protection of the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Spatial Management of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin). He was a participant and co-organizer of many scientific expeditions to Spitsbergen (Svalbard).

Professor Jerzy Melke was born on December 4, 1941 in Vilnius. After coming to Poland with his family, he lived, among others, in Bydgoszcz, Białystok, Ełk, Olsztyn and Hrubieszów, where he attended the Stanisław Staszic High School. He studied Pharmacy at the Medical Academy in Lublin and earned his title of Master of Pharmacy in 1964.

Directly after finishing his studies, Prof. Jerzy Melke began his work at the Faculty of Soil Science at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin. Here, he passed through all of the levels of an academic career, from a scientific and technical assistant to a professor of Earth sciences. He was awarded a position of senior lecturer after defending his doctoral dissertation in the Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences of the UMCS in 1976. The title of his dissertation was “The Impact of Soil Properties on the Alkaloids of Selected Medicinal Plants”. He achieved the degree of habilitated doctor in biology with

the specialization in biology-soil science in 1997 based on the habilitation dissertation entitled “Selected Properties of the Chemical Composition of Brown Soils of Various Geographic Regions.” In 2003, he advanced to the position of associate professor of the UMCS in Lublin, followed by receiving the title of full professor of earth sciences in 2008.

Professor Jerzy Melke’s research interests were focused on the soil environment of Eastern Poland and Spitsbergen. It is, however, noteworthy that natural environment of the Arctic was of special interest to Professor Melke. Beyond the soil-related research, he also meticulously photographed the nature of Spitsbergen, so different from that of Poland, and yet so beautiful. In the years 1987-2009, he participated in 9 polar expeditions to Spitsbergen, including 2 expeditions of which he was the director. Specific scholarly interests of Professor Melke were related to the genesis and chemical properties of brown soils occurring in various bio-climatic zones (from the Hungarian Lowland, through Poland and Sweden, to Western Spitsbergen), as well as the dynamics of the chemical, physical-chemical and biological properties of the arctic tundra. He also studied the macro- and micro-elements in soils and plants, as well as the impact of soil properties on active substances in medicinal plants. His scholarly activity is complemented by manuscripts related to the hygiene and contamination of soil with heavy metals. He has generated over 90 publications, almost 50 of which are original scientific works. Some of his most valuable contributions are arguably the already mentioned monograph related to the brown soils (habilitation dissertation) - crucial in recognizing some of the chemical properties of soils depending on the different bio-climatic conditions, as well as the co-authored monograph entitled “Soils of the North-Western Part of the Wedel Jarlsberg Land on the Background of the Natural Environment of Spitsbergen”, which is the first (relatively comprehensive) work on the soils of the Spitsbergen peryglacial zone in the region of the southern bank of Bellsund.

Professor Melke perfected his scientific skills through numerous specialized courses and research scholarships, including a stay at the Faculty of Soil Science of the Agricultural University in Prague (Czech Republic).

Professor Jerzy Melke was a valued and well-liked academic teacher. His lectures always generated great interest. He was a co-author of a soil science textbook “Studying Soils in the Laboratory and in the Field”. Professor Jerzy Melke was the promoter of 2 doctoral dissertations. Under his supervision, 46 students (mainly those majoring in environmental protection and geography) completed their Masters’ theses. He actively participated in the scientific activities of Poland. He was a member of the Polish Society of Soil Science (he presided over the Committee “Soil and Human Health”), International Union of Soil Science Societies (IUSS) and the Polar Club of the Polish Geographic Society. He was also an avid stamp-collector and a “bicycle tourist”. For his accomplishments in

scholarship and didactics, he was given the UMCS Rector's Award. He was also awarded the Golden Cross of Merit and the Gold Medal of Service.

Professor Jerzy Melke was a collegial and generous man, although he always expected the best performance (mainly with regard to himself). He was very responsible and always kept his word. He was very easy to work with in the field, especially in the difficult conditions in Spitsbergen. We have very fond memories of our field research studies, in which, next to our Colleague Jerzy, we also had the privilege to be accompanied by Professor Stanislaw Uziak - a man of great moral and scholarly authority. Each day, after completing our field work, we spent hours (usually late into the night) discussing a variety of topics not only of scientific nature.

To us, his colleagues at the Faculty of Soil Science and Soil Protection of the UMCS in Lublin, Professor Jerzy Melke was a man of great heart and mind and a sincere Friend - honest and direct, generous, but also critical and meritorious in scientific discourses. So will he be thought of and remembered.

Jacek Chodorowski
Ryszard Dębicki
Zbigniew Klimowicz