

Bronisław Ceranka *

PROFESSOR WIKTOR OKTABA 1920–2009

Professor Wiktor Oktaba was born on the 16th of April, 1920 in Kiev. In 1925 his parents moved to Legionowo near Warszawa, where he attended a 7-class elementary school. In 1938 he graduated from the Leopold Lis-Kula Male Grammar School in Warszawa, specialising in teaching the humanities. In the same year he started mathematical studies at the Józef Piłsudski University of Warszawa, attending lectures by such outstanding mathematicians as Waław Sierpiński, Karol Borsuk, Kazimierz Kuratowski and Edward Marczewski.

His studies were interrupted by the Second World War. Wiktor Oktaba spent the first years of the German occupation in Warszawa and Legionowo, working as a labourer and tutor. From 1941 he was employed at the Water Authority in Puławy, later he worked at the quarries in Nasiłowo and Kazimierz Dolny.

In the academic year of 1944/45 he started studies at the Mathematical, Physical and Chemical Section of the Faculty of Life Sciences at the newly established Maria Skłodowska-Curie University (UMCS) in Lublin. As early as in 1945, as a second-year student, Wiktor Oktaba initiated his scientific and organisational activity, when he was employed as a junior assistant lecturer at the Department of Mathematics headed by Prof. Mieczysław Biernacki. On the 3rd of December, 1947 he received a degree of Master of Philosophy in the field of mathematics. After receiving his degree he continued his work as a senior assistant lecturer at the Department of Mathematical Statistics, UMCS, working under the supervision of Professor Mikołaj Olekiewicz. At that time he gave lectures and taught classes in mathematical statistics, mathematics, theory of probability and theory of experimentation not only to students of mathematics, but also other fields of life sciences, as well as those of the Faculty of Economics, the Lublin Catholic University.

He spent September, 1948 at the Nencki Experimental Institute in Łódź thanks to a scholarship granted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

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Starting from the 1st October, 1952 he was employed at the position of a lecturer and was appointed the head of the Department of Mathematical Statistics, the Faculty of Agriculture, UMCS, which he had been organising from the very beginning of its existence. In August 1955 the Higher School of Agriculture in Lublin (Wyższa Szkoła Rolnicza – WSR) was created from the Faculties of Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine and Animal Husbandry, UMCS, and there Professor Oktaba, as an employee of the Faculty of Agriculture, started his work at the new university, heading the Department of Mathematical Statistics. This Department was renamed in 1979 into the Institute of Mathematical Applications, the University of Agriculture in Lublin. Professor Oktaba headed this Institute until he retired in 1990.

In 1957 Wiktor Oktaba received his degree of a candidate researcher (a post-graduate degree) at the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, UMCS, after he defended his dissertation “On the linear hypothesis in the theory of normal regression”, written under the supervision of Professor Mikołaj Olkiewicz, and on the 26th March, 1959 the Central Qualification Commission granted him the position of a Reader.

In 1966 Wiktor Oktaba received the title of an associate professor in mathematical sciences and in 1971 he was granted the title of a full professor.

Scientific interest of Professor Oktaba from the very beginnings of his career focused on mathematical statistics. He developed his interest and determined the scope of his research in the academic year of 1959/60 during his stay as a researcher at the Iowa State University, Ames (USA) as a Rockefeller Foundation stipend holder. There Professor Oktaba met the creators of linear models and experimental designs, such as Oscar Kempthorne, Babubhai Shah, Tom Bancroft, George Zyskind, Jon Rao and David Hartley. These professors shaped the scope of research for Wiktor Oktaba, in which we may distinguish the following directions: estimation and testing of hypotheses in regression, analysis of data with missing observations, estimation of variance components, analysis of the Gauss-Markoff model, analysis of non-orthogonal models, multivariate Zyskind-Martin models, one-way and multivariate analyses of variances, estimation and verification of hypotheses for univariate models of asymptotical constants, theory of experimental designs and matrix algebra.

Results of studies, both theoretical and practical in character, were published in 215 scientific papers in leading Polish and foreign journals. Moreover, Professor Oktaba was an author of 11 books, including 5 widely known, repeatedly published textbooks in mathematics, mathematical statistics and experimentation theory. He was an author and co-author of 8 multilingual dictionaries in mathematical statistics, theory of probability, theory of experimentation and biometry. Moreover, he was an author of 7 popular science books. He presented results of his investigations at numerous national and international conferences.

In the years 1952–1990 Professor Wiktor Oktaba was the head of the Department of Mathematical Statistics and the Institute of Mathematical Applications, in the years 1960–1962 he was Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and in the years 1962–1966 Dean of this faculty. In the period 1968–1969 he was Vice-Rector of the Higher School of Agriculture. In the years 1970–1976 he was a member of the Informatics Commission at the Minister of Education and Higher Education.

Professor Oktaba was a co-organiser of the Polish Biometric Society and from 1976 he was the chairman of the Scientific Council of this Society. He served this function until his death in 2009.

On the initiative of Professor Oktaba, in cooperation with Professors Tadeusz Caliński, Wiktor Klonecki and Eugeniusz Bilski, the first conference in biometry was organised in 1970. This conference has been repeatedly held, without interruptions, until the present, currently organized under the name of Colloquium in Biometry. Presented papers were initially printed as conference proceedings, and later an independent journal under the name of Colloquium Biometricum was established as annuals of PTB. In the years 1970–2009 Professor Oktaba was the Editor in Chief of this journal.

Professor Oktaba was appointed a member of the Mathematical Statistics Commission, the Mathematics Commission PAS at the time it was established on the 19th September, 1972. He was a member of numerous scientific societies, e.g. the International Statistical Institute, the Biometric Society, as well as scientific councils of COBORU at Słupia Wielka, IUNG Puławy, the Institute of Organisation and Management Higher School of Engineering in Lublin.

It needs to be stressed that Professor was an organiser of weekly seminars in mathematical statistics at the Department he headed (later the Institute). Professor Oktaba was the scientific supervisor for 37 Master's theses in mathematical statistics prepared by UMCS students. He was also the scientific supervisor for 17 doctoral dissertations. He educated numerous reputable statisticians and biometricians. He was a co-founder of the Polish school of mathematical statistics and experimentation theory. He was a reviewer of doctoral dissertations, post-doctoral degree conferral procedures and applications for professor titles.

For his scientific and research achievements, teaching and organisational activity he was awarded numerous decorations and medals, e.g. the Commander's, Officer's and Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and the Medal of the National Education Commission.

While retired Professor Oktaba was continuously involved in the activities of his Department. For many years he participated in seminars. In the last years of his life he participated in seminars celebrating special holidays as well as his birthdays and name days.

Professor Wiktor Oktaba always highly valued symbolism. His death was also symbolic. Professor departed from this world on the 6th September, 2009, on a Sunday. On that day the 39th Biometric Conference was opened, of which he was the creator and which from 1970 was his “beloved child”. This conference was organised by the Department of Mathematical Applications, the Lublin University of Life Sciences, and was held for the first time in Kazimierz Dolny, a town Professor Oktaba loved particularly and with which he was attached to from the times of WWII.

The funeral mass at the parish church in Kazimierz Dolny and his funeral were held on the 9th of September, when the conference was closing. The participants of the conference accompanied Professor Oktaba in the funeral rites and paid homage and thanked for his life devoted completely to mathematics, mathematical statistics and biometry. Professor Wiktor Oktaba was buried at the cemetery in Kazimierz Dolny on the Wisła River – next to his wife Janeczka, with whom he spent 60 years of their married life.

REFERENCES

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