

Joseph S. Fruton (1912– 1993)



Joseph S. Fruton is Eugene Higgins Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry and Professor Emeritus of the History of Medicine at Yale University. He was born in Czestochowa, Poland on May 14, 1912. He came to the United States in 1923 and was naturalized in 1929. He received his B.A. with honors in 1931 and his Ph.D. in 1934 in biological chemistry at Columbia University. He worked in the laboratory of Max Bergmann at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research until 1945. In 1945 he went to Yale University as associate professor of Physiological Chemistry (1945–1950) and professor of Biochemistry (1950–1957). Fruton served as chair of the Department of Biochemistry (1951–1967), and as director of the Division of Science (1959–1962). He was Eugene Higgins Professor of Biochemistry during 1957–1982 and professor of History of Medicine during 1980–1982. Fruton was visiting professor at Rockefeller University during 1968–1969. In 1976 he was awarded a D.Sc. degree from Rockefeller University.

The biochemical problems studied by Fruton and his research students and associates are numerous, as demonstrated by hundreds of papers and theses. His principal interests emphasize the use of synthetic peptides to determine the specificity and mechanisms of the catalytic action of protein-cleaving enzymes such as pepsin. Fruton also has strong interests in the history of chemistry and biochemistry and the history of medicine.

Apart from an extensive list of journal publications (more than 330 scientific papers, reviews, and monographs) on the research in his laboratory and his studies on the history of science, Fruton is the author of the following books: *General Biochemistry* (with Sofia Simmonds, 1953, 1958); *Molecules and Life* (1972); *A Bio-bibliography for the History of the Biochemical Sciences Since 1800* (1982, 1985, 1994); *Contrasts in Scientific Style* (1990); *A Skeptical Biochemist* (1992); *Eighty Years* (1994); *Proteins, Enzymes, Genes: The Interplay of Chemistry and Biology* (1999); *Methods and Styles in the Development of Chemistry* (2002). He has served on the editorial boards for *Journal of Biological Chemistry* (1948–1958), *Biochemical Preparations* (1951–1955), *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* (1962–1972), and *Biochemistry* (1962–1972). He is currently on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the History of Biology* and the *Journal of the History of Medicine*.

Fruton was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences in 1952 and the American Philosophical Society in 1967. He has been a Special Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation (1948), Benjamin Franklin Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (1962), Commonwealth Foundation Fellow (1962–1963), and John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellow (1983–1984). Fruton has also been honored as a Harvey Lecturer (1955), Dakin Lecturer (1962), Sarton Lecturer (1976), and Xerox Lecturer (1977). Among the honors he has received for his work in chemistry, biochemistry and the histories of chemistry, biochemistry and medicine have been the Eli Lilly Award in Biochemistry of the American Chemical Society (1944), the Pfizer Award of the History of Science Society (1973), the John Frederick Lewis Award of the American Philosophical Society (1990), and the Dexter Award in 1993.

Joseph S. Fruton is enjoying a long, active and distinguished scientific life. He is a consummate student of science, a teacher, an advisor, and a beloved colleague to his students and many friends. In 2005 he and his wife endowed the "Joseph S. and Sofia S. Fruton Teaching and Research Fund" for the History of Science at Yale University.

Joseph Fruton died on July 29, 2007.

Sources

Autobiographical information provided by Joseph S. Fruton.

Joseph S. Fruton, *Eighty Years* (New Haven: Epikouros Press, 1994).

Anon., "Yale professors endow teaching and research fund in the history of science," *Yale Bulletin and Calendar* 33 (May 20, 2005), <http://www.yale.edu/opa/v33.n29/story12.html>

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