

Scientific Contributions of Dr. Alfonso Romo de Vivar

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I consider it a great honor to be asked to present the "Scientific Laudatio" of Dr. Alfonso Romo de Vivar and it is a pleasant duty to write a summary of Dr. Romo de Vivar's accomplishments in natural products chemistry. It speaks for itself, that his scientific contributions span over a time period of nearly one half century. Alfonso can with pride look back on a highly productive scientific career with impressive accomplishments and significant contributions to organic chemistry, in general, and natural products chemistry, in particular.

Alfonso was born in Mexico on April 30, 1928 in San Francisco de los Romo, Aguascalientes. He received the B.Sc. degree in Chemistry at the School of Chemistry, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico City. He subsequently entered the Postgraduate Program in Organic Chemistry and completed his Ph.D. in 1959. His dissertation research was directed toward the isolation and chemistry of sesquiterpene lactones from *Helenium mexicanum*.

Alfonso spent his whole research career at the Institute of Chemistry at UNAM, which began in 1958, and in 1992 he received the status of Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Chemistry at UNAM. Since 1994 he is also a National Emeritus Research Scientist of the National System of Scientific Research. His early research interests were shared with his mentor, the late Professor Jesús Romo Armería, the "father" of the Institute of Chemistry. Their main focus was on the chemistry of plant steroids as well as sesquiterpene lactones from *Helenium mexicanum*.

It is most impressive that between 1956 and 1961 eight publications appeared with these two individuals as sole authors. The papers were published in highly prestigious international journals including three publications in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* and two in the *Journal of Organic Chemistry* [1-6].

His increasing interest in sesquiterpene lactones led to a one-year sabbatical leave (1962-1963) in the laboratory of Professor Werner Herz at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, USA. This highly productive collaboration led to a series of pioneering studies on the structure and chemistry of pseudoguaianolides from the genera *Helenium* and related taxa. Six papers [7-12] resulted from this collaboration and appeared in the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* [7], the *Journal of Organic Chemistry* [10, 11] and *Tetrahedron* [8, 9, 12], which again speaks for the high productivity and caliber of these publications.

Dr. Romo de Vivar's teaching career in the School of Chemistry at UNAM began in 1957. He was the mentor of about 40 undergraduate students and eleven students received the Ph.D. degree under his direction. Many of his publications on multiple structural types of natural products, ranging from sesquiterpene lactones to diterpenes, to triterpenes, were co-authored with his dedicated students. Many of them have subsequently developed their own highly successful, internationally recognized research programs at UNAM and other prestigious academic institutions. Other collaborators include his colleagues at the Institute of Chemistry and natural product chemists from academic institutions in Mexico and other countries.

His high productivity in research publications continued for over three decades [13-16], with a total of about 150 peer-reviewed papers and reviews being published. He continues to do research and publish in top international journals on various aspects of natural products chemistry. Since the beginning of the year 2000 alone, nearly ten papers have appeared or are in press. This seems to be a good example of a chemist, who "never stops to react".

Alfonso was the recipient of a number of significant academic awards for his scientific work. In 1968, he received the Science Award of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and in 1977 was awarded the National Chemistry Award "Andrés Manuel del Río" by the Mexican Chemical Society. In 1987 he was the recipient of the National University Science Award, and in 1990, the IOCD-Syntex Award by the American Chemical Society.

I wish to conclude with a personal note. My first correspondence with Dr. Romo de Vivar goes back to October 1976. At that time Alfonso informed me in a short letter, that Dr. Ronald Hartman had visited and stored our plant collection at a safe place in the Institute. In a handwritten footnote, he pointed out that a young scientist in the Institute, Dr. Leovigildo Quijano, would send his application for an advertised post-doctoral position. Leo joined my research group shortly thereafter. This was the beginning of a life-long scientific collaboration and close friendship with Leo, that my wife Helga and I cherish very much. My association and interaction with many members of the faculty in the Institute of Chemistry and the School of Chemistry continues to this date.

Thank you, Alfonso. You started it all!

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