Jakub Karol Parnas was born in 1884 in Mokrzany, a small village in Galicia, which at that time belonged to Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As a result of the WWI, Galicia became part of Poland. Following the Soviet-German agreement this land was turned over to the Soviets. From 1941 to 1944 the land was occupied by Germans and by now it is a part of Ukraine. Parnas studied chemistry at the universities of Berlin, Strasbourg, Zurich and Munich where in 1907, he received the Ph.D. He was associate professor at Strasburg University in 1913 and professor of physiological chemistry at Lwów University (1920–1941).

Lwów (in Polish) or Lviv (in Ukrainian) or Lemberg (in Yiddish) was a very special place. It was the Polish city built on Ukrainian land. In thirties of the last century, the Lwów population comprised of 52% Poles, 30% Jews, 17% Ukrainians and small percentage of other minorities, like Germans, Czechs, Armenians. At that time Lwów was not a peaceful city. Ukrainian Nationalist struggled for free Ukraine and claimed that Lwów should be the Ukrainian city. Jews fought against the increasing wave of the anti-Semitism. Poles tried to maintain the status quo. Agents of German Nazi and Soviet Communist were also present trying to destabilize the situation in the city.

The Parnas’ laboratory was an unique place where in a friendly atmosphere, young Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish scientists studied glucose metabolism in Vertebrate skeletal muscle cells. In order to follow the fate of the phosphate residue in glucose metabolism, it was necessary to employ the radioactive phosphor 32P which had been successfully used in Parnas laboratory. The quintessential discovery of Parnas and his collaborators was: the breakdown of glucose results in ATP production.

Two enzymes of glycolysis have been discovered by Parnas and his collaborators. Ostern, Guthke and Tershakowec discovered phosphofructokinase and Parnas himself discovered pyruvate kinase. The results of their work were highly appreciated and for many years glycolysis was also termed as Embden-Meyerhof-Parnas pathway.
Professor Jakub Oskar Parnas was born in Western Ukraine, and he worked for a long time (1920–1941) at the University of its big regional center Lviv (Lvov, Lwow, Lemberg, Leopolis). Parnas is considered to be a father of Polish biochemistry, and he is also one of the founders of biochemistry in Ukraine. It should be stressed that being an outstanding scientist in the field of enzymology of carbohydrate metabolism (Embden-Meyerhof-Parnas pathway) and energy generation, Prof. Parnas belongs to the whole world scientific community. Before the Second World War, Lviv was a very multinational city, and it was reasonable that in Parnas’s research lab scientists of the dominating there Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian communities worked. Prof. Parnas was killed by Stalin’s regime in 1949, and for a long time there were no official celebrations in his honor. Only in 1995, there was a meeting of the President of Polish Biochemical Society Prof. Liliana Konarska, its Vice-President Prof. Jolanta Baranska, known Polish biochemist Prof. Lech Wojtczak, from the Polish side, and Prof. Rostyslav Stoika, the Director of Lviv Division of the Institute of Biochemistry, Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, from the Ukrainian side. At that meeting, a decision was taken to put a commemorative plaque devoted to Prof. Parnas on the building of the Department of Biochemistry which he headed at Lviv University. It was proposed by Prof. Stoika that such action should be done at the bilateral Ukrainian-Polish scientific conference dedicated to Parnas’s memory, and this idea was successfully realized in September 9–11, 1996. At that conference, there was only one scientist from outside Ukraine and Poland — Prof. Simon Shnol who is Prof. Parnas’s scientific “grandson”. Another good idea came to my mind at the closing ceremony of the 1st Parnas conference, when I proposed that Parnas conferences should be organized regularly, once in two years in Ukraine and Poland. That idea was very welcomed, and it successfully works till now. Together with Prof. Stefan Angielsky, in 1998, we have co-organized the 2nd Parnas conference in Gdansk (Poland). It was very successful for two reasons: 1) it coincided with the days of Ukraine in Poland, and 2) around 30 leading biologists from the Western countries (including the USA) participated in that conference. Since that time, Parnas conferences really got to be international ones, and they gained great scientific respect. The 3rd Parnas conference was co-organized by Prof. Rostyslav Stoika (Ukraine) and Prof. Jolanta Baranska, President of Polish Biochemical Society. The international scientific traditions were successfully continued at that Parnas conference. Starting from the 4th Parnas conference, the President of the Ukrainian Biochemical Society, Prof. Serhiy Komisarenko took the leadership as a Ukrainian co-organizer of Parnas conferences, and the best traditions of these conferences were not only preserved but also greatly developed (ex. moving to trilateral organization of Parnas conferences). I would like to acknowledge all people who were with us at the start of Parnas conferences which have really provided an excellent opportunity for initiating collaboration between the biochemists of different countries, and also for gaining new friends.