Cor Winkler Prins, the silent force

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Introduction

Silent respect. It is the way the Cornelius Winkler Prins treated the world, and often the way that the world treated him. It is the silent man that is easily overseen, but, in our opinion, it is the modest scientist that should never be forgotten.

Son of a famous family

Cor was born in Haarlem on 18th April, 1939, as the latest member of a family whose name was known in every household in The Netherlands. In those days, and actually long after that, the *Winkler Prins Encyclopaedia* was an important source of information, found on many a bookshelf in Dutch homes. The *Encyclopaedia* was founded by Cor's great grandfather, Anthony Winkler Prins (1817-1908) (Fig. 1), and ran through nine editions, the latest one, which appeared in 26 volumes between 1990-1993, known as 'The Great Winkler Prins'. In a day and age that internet has mostly taken over the role of source of knowledge from encyclopaedias, it is nice to note that its popular successor, Wikipedia,

Fig. 1. The memorial monument in honour of Anthony Winkler Prins, Cor's great grandfather.

refers to the Great Winkler Prince as one of the most comprehensive works of its kind published so far in any country. Anyway, this opus magnum earned Cor the fond nickname "The Small WP", a reference to the concise edition of the *Encyclopaedia*.

As already noted, Cor is known for his quiet demeanour, which appeared at an early age. He managed to get punished on the first day at school and was sent out into the hallway. The ease with which he undertook his punishment drove his teacher mad. Little did she know that at home Cor was regularly told to go play in the hallway because mamma had visitors. It never occurred to him that going to the hallway actually meant he had done something wrong.

Cor grew up in Bilthoven, near the Utrechtse Heuvelrug, an ice-pushed ridge from the late Middle Pleistocene and probably the most recognizable geological phenomenon in the west of Holland. His passing interest in erratics and other stones was greatly expanded by the geography teacher in the first grade of the Kennemer Lyceum. This teacher was very much interested in geology and was elated when his class won a price with the annual selling children stamps. The prize consisted of a two week excursion in Switzerland, a geological paradise. When the rector of the school considered a one week trip to the south of Limburg sufficient reward, the teacher made the most of it and took his pupils into the limestone quarries, teaching them about Cretaceous fossils.

The student years

The experience stuck in Cor's mind and, after he received his diploma Gymnasium B in the summer of 1957, he started to study Geology at the Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, partly because he was inspired by his old geography teacher, but also because such a study was sure to take him abroad! After all, Dutch geology students, or rather their lecturers, were confronted with an elemental problem. Holland is mostly a Pleistocene delta, largely covered with Holocene peat bogs. Moreover, it is famous for being entirely flat. In short, it is an awful place for mapping projects. In the 1950s, the Dutch geological institutes solved this problem by sending their students to Spain. For example, one contact was made by the palaeobotanist Professor Jongbloed of the Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, who was primarily interested in the Carboniferous. The Palaeozoic outcrops of the Cantabrian Mountains provided excellent opportunities for fieldwork, and it was here that the student Cor was sent for his mapping assignments. Spain, and particularly the Cantabrian Mountains, would become a home away from home for Cor (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. A home away from home, Cor Winkler Prins in his beloved Cantabrian mountains.

In order to know what such fieldwork encompassed, one must realize that Francoist

Spain in the sixties was not the easy touristic paradise it is today. To drive himself and his friends there in his yellow Volkswagen Beetle took Cor the better part of a week. And he arrived in a country where mules were still a major means to transport inland, and the roads were infamous for the many holes and cracks.

Spain would also be the place where he was reunited with a secret love from years before. Annelie Nieuwdorp was a friend of the elder sister of Cor. As a 14-year old he was greatly impressed by this 20-year old beauty with fiery eyes. Of course, at that time she was totally out of his reach. But as he went to his second year in the field, he received a letter from Annelie, stating that she would be in Spain as well. Unfortunately, they would not be able to meet, as he was working in the Cantabrian Mountains and she was on the other side of the peninsula, at the Costa Brava. When Cor mentioned his plight to a fellow student, the latter took the view that nothing is impossible. What followed was a wild night ride in the above mentioned Volkswagen Beetle straight across Spain, with nothing more of an address than the name of the town the lady with the fiery eyes would be staying. Arriving in the morning, the two young men went to tourist information, explaining that they were looking for a blond Dutch woman. Luckily, the Costa Brava was also not as it is today and they received directions to the street where most of the foreigners had their hotel. Once there, they immediately bumped into the woman who would become the future Mrs Winkler Prins. The marriage would be blessed with one son, Edwin. Throughout his career, Annelie was a great support for Cor and turned out to be an excellent organizer of partner programs at congresses.

Cor Winkler Prins took his degree in 1964, after which he was drafted for his military service. Having been released from the army in 1965, he immediately continued with a Ph.D. project that would ensure the annual trips to Spain and his beloved Cantabrian Mountains. The Ph.D., under direction of Professor Aart Brouwer, was completed in 1968, when Cor defended his thesis entitled "Carboniferous Productidina and Chonetidina of the Cantabrian Mountains (NW Spain): systematics, stratigraphy and palaeoecology". He did know a tight moment in the last year of his project, as he lost part of the original typewritten manuscript off the luggage rack of his bicycle. Much to his relief, a passer-by had picked up the papers and delivered them at the museum. Notably, his supervisor was not at all in favour of the co-operation with the Spanish colleagues, but he was glad to leave these contacts to Cornelius, as his Spanish coworkers call Winkler Prins.

Curator and science manager

Following his promotion, Cor worked for a short period as assistant at the department of Palaeontology and Stratigraphy at Leiden University. In August 1968 he accepted an appointment as curator of the Rijksmuseum van Geologie en Mineralogie (RGM), which at that time had just moved out of the Geological Museum at the Garenmarkt to the old orphanage at the Hooglandse Kerkgracht. His appointment was part of the museum's ambition to truly become a national museum for geology, rather than the university museum it had been up to then. The staff was greatly expanded and as a result Cor started his career at the museum together with a number of young scientists, who would become his direct colleagues for decades to come.

Of course, the fresh staff had to fulfil the ambitions the museum had set out and Cor attacked this challenge wholeheartedly. The museum started its own journal and, since the beginning in 1971, Cor was the managing editor of *Scripta Geologica*. Thus, the RGM had its own medium for disseminating knowledge of its collections. As a curator, Cor bore the responsibility for the Brachiopoda collection at the museum. At that time, the museum had fourteen curators. Some of these, however, had grown up in the tradition of University research and paid little to no heed to the collections they were supposed to curate. As the number of curators dwindled over the years, the part of the collection for which Cor was responsible grew. At his retirement, he was curator of Palaeozoic invertebrates and it pained him greatly that that particular position was not filled at the time (nor later, for that matter).

Another ambition of the RGM was to develop more extensive displays for the general public. The museum was opened to the public on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons in 1880, and, after the finishing of the new building at the Garenmarkt and the visit of Queens Emma and Wilhelmina on the 19th September, 1895, it was officially opened for interested people. The Geological Institute originally was part of the museum, but it became more important as more geology students entered. The permanent exhibition was made with the help of the curators and Cor's contribution lay mainly with the hall "Geological Processes", which was opened in 1973. It was certainly not his last contribution with respect to exhibitions. Apart from numerous temporal expositions at the Hooglandse Kerkgracht, he also helped in developing the geological exhibition of Naturalis in the 1990s. His biggest pride, however, lies with a temporary exhibition made from his own collection. As we noted, Cor's interest with geology started with a competition in selling stamps. But he also kept a keen interest in stamps themselves and is a fervent philatelist, specialising in stamps linked to geology. The exhibition "Geology on Stamps" in 1988 was quite a success in Holland, both in the museum and as a travelling exhibit. But it was an absolute hit in Spain, where it also toured and drew interested crowds at multiple locations (Fig. 3).

Thus, the early years at the museum were a matter of multi-tasking, particularly when one bears in mind that the growth of the scientific staff had not been followed by an increase in technical staff. Thus, everybody had to do what it took to get the job done. Cor in particular has always taken this attitude and, in his days as head of the palaeontology department, certainly encouraged others to follow suit. This did not always happen and, being the man he is, Cor was always willing to look for alternative solutions or walk the extra mile himself. As such, he more and more be-

Fig. 3. Opening of the exhibition "La Geología a traves de los Sellos" (= Geology on Stamps) in the Jardín Botánico de Córdoba in 1994. Joining Cor are Drs R.H. Wagner (left) and Carmen Álvarez (centre).

came a silent force, which enabled others to concentrate on their scientific careers.

This quality was put to good use in the second half of his career. Having first witnessed and helped the RGM evolve from university museum to truly a national museum, in 1988, he represented the geologists in the management team that prepared the merger of the RGM with the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie to form what would eventually become Naturalis. After the merger he became Head of Palaeontology and from 1998 till his retirement also vice-director of the Section Research and Collections. Our classification of Cor as 'silent force' mostly stems from the incredible amounts of work we have witnessed him do in the latter function. In fact, he did much more for the museum than he ever was credited for. It is indeed the silent man that is easily overseen.

A brachiopod life

Both authors came to know Cor in a period in which he was already mostly engrossed with his management duties. In fact, both of us benefited on multiple occasions from the opportunities he created in that position. But neither of us is in the habit of praising managers and the reason for this special volume is to give homage to the scientist Cor Winkler Prins. And Cor plus science equals brachiopods, particularly the multitudinous taxa of the Carboniferous.

After he obtained his Ph.D., Cor continued with his research in cooperation with Bob Wagner. The focus changed to a more stratigraphical and palaeoenvironmental one, in which Cor, of course, worked on the distribution of the brachiopods. He was assisted by his one Ph.D. student, María Luisa Martínez Chacón, who was to become professor at the University of Oviedo (Fig. 4). Together they not only worked on Brachiopoda from the Cantabrian Mountains, but also studied the mollusc assemblages. The latter part of the research was later continued by Michael Amler. The Tenth International Carboniferous Congress, held in Madrid in 1983 (Fig. 5), provided an excellent opportunity to present the results of the research, including a field excursion to the Cantabrian outcrops (Fig. 6). The congress was also the starting point for the book series 'The Carboniferous of the World', for which Cor is a co-editor.

Those fruitful years yielded large collections on which Cor is working still. Or perhaps it is more aptly put to say that he is working on them once more, now that retirement has relieved him from his many management duties. Apart from Spain, he has the last couple of years also been working on the museum collections of brachiopods from the Permian of Timor.

Fig. 4. Cor Winkler Prins in the promotion committee of María Luisa Martínez Chacón at the University of Oviedo in 1977.

Later in life, Cor also became interested in the history

Fig. 5. During the relaxation program of the X International Carboniferous Congress in Madrid (1983), Cor Winkler Prins showed his capabilities as matador in the arena of El Escorial.

Fig. 6. Spanish geologists during the stratigraphical excursion of the X International Carboniferous Congress (1983). 'Cornelius' Winkler Prins (second from the right) was naturally considered to be part of the Spanish team.

of (Dutch) palaeontology. In 2003, he organized the VII International Symposium 'Cultural Heritage in Geosciences, Mining and Metallurgy: Libraries – Archives – Museums'.

But even when considering his scientific career, the qualification 'the silent force' remains applicable to Cor. This holds particularly true for his work in the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) Subcommission on Carboniferous Stratigraphy. Starting as assistant-secretary in 1973, Cor became secretary and vice-president in 1976, a position he would hold until 1982. In that function he lead the field trip of the committee in Turkey. He filled in for the president, who was taken ill during the trip. As a result, Cor spent his evenings studying the excursion book tirelessly; to be sure he was one step ahead of the group he was supposed to explain everything to the day after! He also started the *Newsletter on Carboniferous Stratigraphy*. In 1984, Cor became a member of the IUGS Subcommission on Stratigraphic Classification. Apart from that, he held various positions in national and international committees.

For his services to science and society, Cor Winkler Prins was decorated as Knight of the Order of Oranje Nassau on 29th April, 2004 (Fig. 7).

Silent respect, but silent no more. The reasons for organizing an honorary volume for Cor in his own *Scripta Geologica* may be clear now. It is a small gesture for a scientist, whose name is already connected for eternity to palaeontology, in

Fig. 7. Cor Winkler Prins receives his decoration as Knight of the Order of Oranje Nassau from the Mayor of Voorschoten, Mrs. W.M. Verver-Aartsen, 29th April, 2004.

the taxa that have been named after him (Table 1). But a gesture that we, as editors, considered long overdue. A token of our respect, but, also speaking on behalf of the friends and colleagues who contributed, mostly one of gratitude.

Table 1. The various taxa named in honour of Cor Winkler Prins.

Name	Type of organism	Author(s)	Year
Paladin wiprinsi	Trilobite	Gandl	1973
Stenoscisma winkleri	Brachiopod	Martínez Chacón	1977
Gangamophyllum winklerprinsi	Coral	Boll	1983
Allocricetodon cornelii	Rodent	Martínez Suárez & Freudenthal	1994
Brachyphyllum winklerprinsii	Plant	Van Waveren *et al*.	2002
Amphicrinus prinsi	Crinoid	Webster *et al*.	2004
Pseudocriboconcha prinsi	Ostracod	Sànchez de Posada & Sanz-Lopez	This volume
Plicatospiriferella winklerprinsi	Brachiopod	Martínez Chacón	This volume
Winklerprinsia europea	Brachiopod	Martínez Chacón	This volume
Protriticites winkleri	Foraminifer	Villa	This volume

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