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OBITUARY

Dr. Jakob Verseveldt **8 February 1903 – 29 March 1987**

At the very time that the manuscript of the present paper was ready to be submitted for publication, the senior author, Dr. Jakob Verseveldt, in spite of his age, unexpectedly passed away on 29 March 1987 in his resident town, Zwolle, the Netherlands.

Jakob Verseveldt was born on 8 February 1903 in The Hague, the last but one of twelve children (eight sons and four daughters) of the textile-dealer Teunis Jan Verseveldt and Pieterella Vriens. He received his primary and secondary education in his native town and graduated in 1921. In the same year he entered the University of Leiden to study biology and geology.

In particular under the guidance of Prof. Dr. P. N. van Kampen, Prof. Dr. E. D. van Oort (both zoology) and Prof. Dr. J. M. Janse (botany), to whom – in his own opinion – he owed the most important contributions to his scientific education, he qualified as a biologist (\approx M.Sc. degree) in 1927. In the meantime, in 1923, he had begun teaching biology part time at a secondary school (Christelijke H.B.S.) in Leiden. In 1926 he also taught in Alphen aan den Rijn, a town situated some 15 km east of Leiden.

On 16 April 1927, after obtaining his “M.Sc.” he moved to Zwolle in order to take up a full-time teaching post on the staff of the Christelijke H.B.S. in that town. This post he was to keep until his retirement on 1 August, 1970. He was apparently exempted from compulsory military service.

On 29 May, 1929, some two years after having settled at Zwolle, he married Hendrika de Ruiter, who he had met in The Hague, and who bore him three children: two sons and one daughter.

Jakob Verseveldt was a born teacher; he enjoyed and loved teaching, and owing to his natural authority he rarely if ever met with the problems so familiar to many of his fellow-teachers, especially nowadays. Teaching apparently never exhausted him and in 1930, in spite of his full-time job, he “en passant” took an “M.Sc.” in Physical and Social geography at the University of Utrecht. Among his professors was the well known geophysicist F. A. Vening Meinesz.

Although first of all a teacher, Jakob Verseveldt had, and kept, a keen interest in research. His initial interest was with botany, especially mosses (Musci) and Liverworts (Hepaticae). In 1929 he published a survey of the species of these two groups occurring in Meijendel, a dune area between Leiden and The Hague (1). In this area, where he did much field-work, he came to distinguish that mosses and their protonemata form an important stabilizing factor in the dunes by fixing the surface sand.

Later, under the supervision of Dr. H. Boschma – who, in 1931, had succeeded Dr. Van Kampen as professor ordinarius in zoology, and, in 1933, Prof. Dr. Van Oort as director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie – he began a study of Octocorallian morphology, receiving ample support from Dr. G. Stiasny (in spite of some later discord), the then curator of the Coelenterate section of the museum.

In 1937, he formed part of a group of five selected college teachers sent for several months on an official mission to the Dutch East-Indies (now Indonesia) to obtain information about the educational system there, to exchange views on educational matters, and to forge a tighter link of the home-land with the then colony.

In 1940 his studies on Octocorallia resulted in his doctoral thesis (Ph.D.) (2), to which he published a supplement in 1942 (3).

For many years it seemed as if these two papers were to conclude Jakob Verseveldt's scientific career. After 1942 he was apparently entirely occupied by his family life, his teaching job and other obligations.

At an age that many people begin looking forward to retire, Jakob Verseveldt again found inspiration and time to resume his work on Octocorals. In 1960 (18 years after his last publication!) this resulted in two papers (5, 6), the first of a continuous series of some 40 taxonomic publications on Alcyonacea, which was to culminate in the important revisions of the genera *Sinularia* (31), *Sarcophyton* (34) and *Lobophytum* (38), and the present joint publication with Dr. F. M. Bayer.

On 5 April 1968, by mediation of Prof. Dr. L. D. Brongersma, the then director of the Leiden museum, he was appointed "honorary staff member" of the museum.

On 24 October 1970, less than three months after his retirement, his wife Hendrika, who for many years had suffered from ill-health, passed away; a sad start of a life-phase which for so many married couples implies a more relaxed way of life, joint retrospection and spending more time together. It caused him deep distress, but also due to his Christian faith and his indomitable character, he overcame this blow, in particular finding relief in his taxonomic studies.

During all his life Jacob Verseveldt rarely experienced illness or physical discomfort, although his sense of hearing deteriorated with increasing age. In 1982, however, at the height of his scientific career, he was struck by a mild stroke, which affected his eye-sight (tunnel-vision). Although this involved considerable inconvenience, such as preventing him from driving a car or bicycle, and forcing him to apologize more often than he was used to in pedestrian traffic, it fortunately did not affect his ability to use a microscope, so he could continue his studies. In point of fact he seemed to go on living as if

nothing had happened. He stubbornly ignored that old age has its infirmities and even did not refrain from spending some of his holidays hiking in the Alps, until he had a near-accident in the summer of 1986, which made him admit reluctantly that he had to be more careful.

In the end of March 1987, shortly after having finished his part of the present publication, he was hit by another, this time fatal, stroke and a few days later he passed away at the age of 84 years, after a most active life and an unusual scientific career.

Brought up in a dogmatic Calvinistic environment Jakob Verseveldt remained faithful to his belief all his life. He was engaged particularly in the controversies or paradoxes between biblical doctrine and the results of science, for which he had an open mind. But rather than abandoning his belief he attempted to bridge these paradoxes. In this respect it is significant that one of the theses he chose to defend at the ceremony of his doctorate on 24 September 1940, runs as follows: "The controversy between the story of creation of Genesis I and the results of absolute chronology of the geologists can only be removed by considering the former in a symbolic sense". At that time this was a view not generally accepted and appreciated in conservative, Calvinistic circles, and at least subject to much debate. In the framework of a conference on the theme "The age of the Earth", held on 14 and 15 April 1950 at Amersfoort by the "Christelijke Vereniging van Natuur- en Geneeskundigen" (Christian Society of Physicists and Physicians) he gave a reviewing lecture on geological age determinations. This lecture was published in 1951 in the journal "Geloof en Wetenschap" [(Christian) Belief and Science] (4), and also in a special volume "De ouderdom van de Aarde" (The age of the Earth), printed at least three times. He found support for and confirmation of his views and philosophy in the book "Creatie en Evolutie" (Creation and Evolution) by J. Lever (1956), then professor of zoology at the Calvinist "Vrije Universiteit" (Free University), Amsterdam. Apart from the Bible, no other serious book probably ever appealed more to him.

In his residence, Zwolle, he was member of the local board of a few societies such as the "Nederlandse Vereniging voor Weer- en Sterrenkunde" (Dutch Society of Meteorology and Astronomy). He also was a member of the local council of the Calvinist Church. He liked to travel, and between about 1960 and 1970 he served in a regional board of the "Nederlandse Christelijke Reisvereniging" (Dutch Christian Travel Society). In this capacity he gave many lectures and, often accompanied by his wife Hendrika, guided travelling parties abroad, in particular to Austria and Switzerland.

In the framework of his studies on Octocorallia he visited various museums

and institutions, mainly in Europe; when possible in company of his friend (and ex-colleague) G. J. Vrijmoeth, who, since 1964, provided most of the photographs for his publications, just as his friend (and ex-colleague) J. ter Spil, since 1960, used to check his English texts. A highlight was his trip to Australia in 1977, on the invitation of the former Roche Research Institute of Marine Pharmacology (RRIMP). He then shared his Octocorallia expertise with Dr. P. N. Alderslade, now curator of Coelenterata at the Northern Territories Museum of Arts and Sciences at Darwin. They visited the Great Barrier Reef, and operating from Heron Island they made several collecting trips; an unforgettable experience to the man who had become one of the world's foremost experts (if not *the* foremost expert) on Alcyonacea, but who all his life had until then only worked with preserved specimens.

Apart from his enthusiasm and good health, his self-discipline must have formed part of the secret of his productive life. Even in his later years he worked according to a rather strict daily schedule, getting up early and often working until late at night. He worked steadily and never hurried, allowing himself ample time for tea- and coffee-breaks, meals, and shopping. He also did not neglect his social life. There was always time for a visitor dropping in, and he often spent his week-ends with relatives or friends.

He regularly visited the Coelenterate Section of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie at Leiden and with pleasure I think back of the pleasant contacts we had. In particular I recall the period from 10 to 15 November 1980, when I had the privilege to enjoy his hospitality at Zwolle to receive a personal course in techniques relevant to the taxonomy of Octocorallia.

PUBLICATIONS BY JAKOB VERSEVELDT

1. 1929. De Mosflora van Meijendel. — *Levende Natuur* 1929: 289-294, figs. 1-3; 356-360, figs. 4-8.
2. 1940. Studies on Octocorallia of the families Briareidae, Paragorgiidae and Anthothelidae. — *Temminckia* 5: i-v, 1-142, figs. 1-52 (Thesis, also issued separately plus five-paged summary in Dutch).
3. 1942. Further studies on Octocorallia. — *Zoologische Mededelingen Leiden* 24: 159-186, figs. 1-9.
4. 1951. Geologische Ouderdomsbepalingen. — *Geloof en Wetenschap, Loosduinen* 49 (1 & 2): 15 pp. (Also issued as pp. 63-78 in Sizo et al., 1953. "De ouderdom van de aarde": 114 pp., Kampen).
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6. 1960. Two new species of the genus *Dendronephthya* Kükenthal (Coelenterata: Octocorallia). — *Proceedings Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Amsterdam, Ser. C*, 63: 511-517, figs. 1-4.
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8. 1965. Report on the Octocorallia (Stolonifera and Alcyonacea) of the Israel South Red Sea expedition 1962, with notes on other collections from the Red Sea. — Sea Fisheries Research Station, Haifa, Bulletin 40 (Israel South Red Sea expedition, 1962, Reports no. 14): 28-48, figs. 1-9, pls. 1-3.
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 12. 1969. Octocorallia from North-western Madagascar (Part I). — Zoologische Verhandelingen Leiden 106: 1-38, figs. 1-17, pls. 1-7.
 13. 1969. A new species of the genus *Anthelia* (Octocorallia: Alcyonacea) from the Gulf of 'Aqaba (Red Sea). — Israel Journal of Zoology 18: 325-327, fig. 1.
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 16. & J. Cohen, 1971. Some new species of Octocorallia from the Gulf of Elat (Red Sea). — Israel Journal of Zoology 20: 53-67, figs. 1-10.
 17. 1971. Octocorallia from north-western Madagascar (Part II). — Zoologische Verhandelingen Leiden 117: 1-73, figs. 1-40, pls. 1-15.
 18. 1972. Report on a few Octocorals from Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall Islands. — Zoologische Mededelingen Leiden 47: 457-464, figs. 1-3, pl. 1.
 19. 1973. On the validity of *Alcyonium siderium* Verrill (Coelenterata: Octocorallia). — Zoologische Mededelingen Leiden 46: 209-216, figs. 1-4, pls. 1-2.
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 21. 1974. Octocorallia from New Caledonia. — Zoologische Mededelingen Leiden 48: 95-122, figs. 1-17, pls. 1-5.
 22. 1974. Alcyonacea (Octocorallia) from the Red Sea, with a discussion of a new *Sinularia* species from Ceylon. — Israel Journal of Zoology 23: 1-37, figs. 1-24, pls. 1-10.
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 26. 1977. Australian Octocorallia (Coelenterata). — Australian Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research 28: 171-240, figs. 1-49.
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 34. 1982. A revision of the genus *Sarcophyton* Lesson (Octocorallia, Alcyonacea). — Zoologische Verhandelingen Leiden 192: 1-91, figs. 1-39, pls. 1-24.
 35. 1982. New species of Alcyonacea (Octocorallia) from the Great Barrier Reef, south-east Asia, and the Red Sea. — Zoologische Mededelingen Leiden 56: 143-151, figs. 1-4, pls. 1-2.
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In addition to the references listed above, Jakob Verveeldt left behind a small manuscript on the genus *Tubipora*, almost ready for publication and a manuscript in an advanced state of progress on the genus *Alcyonium*. Finally there is among his scientific inheritance a number of finished species descriptions (including several new species) which may warrant publication. We hope that these manuscripts and descriptions can be made ready for press with the help of other specialists, to be published in due time in the Zoologische Mededelingen or Zoologische Verhandelingen.

The above-listed references are almost certainly complete as regards the Octocorallia, but publications on other subjects may have escaped notice.

J. C. den Hartog
14 July, 1987.