

The VII International Symposium 'Cultural Heritage in Geosciences' at Leiden: an introduction

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Contents

Introduction	1
The meeting	2
Excursions	2
References	4

Introduction

The Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum Naturalis at Leiden, The Netherlands, was host to the VII International Symposium 'Cultural Heritage in Geosciences, Mining and Metallurgy: Libraries - Archives - Museums' (Fig. 1). It was a rather special place for such a meeting since it is near the North Sea, whilst most previous symposia were in mountainous regions, apart from the III Symposium, which was held in Saint Petersburg on the Baltic coast. Further, it is a general natural history museum with no special connection to mining. Although the archives and library play an important role in the museum, the emphasis was different in comparison with the other symposia, which was made clear by the theme of the meeting, "Museums and their collections."

Although mining has not a long tradition in The Netherlands, if one ignores the prehistoric flint industry, some important collections of our Museum, and part of its library and archives, are directly linked to it (Winkler Prins, 2004). A good example is the Jongmans collection, which was brought together by the first director of the 'Geologisch Bureau voor het Mijngebied' (Geological Bureau for the Mining Area) of the 'Rijks Geologische Dienst' (Geological Survey of The Netherlands). Professor W.J. Jongmans (1878-1957) is famous as the initiator of the International Congresses on Carboniferous Stratigraphy, the so-called 'Heerlen Congresses.' The Jongmans collection gives a complete documentation of the Carboniferous stratigraphy and plant fossils from the coal mines in south Limburg (The Netherlands), and is one the richest collections in the world of Carboniferous-Permian plants (van Waveren, 2004). With the collection came important archival material and the Jongmans library, which is famous for its coverage of Carboniferous stratigraphy worldwide and its palaeobotanical literature, especially of the Carboniferous-Permian interval.



Fig. 1. The participants at luncheon in Naturalis.

The meeting

Some 40 delegates from twelve countries were welcomed at the Museum by the then Director of Naturalis, Wim van der Weiden. Cor Winkler Prins followed with an elaborate overview of the collections of the National Museum of Natural History, stressing its links with the mining industry and the important recent acquisitions from the universities (see also de Clercq, 2004; Kriegsman, 2004) and the geological survey (Netherlands Institute of Applied Geoscience, TNO). During the meeting colleagues from all over Europe gave wide-ranging talks on the collections in their museums, archives and libraries, thus presenting the stories behind their collections, illustrating developments in mining and the geosciences. On the last day of the meeting, Lieselotte Jontes, one of the two initiators of these symposia, presented an overview of ten years of 'Erbe Symposia', the colloquial name for these symposia. Cor Winkler Prins presented the third 'Peter Schmidt award' (named after the late, much missed second initiator of the 'Erbe Symposia') to Joanne Lerud (Head Librarian of the Arthur Lakes Library of the Colorado School of Mines) for organising in such an excellent way the fifth 'Erbe Symposium' at Golden, Colorado.

Most papers presented at the Symposium can be found in this volume; of those that were not handed in, the abstract is included. Additionally, a few papers are published herein that were not presented at the meeting because the authors were unable to attend.

Excursions

Delegates had free access to the exhibitions of Naturalis during the symposium. The library, archives and rare book room were visited also under the expert guidance of the librarians.

Other museums in Leiden were visited as well, first and foremost the “Rijksmuseum voor de Geschiedenis van de Natuurwetenschappen en de Geneeskunde Boerhaave” (National Museum for the History of Science and Medicine ‘Boerhaave’). At this museum, named after the famous physician Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), historical instruments, documents and old books related to science and medicine could be seen. These included the equipment of Nobel Price laureates and their awards, such as J.H. van ‘t Hoff, who was Professor of Chemistry and Geology at the University of Amsterdam. At the end of the Symposium, on Friday afternoon, an optional visit was available to the “Rijksmuseum van Volkenkunde” (National Ethnographical Museum), which was also greatly appreciated.

The Symposium dinner at the Restaurant “De Zwaan” on the beach in Katwijk provided pleasant surroundings to get to know each other better.

On Thursday May 22, an excursion was organised to Haarlem in order to visit the Teylers Museum. On the way, the Holland Tulip Park was visited and the old city centre of Haarlem was briefly shown. Teylers is a rather unique museum, being an early 18th century scientific museum which has kept, for a large part, its original atmosphere, reminding visitors of the old encyclopedical cabinets. Its eclectic collections range from old drawings, including some by Michelangelo and Rafael, and coins to geological objects and pieces of scientific apparatus. The old lecture room brings one back to the past and the library is an important source of old scientific literature (we say ‘if we don’t have it, there is always Teylers’). A good example of its cultural value is the following. A Swiss participant had spoken on Scheuchzer’s research in Switzerland (Bouheiry, 2004) and at Teylers we could not only see the original book (Scheuchzer, 1731-1735) in which he described the ‘*homo diluvii testis*’ (‘the man who saw the flood’), but also the original specimen of the giant salamander (*Andrias scheuchzeri* (Holl, 1831)) from the Miocene of Oeningen (Switzerland) on which the description was based (Fig. 2). Another rare book that attracted much attention was the ‘*Lithographiae Wirceburgensis*’ (Beringer, 1726) in which the famous “Beringer Lügensteine” were described. Some original specimens of the “Lügensteine” could also be seen at the exhibition.

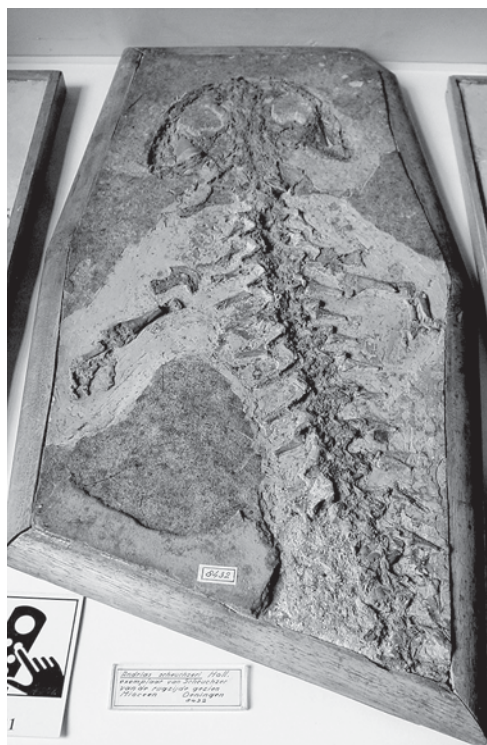


Fig. 2. Holotype of *Andrias scheuchzeri* (Holl, 1831), originally described by Scheuchzer in 1735 as the ‘*homo diluvii testis*’ (photograph by one of the participants, Andrea Beyer).

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