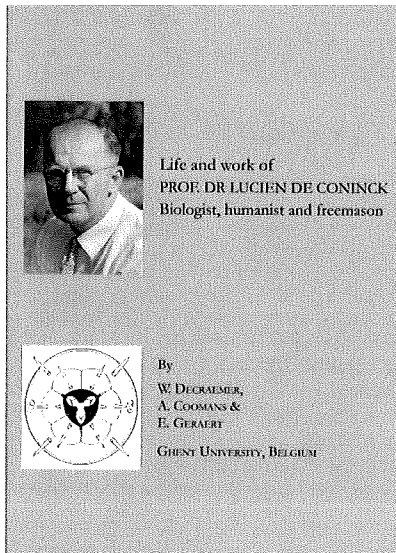


Book reviews



DECRAEMER, W.; COOMANS, A. & GERAERT, E. 2009. *Life and work of Prof. Dr. Lucien De Coninck - Biologist, humanist and freemason*. Academia Press. Ghent, Belgium. 169 pp. [ISBN 978 90 382 1499 3]

The specialists and experts in any scientific field usually know with some detail the task and contribution by the most important pioneers and 'magisters' to the discipline. However, we very often ignore other aspects of their activities, although the latter may be as interesting as the former. Such information is commonly summarized, after their decease, in obituaries or *in memoriam* reports. As a result, we will never understand the true dimension and value of these men and women in the time they lived. Fortunately, the figure of Prof. L. De Coninck will be an exception to this general rule. All nematologists are perfectly aware of his exceptional work to explain the morphology of nematodes and to elucidate their classification, which reached its highest landmark with the publication of two volumes (De Coninck, 1965) in Grassé's *Traité de Zoologie*. And, now, we have the opportunity to know the man as well. Three enormously reputed colleagues, first students and later colleagues of Prof. De Coninck in Ghent University, have collaborated to provide us with an interesting and well-deserved biography of their 'teacher', in the commemoration of the first century of his birth, on July 31, 1909. Frieda Decraemer, August Coomans and Etienne Geraert, who, with the course of time, became referent researchers in Nematology, introduce us both the professional and personal profile of Prof. De Coninck.

The book consists of two main parts, the first is devoted to relate the life of Prof. De Coninck, while the second one compiles his scientific labor. In the introductory section, the authors refer to how they met and knew Prof. De Coninck at the beginning of their studies at Ghent University and how they became his

pupils, with the narration of interesting events and anecdotes. It has called my attention the text written by E. Geraert concerning the family name of Prof. De Coninck. We always saw it spelled in two words, but this graphy apparently derives from "a mistake ... made on the (his) birth certificate", which, however, he retained "... Probably for emotional reasons" although his parents were named Deconinck, a spelling which would be rescued later by Prof. De Coninck's sons. Subsequent chapters are dedicated to describe several stages and aspects of his life and activities. (i) His studies at the University of Ghent, period in which he was an active militant of the 't Zal Wel Zaan, a student organization to promote the use of Flemish language in this institution, and when he joined free-thinking. (ii) His long and successful academic career as researcher, lecturer, leading scientist, promoter, director, dean, member of a myriad of committees, to name just a few. (iii) His very active compromise with and participation in the Resistance after the occupation of Belgium by German army during the Second World War, actions for which he received several official medals and decorations. (iv) His work and leadership for the foundation and development of several associations and initiatives related to free-thinking, including the Freemasonry, the Humanistic Association, the International Humanistic and Ethical Union among others. (v) His relevant contribution to the advance of Ethical Sciences in Ghent University, in particular, but not only, of those aspects narrowly linked to Biology. And (vi) a detailed report about his family.

In the epilogue the authors highlight the most remarkable features of Prof. De Coninck, who was "an eminent nematologist" and "a perfect representative of the human race". The remaining part of the book are a series of appendices including the publications by Prof. De Coninck, the taxa named in his honor, the taxa described or changed by him, and, finally, a reproduction of one of his major contributions (De Coninck, 1942), originally published in Dutch with a summary in French, in which he gave to know the 'De Coninck system', that is an original interpretation of the symmetry of the arrangement of anterior sensilla in free-living nematodes, nowadays worldwide accepted.

For my part, I will never forget that, more than 20 years ago, during my first stay in Ghent University to work with Prof. Coomans, I saw that the picture of a man, situated at the middle top of a large wall, presided the Nematology lab. I asked my lab mate (Paul De Ley, at that time pre-doc student) who was that man. He told me: "He is Prof. De Coninck". That day I begun to be aware of his personality and the enormous respect all people in Ghent University felt for him.

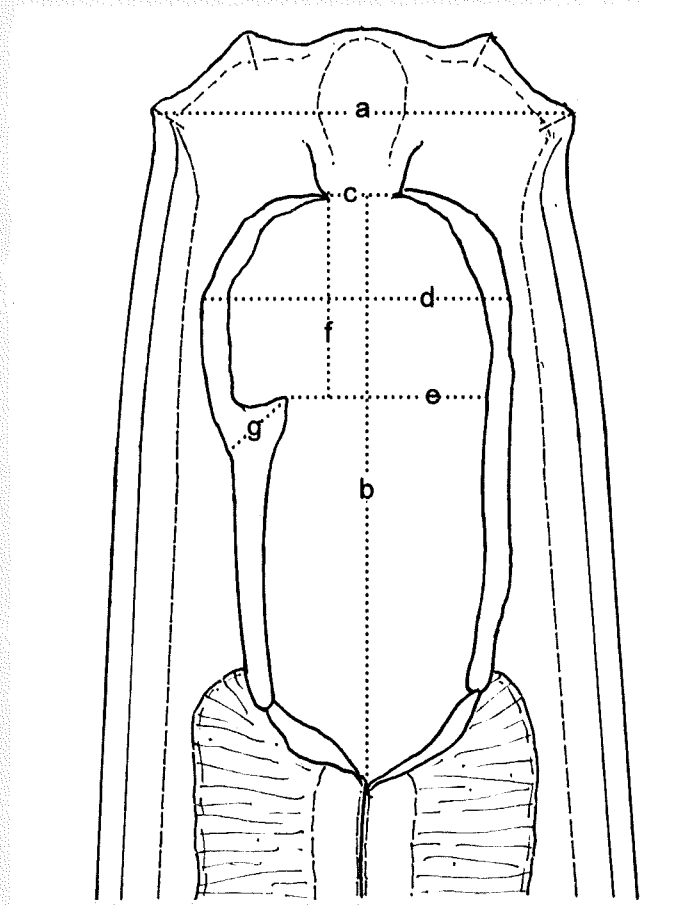
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