

Your Excellencies, (*Dear Mr. Ambassador of Israel Jacques Revah and Mr. Ambassador of Belgium in Israel John Cornet d'Elzius*)

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Professor Wagner,

Excellenties,
Dames en heren,

Van harte welkom voor de uitreiking van de 45^{ste} Christoffel Plantin prijs. Uit respect voor de laureaat, en u zal me dat niet kwalijk nemen, zal ik spreken in het Engels. De taal van zijn onderzoek en onderwijs. Zijn minstens tweede of derde of vierde huis na een al indrukwekkende carrière in vele buitenland.

Welcome to the Gife room of the Sint-Bernardus Center, the ancient episcopal palace and later residence of Napoleon here in Antwerp, where we are pleased to host again the annual award of the Christoffel Plantin prize. Today we award this prize for the forty-fifth time to a fellow countryman who is working abroad for many years now and whose professional activities have gained him worldwide fame and reputation.

Five people from Antwerp, Ludo Van Bogaert, Roger Avermaete, Hugo Van Kuyck, Maurits Naessens and Jo Van de Perre, originally set up this prize. They believed that Belgian people who become a hit abroad also deserve recognition in their own country. After all, they make an invaluable contribution to the radiance and the distribution of our know-how and culture.

These five people had the brilliant idea of naming this prize after Christoffel Plantin, the 16th century printer and publisher who, thanks to the international character of his work, put this region on the map, and more in particular our Scheldt city.

And now, more than 400 years after his death, there are still people whom we can be particularly proud of, because they show far beyond our borders how a small country like ours can be great.

Out of as many as eight candidates nominated by Belgian ambassadors, the Christoffel Plantin Trust unanimously chose professor Daniel Hanoch Wagner. Professor Wagner was born in Tel Aviv in 1953 by Belgian parents and lived in Anderlecht nearby Brussels from 1956 till 1975. In that year, he obtained a degree in Physics at the Free University of Brussels.

Armed with his degree, he returned to Israel where in 1977 he was awarded a Master in Materials Science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Five years later in 1982, he completed a PhD in Israel. Subsequently, he spent three years at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York as a postdoctoral associate and lecturer. Afterwards, Daniel Wagner started a brilliant career at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot. In 1991 he was given a permanent function as associated professor and was by then already internationally recognized in his search area. In the same year, he received the Fiber Society Award for Distinguished Achievement in New Orleans. As of 2000 he is a permanent professor and well sought teacher at both the Weizmann Institute Department of Materials and Interfaces at the Technion, The Institute of Technology in Haifa. Daniel Wagner holds the Livio Norzi Professional Chair in Materials Science and was elected in 2000 Chairman of the Gordon Research Conference on Composites in California. In 2010, our nominee was the receiver of the prestigious Gutwirth Prize for excellence in scientific research.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It goes without saying that professor Wagner may consider himself as a prominent scientific leader in the field of materials science. His current domain interests include the micromechanics of both synthetically and biological composites systems. Novel man-made materials such as *carbon nanotubes, graphene and nanocomposites* as well as *bone, dentin* and *cell adhesion* continue to fascinate him. Especially *biological composites* have the potential to inspire radically new synthetic designs, for example in airplane components or in impact-resistant structures such as building materials and construction techniques.

Domains in which Daniel Wagner undertakes world-class research and made notable contributions over recent years. That's one of the reasons why colleagues tend to name him a true 'guru in the field of nano and biocomposites'. International industries worldwide and none of the least Israel itself, have benefitted from his outstanding scientific contributions and vast knowledge in the composites area.

Daniel's publication record is exemplary. The Web of Science shows him to have published 244 papers and several book chapters with over 10 000 citations and an H-index of 51, which is outstanding. This makes him one of the most successful and productive material scientists of his generation in terms of publications. He is also reviewer of the top scientific journals including *Nature*, *Science*, *Physical Review Letters* and many more.

Professor Wagner was a guest professor at various universities in Hamburg, Paris, Bordeaux, Potsdam and Connecticut. Another demonstration of his leadership in the field is the organization of the COMPO2014 conference held at the Weizmann Institute earlier this year. Sharing his insights, knowledge and ideas is one of Daniel's specialties and undoubtedly, the most important asset in our complex world today.

Dear professor,

Many of your colleagues that listen to you at numerous conferences, praise you for your inspiring talks full of interesting new ideas. Scientific discussions among fellow researchers in your presence are mostly cherished because of the so called 'ray of scientific lucidity' that they provoke. Your students consider you as an energetic promotor and you are renewed by many for your rare combination of talents.

Besides your rich academic career and fluent knowledge of French, Hebrew, Spanish, English and German, let us not forget that football is your first true love.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Daniel grew up in Belgium and played, as a kid, on the Anderlecht team. But his heart was always with his friends on Maccabi Brussels. So every year he had to secure a temporary transfer from Anderlecht to Maccabi. However he continued to belong to Anderlecht and sometimes he played with Maccabi against his home team in the league. The Maccabi team was then composed of some of the best Jewish players who ever played in Brussels. One of them, Doron Levi, eventually played several years with Anderlecht and l'Union St Gilloise in the top Belgian league.

Dear professor Wagner,

Your other passions and interests are jazz music from the 40's and 50's, French literature and Jewish Genealogy from a personal point of view. That Patrick Modiano was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature must certainly fulfill you with joy.

After a long search, you were not only able to trace the family that saved and hid your mother during World War II. Eventually, this family was granted the honorable distinction of Righteous Among the Nations.

Thirteen years ago, you combined this historical passion with the scientific area in which you excel. Because your family is originally coming from Poland, together with a team of experts and students, you started to investigate the Zdúnska Wola Jewish cemetery near Lodz. In doing so, you and your colleagues Kamila Klauzínska and Elżbieta Bartsch discovered a real treasure. All that years, the weed-infested graveyards had hidden precious colored tombstones adorned with floral and animal patterns. For Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe, this finding was quite unique. Together with your team of co-researchers, students and volunteers, you managed to restore systematically each grave and to investigate the data of the deceased. But there again, your mission wasn't accomplished. Determined to preserve the Jewish cemetery and properly remember the common heritage of the town, you decided to tell the story of this historical treasure to the fellow citizens and children via education programs at school. During your visits to Zdúnska Wola, you discuss with teenagers and share some Jewish history with them.

You considered this was a starting point to change the opinions and break stereotypes that many local residents in Poland have of Jewish people and their culture. You and your team also hoped this was the best way to stop the vandalism and theft at the cemetery which had been going on since the end of the Second

World War. For all your efforts and warm-hearted commitment for the Jewish community you were elected both Chairman of the Organization of Former Residents of Zdúnska Wola in Israel and Honorable Citizen of the local community.

Dear professor Wagner,

As governor of the province of Antwerp, I am honoured to be able to present you today the Plantin prize. You are part of a select group of specialists who are spreading their great knowledge abroad and hereby keeping Belgian prestige high. Your homeland has not lost sight of that and wanted to reward your extraordinary talent and your hard work with a much sought after distinction. Through your commitment for the Jewish community worldwide, your empathy and call for mutual understanding and solidarity, you show us that you're not only a brilliant scientist but also a truly warm-hearted man. Therefore: many congratulations, also on behalf of the jury members.

I sincerely hope that the Christoffel Plantin prize will be an encouragement to you to continue your work with great enthusiasm and passion for a long time to come. For me, this year's winner gives Antwerp the opportunity to strengthen the friendship bonds between Belgium and Israel that were initiated long time ago. This award also enables us to look forward with confidence: last June, a Belgian-Israeli Business Club with an important focus on collaboration through innovation was set up by the Belgian embassy in Israel. In the future, I hope this good initiatives will be continued and supported by many.

My congratulations again and I wish you all the best, every success joy and gratitude in your further career.

Cathy Berx

Governor of the province of Antwerp

