
 IN MEMORIAM

EMERI VAN DONZEL REMEMBERED

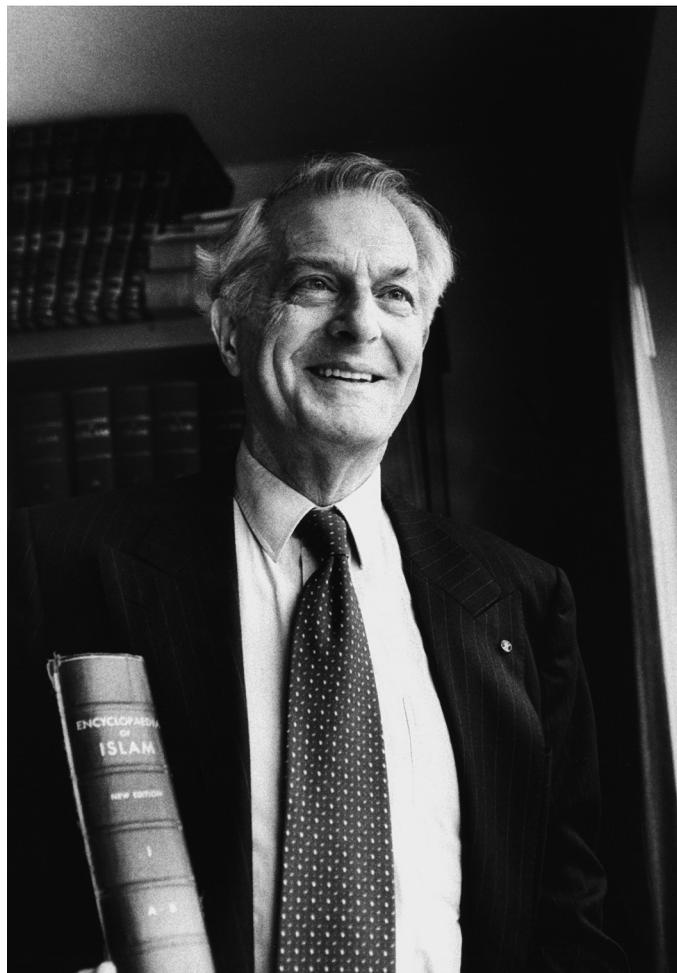
With some hesitation I decided to accept the invitation to sketch my memories of Emeri van Donzel. I have known him for quite a long time, be it mainly from my former position as local director of the Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut (NHAI) at Istanbul. Therefore I am less well informed about the *faits divers* of the Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten (NINO) at Leiden in the eighties of the last century.

In his capacity of General Director of NINO, the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, and its annex NHAI, the Netherlands Historical-Archaeological Institute in Istanbul (at present called the Netherlands Institute in Turkey, NIT), Emeri would come to Istanbul on working visits several times a year. In the conversations we then had on the first floor of the Palais de Hollande of the Consulate General, where the NHAI was then accommodated, we discussed, more often than not until the middle of the night, not only institutional matters but also a wide range of other topics. In these circumstances I came to know him as an understanding director, an eager academic and a fascinating conversationalist. As a traveller *pur sang* who preferred not to spend his days exclusively behind his Leiden desk at the addresses Noordeindsplein respectively Witte Singel, he participated regularly in congresses and symposia throughout Europe, the Near East and elsewhere, where he would represent NINO with gusto. I especially remember from his visits to NHAI his smooth way of dealing with people. Being fluent in modern languages he easily made contacts within the academic circles of Istanbul and Ankara when attending meetings. He maintained friendly contacts with Halet Çambel, a prominent personality and archaeologist at Istanbul University, and with Nurettin Yardımcı, at the time General Director of the Antiquities Service at Ankara.

NINO's original mission was to be a national and international centre for the advancement of the study of the ancient Near East. After some time, however, a re-orientation took place, in the sense that the interest in the modern Near and Middle East also be stimulated. This decision of the Board of Trustees was no doubt inspired by a more pragmatic than historical interest within the Dutch government for contemporary developments in countries of the Near and Middle East including Iran, Libya, Ethiopia and Turkey. It was expected that the Institute could participate more actively in the study of antiquities in the different states; even archaeological research on one's own initiative was taken into consideration as a possibility.

Appointing a specialist in the field of Oriental Studies after the retirement of the previous director, A.A. Kampman, was only natural in view of this new orientation. In 1974 Van Donzel was appointed. As a specialist in the modern Near East and Islam he had, however, less affinity with its ancient languages and cultures. Nevertheless he picked up – in addition to his activities in his own field of studies, and his becoming editor, and later editor in chief, of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam/Encyclopédie de l'Islam* – a lively interest in archaeological research. I remember how, during excavations at Kumartepé along the Euphrates river in the southeast of Anatolia, he stood in a deep pitch, dust-covered and

sweating, scraping off profiles with a trowel in his hand. He wholeheartedly supported the successive archaeological projects of NHAI, and the Institute more than once reaped the benefits of the goodwill he had built up in Turkey.



Dr. E.J. van Donzel, 1925-2017 (foto V. Mentzel, 22 februari 1994).

Looking back, it is not difficult to see the merits of Van Donzel as Director of the foundation comprising NINO and NHAI. In the first place, he – in collaboration with the administrator Piet de Spaey, whom he had invited for the job – established a renewed, sound financial basis for the institutes. I should single out two important points: the Foundation's stable income by means of government grants, and entering the NINO staff in a pension fund. This contributed to a large extent to the continuation and consolidation of the Foundation during some critical moments in its existence. Another monumental merit is the fact that he was able, in the beginning of the eighties, to secure a place for NINO in the then-newly built housing complex of Leiden University's Humanities department at Witte Singel. This guaranteed the physical entity and the unity of the Institute. In addition to sufficient office, storage and other working spaces for staff – among which a secure place for the famous De Liagre Böhl Collection of cuneiform tablets – this meant in the practical

sense free and complete access for all visitors to the collections of academic books and journals of NINO. Continuation of or even improved accessibility and user-friendliness of the library – as one had known these for 40 years in the Noord-eindsplein buildings, where at that time the University's departments of Assyriology and Egyptology were accommodated – formed a substantial condition for the move to the Witte Singel buildings.

In 2014 the President of the Board of Trustees, Jan Peters, writes in the book celebrating the 75th anniversary of NINO that academic independence is crucial and necessary in order to guarantee and expand the global role of NINO¹. This phrase summarizes the essence of the policy Emeri van Donzel pursued during the 18 years of his directorship. In retrospective we could posit that he succeeded in maintaining a balance between cooperation with Leiden University on the one hand, and the continuously cherished independence on the other hand. Mainly the specific composition of the board of the Foundation, consisting of trustees and a directorate, created a safeguard for that balance; a composition he, in close cooperation with the successive President-curators, monitored. There is no doubt that he felt painfully surprised during the last days of his life by the loss of NINO's sovereignty and the dispersal of its collections that started recently.

Leiden, December 2017

CO ROODENBERG

IN MEMORIAM EMERI VAN DONZEL; SOME PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

When, on Friday 3 November 2017, attendants were given the opportunity to express their last thoughts of farewell about Emeri van Donzel in the Groene Kerk at Oegstgeest, many friends and colleagues had turned up, supporting by their mere presence Emeri's wife and their two daughters and their husbands.

It was two years ago that Emeri had invited friends and close acquaintances on the occasion of his 90th birthday. The invitation read (in Dutch) "Echt waar! Dit 'menke' is bijna 90 jaar!": "Really, this chap has nearly turned 90", referring to the photo on the invitation, showing him as a healthy baby on a woolen rug. That was very much Emeri, and how he had been throughout his long life: gaily, cheerful and smiley, amiable, charming, and hospitable, easygoing, and at the same time, if I may say so, down to earth: a real human being.

Emeri had during his impressive career become the personal embodiment of a large international academic project, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*². V.S. Naipaul, staging a discussion in his *Among the Believers. An Islamic Journey* (1981) had one of the main characters of his book say: "My own

scholar [...] said, 'You know *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*? A Dutch publication. It will give you all the information you want about Islam and Mashhad.'" The "I" in Naipaul's work, then, continues the exchange of thoughts commenting "I didn't think I had come to Mashhad to be told to [...] read an old book." How wrong the opinion of this "I" was, can easily be seen when perusing the *EI*² in its different versions (English and French, the English one totaling 11 volumes, a Supplement and an Index, a cassette with a cd-rom, and the spin-off in the form of the *Islamic desk reference*; more details in the forthcoming history of the *EI* by Peri Bearman).

For an international project like the *EI*² Emeri, as the director of NINO from 1974-1990, moved with much ease in circles of his colleagues all over the world: attending conferences, giving lectures, and spending time with his fellow academics. He would then not necessarily engage in Chablis lubricated dinners. Emeri could very well function on different societal levels. He, being interested in the younger generation and their fields of academic passion, would then have with them a Van Dobben or a Kwekkeboom croquette, and he knew why he preferred the one above the other.

He always wanted to know what the academic discussions of the moment were and engage in them. Also the Luxemburg-discussion about the Koran was a topic he was interested in. When given the time he would comment upon the old editions of De Goeje. I had the privilege to work with him on his lemma in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* on the Dahlak islands of Yemen: he recognized kindred spirits.

Emeri combined in his life work in a cluster of abbreviations and he knew how to deal with these: *EI*, NINO (Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten), *BiOr* (*Bibliotheca Orientalis*), SDG (Stichting De Goeje/the De Goeje Fund), the also Leiden based KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut van Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde), OI (Oosters[ch] Instituut): for outsiders an inextricable, Gordian knot – but not for Emeri.

Emericus Joannes van Donzel (Nieuwstadt, 5 July 1925 – Wassenaar, 29 October 2017) is survived by his wife Anne (née Kauer), and their two daughters, Monique and Nathalie.

Further sources:

Ronald E. Kon, "In memoriam Emericus Joannes van Donzel", <http://mareonline.nl/images/pdf/mare-9-41.pdf>.

Harry J. Stroomer, "Preface", in: Emeri van Donzel, *Ethiopia, Arabia, and Islam. A Selection of his Writings* (Leiden: De Goeje Fund, Vol. 33, 2017), pp. XI-XIII.

Harry J. Stroomer, "In Memoriam: Emeri van Donzel (5 juli 1925-29 oktober 2017)", *ZemZem, Tijdschrift over het Midden-Oosten, Noordafrika en islam*, jaargang 13, nr. 1 & 2, 2017, pp. 129-133.

Siegbert Uhlig, "Laudatio", in: Emeri van Donzel, *Ethiopia, Arabia, and Islam. A Selection of his Writings* (Leiden: De Goeje Fund, Vol. 33, 2017), pp. XV-XVIII.

"In Memoriam Dr E.J. van Donzel", obituary on the NINO website, <http://www.nino-leiden.nl/message/in-memoriam-dr-ej-van-donzel>.

Mheer, January 2018

Ronald E. KON

¹) J.R.T.M. Peters, Voorwoord, in: O.E. Kaper & J.G. Dercksen (ed.), *Waar de geschiedenis begon. Nederlandse onderzoekers in de ban van spijkerschrift, hiërogliefen en aardewerk*. Uitgave n.a.v. het 75-jarig bestaan van het NINO. Leiden, 2014, p. VIII.