

Meeting NINO library users with Karel van der Toorn (President Curator NINO), Erik Jan Zürcher (Curator NINO, charged with negotiations NINO library-UBL), 6 July 2017: short report

Van der Toorn gave a short (simplified) explanation on the financial background of NINO: *for many years NINO was funded directly by the Ministry of Education. Several decades ago, the Ministry decided to instead give the NINO budget to Leiden University; the University has continued directing this non-earmarked budget to NINO without cuts. The budget does not increase and is rather tight. Until now NINO has successfully maintained a near-complete library. Ca. 83% of the NINO budget is used for personnel costs. This makes the institute vulnerable.*

The Board of the NINO Foundation (officially named "Curatorium") has decided to adopt the basic agreement between NINO-UL-RMO, and flesh out the specifics during the coming months, so that the new, closer cooperation agreement can be signed and will start governing relations between NINO, UL and RMO from 1 January 2018 onwards.

NINO keeps ownership of its current book collections and of its clay tablet collection (the Böhl Collection). Care for these collections will be taken over by Leiden University and the National Museum of Antiquities, respectively. A special wing of Leiden University Library will be designed to house a new Middle Eastern Library, of which the NINO library will be part. The library budget will be doubled, the books will be in open shelf and open stack. Negotiations between NINO (Anita Keizers, librarian, and Erik Jan Zürcher) and the UB (Kurt De Belder) have started this week.

NINO will spend much less money on personnel costs, staff will be employed by Leiden University. The money thus freed up, ca. € 300.000, will be used to create a research institute (PhD researchers, visiting professors, small travel funds etc.). This will in turn instigate a national research school for the Ancient Near East.

Many people present were concerned that the conditions at the UB will be favourable at first, but quickly evaporate. The NINO books will disappear into closed stacks after 5 or 10 years.

The devil is in the details. NINO needs to carefully negotiate shelf space, access etc. NINO is working to get conditions in the agreement that makes sure the institute and its library will continue existing in the long term.

Legal status of NINO: NINO will remain a foundation; it will become a closer part of UL organisation and administration, but even though the NINO library is kept in UBL the institute will keep a national function. The NINO Board has actively sought closer cooperation with RMO because the museum also has a national function. The research school is something new and should have impact on a national level. Caroline Waerzeggers and Olaf Kaper will develop a plan for the research school.

Petra de Bruijn mentioned there is a budget available for national research schools, provided several Dutch universities acknowledge its necessity and are willing to contribute. PhD's are usually paid with separate funding.

RMO will partner in NINO's publication program; the specifics will be fleshed out during the coming months. UBL has also expressed interest in housing the clay tablets.

Ben Haring strongly objected to the way things have been handled until now. This matter is much larger than NINO, it concerns UL teaching and research. The involvement of NINO users should not be limited to this meeting. There should be meetings with UL staff members, PhD students etc. The conditions need to be on paper and open for input before the deal with UL and RMO is finalised.

Many others agreed that they were offended by the lack of transparency and taken by surprise at the speed of the decision-taking. Several students and graduates voiced their dismay vehemently.

Karel van der Toorn offered his apologies for not involving anyone outside the NINO Board in the discussions leading up to the decision to adopt the concept agreement.

The agreement proposal is put on the NINO website (<http://www.nino-leiden.nl/message/closer-collaboration-nino-with-leiden-university-and-the-national-museum-of-antiquities>) and user committees are formed for three subjects: the library, the tablets and the formation of the research institute. Ultimate decisions are taken by the NINO Board. Jan Gerrit Dercksen is in charge of the library committee, the other two to be decided.

Jan Just Witkam urged NINO to look at other institutes that have been merged with or transferred to UBL. UBL has done this several times; NINO needs to look at the examples. How reliable have the agreements between similar institutes and UBL proven so far? As a stable organisation NINO has been left as the last institute to be moved to UBL. Zürcher took the advice and stated he is looking at the new Asian Library to learn lessons.

Because of the impending renovations leading to the new Humanities Campus, NINO will be relocated in ca. five years. The deal between NINO and UL needs to be made now, so NINO can have a say in the actual design of the library and workspaces in the new building. The NINO library and offices will be housed in Cluster Zuid, which will be entirely renovated and physically linked to the UBL building.

Some specifics concerning collection specialists, book placement system and accessibility in open shelf/open stack were discussed. UBL uses the Library of Congress classification system, NINO has its own thematic classification system. NINO is to keep its visibility within UBL, but will have to start using the LC system.

Joint ownership of new library acquisitions (starting from January 2018) is different from other institutes, where new acquisitions become property of UBL, and will give NINO some leverage.

The Netherlands Institute in Turkey (subsidiary of NINO) has its own budget within the NINO budget. NIT has secured additional sources of income: housing at Koç University, and additional budget from Leiden University for a teaching program in Turkish studies. NIT will pursue its own future without a formal link to NINO. The Institute in Istanbul has started moving towards focussing on modern Turkey some time ago. NINO will continue to finance NIT for the next few years; after that it will be separate and keep its part of the budget.

There will be a new meeting with the NINO library users in September 2017. Meanwhile the three committees will gather and convey input to the NINO Board.

(Notes taken by Carolien van Zoest, 6-7-2017)