

### 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 90<sup>th</sup> 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*<sup>2</sup>. 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*<sup>2</sup> 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*<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>) 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.