

From the NINO archives: Selected memories from 75 years of NINO

Carolien van Zoest & Sebastiaan Berntsen

In 2014 NINO celebrated its 75th anniversary. The Institute's archives proved a rich source of information on its early years, painting a picture of an almost forgotten past. How did it all begin?

Establishment of the Institute

Seventy-five years ago, on 17 August 1939, three gentlemen visited a notary in The Hague and signed the foundation charter of the “Netherlands Archaeological-philological Institute for the Near East”. The institute, soon to be known under the abbreviation NINO, aimed “to promote all academic disciplines relating to the ancient cultures of the Near East. It envisages the notion of ‘archaeological’ to encompass a broad range, as is usual in France a.o. (Institut de France, Collège de France), where ‘archaeology’ is taken to include ‘inscriptions et belles lettres’.” The comparison with archaeological colleges abroad indicates that the lack of a similar institute in the Netherlands was sharply felt. Initiator Arie A. Kampman (1911-1977) had established the Westasian-Egyptian Society “Ex Oriente Lux” six years prior. The Society, still active today with branches throughout the Netherlands and Flanders, was created to organise lectures, courses and meetings on the ancient Near East for a broad public – not only scholars and students. One of EOL's goals from its inception was the establishment of a scientific institute in the Netherlands for the academic study of ancient Near Eastern history, cultures and languages. This dream now became reality.

Leiden was the obvious choice of location for the new institute. Its University boasts a long and

illustrious tradition in oriental studies; add the presence of the National Museum of Antiquities with its magnificent Egyptian collection, and Leiden clearly stands out as the Dutch centre for the study of the Near East and Egypt. Suitable housing in a spacious town house was realised through generous financial aid by C.H.J. van Haeften Esq., who co-signed the foundation charter and joined the institute's Curatorium (Board of Governors). The founders now finally had space for the book collection they had been striving to form – an important impediment to the study of the ancient Near East was the lack of a specialised library. Between the University Library and the Museum's library, many relevant publications in the rapidly expanding field were unavailable in Leiden, and so could only be consulted by those who could afford to purchase them. University professors were usually able to form their own libraries, but many students and others were less fortunate. EOL had started collecting books and journals – mainly through exchange for its own publications – which were made available to its members and patrons. Judging by his numerous letters to institutes all over the world, keeper-librarian Kampman intensified his efforts to acquire as many relevant publications as possible at the best prices in the months leading up to the official establishment of the institute. In August of 1939 he wrote to Professor Jean Capart, Director of the Egyptological Foundation “Reine Elisabeth” in Brussels:

“I have the honour to announce that the Society “Ex Oriente Lux” is to open a Dutch Archaeological Institute for the Near East in Leiden in October

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Fig. 3. The houses at 4a and 6a Noordeindsplein where NINO was housed for over forty years (photo R.J. Demarée, 2008).



Fig. 4. The NINO library at Noordeindsplein in 1940 or 1941. *NINO archive*.



Fig. 5. Kampman speaking at his retirement in 1974. On the wall of the library/lecture room are pictures of historic and contemporary scholars in oriental studies – including a photograph of Böhl. *NINO archive*.

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of this year. The institute (...) will comprise two sections: 1st. Egyptological section (Director: Prof. Dr A. de Buck; Keeper: abbé Jozef M.A. Janssen); 2nd. Westasian section (Director: Prof. Dr F.M.Th. Böhl; Keepers: A.A. Kampman for Hittitology and B.A. van Proosdij for Assyriology). A library will be housed in the institute containing books and journals regarding the Near East, as well as the Leiden Collection of Cuneiform Inscriptions, including a few Egyptian pieces. In addition there will be room to study and board for foreign colleagues who wish to spend some time in Leiden.

The Governing Board has appointed me Keeper-Librarian, so that I am now charged to have a somewhat adequate library ready by October, to be extended whenever funds allow.”

Next is a polite request for a discount on some publications from Brussels, and a proposal to cooperate at organising lectures. In how far this library was filling a gap is clear from a letter from Kampman to a friend and colleague in Prague, July 1939: many journals are unavailable in Leiden, making it impossible for him to retrieve the publishers’ addresses. He encloses a list of titles and asks his correspondent to supply addresses and subscription rates.

Fifties and sixties: initiatives and expansion

The houses on Noordeindsplein

Shortly after the Institute moved into 4a, Noordeindsplein, its lay-out is described as follows:

“(…) On the first floor is the library room, fourteen metres long, with a dais and provisions for projection of images, so the room can also serve as a lecture room for up to 80 persons. The office of the Keeper of the Assyriology section is also on this floor. On the second floor is the Assyriology room, as well as the Curatorium room and the administrative office. On the third floor is the caretaker’s home. Two nice rooms have been separated on this floor and are used as boarding rooms for guests. The whole house has central heating, the boarding rooms have running water, and there is a guest bathroom. In the garden is a small historic pavilion, built in 1825, that can be used in summer for classes and small meetings. Two rooms in the house are sublet to the Westasian-Egyptian Society [EOL].”

Later the adjacent house at number 6a was added, and, in the words of prof. Veenhof: “Because the Faculty of Humanities had insufficient space to accommodate the increasing number of students in the 1950ies, the different departments were housed in many different houses and buildings in the centre of Leiden. The University rented space from NINO for the Assyriology department, including use of the library. This was an indispensable facility for the Assyriologists, as the University Library left the acquisition of publications in this field increasingly to NINO, that had also incorporated the older EOL library. Furthermore, NINO held the collection of ca. 2500 cuneiform tablets – highly important for research and teaching in Assyriology – that were brought together by Prof. De Liagre Böhl in his ‘Assyriological Workroom’. One floor and a half in the house [at no. 6a] was [from 1963 onwards]

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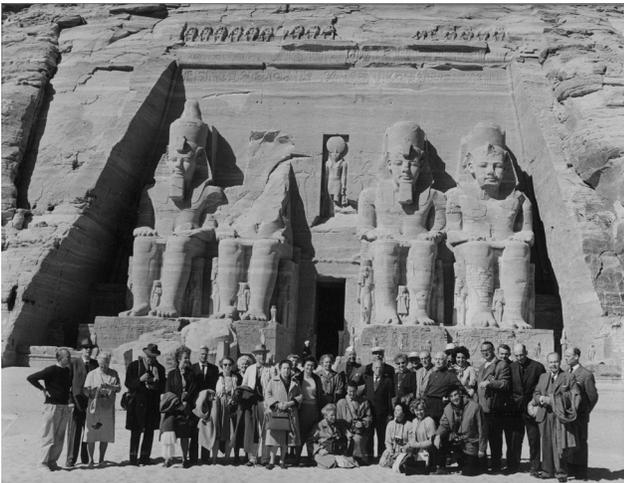


Fig. 6. A tour group from NINO poses at the large temple of Abu Simbel, January 1964 – months before UNESCO started dismantling and moving the monument. *NINO archive.*

rented by the University's Egyptology department. De Buck's library, acquired by NINO, was housed here; there was also a project room for the Coffin Texts, an academic inheritance from De Buck." The library had grown over the years and books were placed in different rooms in the Institute. We see the library room with its dais and the back garden as a background in several group portraits taken at festive occasions, such as the ten-year anniversary celebrations of EOL. With the addition of no. 6a, there were now six boarding rooms on the top floor, that were rented to students and (foreign) colleagues who paid longer or shorter visits to Leiden. The caretaker and his wife were still living in. Visitors to the NINO library were expected to ring the doorbell and wait for the caretaker to remotely open the front door. Kampman, who was now director and held this position for many years, presided over the NINO and EOL activities from his office in the front room on the first floor of no. 6a.

International meetings and travels

The first two international Assyriologists' meetings took place in the summers of 1950 and 1951 respectively, in Paris. Kampman proposed to organise the third *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in Leiden in 1952, as a tribute to Prof. De Liagre Böhl who celebrated his 70th birthday that year. The Assyriologists assembled in Paris accepted the proposal. To the programme of lectures and meetings, touristic excursions in and around Leiden were added, and of course there was a reception in the Institute. The first issue of *Bibliotheca Orientalis* volume 1952, dedicated to

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Böhl, was presented to him at the opening of the conference.

Renewed by-laws of the Institute mentioned the aim to organise trips to the Near East lead by academic specialists. The first trip under the aegis of NINO was a journey to Egypt, led by Professor De Buck, with 22 participants from among the members of EOL. The group left by train to Venice on 31 December 1954, where they boarded a ship to Alexandria. The principal monuments in the Nile Valley and the Fayum were visited, and a tour of Saqqara was given by Dr A. Klasens who was excavating there. The journey to and from Egypt took five to six days each way, so only two and a half week could be spent visiting antiquities.

Further organised trips went by airplane. In 1956 a grand tour of Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan and Palestine was led by Kampman. A second trip to Egypt – including a visit to Klasens' excavation in Nubia, part of the international Nubian rescue campaign – took place in 1964. The following year there was again a trip to Egypt. In 1966 a trip was organised to Iran (often still called "Persia" in correspondence).

In the 1950ies and 1960ies the Middle East was not yet a mass tourism destination. Travel, even to Egypt, was still expensive. This sort of trip was mostly undertaken by the well-to-do, and the participants lists of the above mentioned trips clearly reflect it. Some participants were members of the Curatorium, and/or university professors, diplomats, and members of the nobility. They travelled in relative luxury and stayed in the better

hotels; sometimes the local museum director or head of antiquities would give a tour of some special location. In Beirut a group was received by the Dutch *chargé d'affaires*, in the presence of the Lebanese president and a number of high officials. In Damascus they were invited to a dinner by the Pakistani ambassador. The Institute's trips were highly valued by the participants, but the travel program was eventually discontinued. The Middle East came within reach of a larger public, and with more and more travel agencies offering a variety of possibilities, this was no longer a task for the Institute.

Seventies and eighties: start of a new era

Kampman retires

For over thirty years Kampman employed numerous activities at and for NINO: he served as director from 1955 onwards, as editor-in-chief for *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, as agent for the Scholten Fund, and as (acting) director of the subsidiary institute in Istanbul. He combined this with activities for EOL and with teaching at a secondary school in Schiedam and at Istanbul University. Maintaining innumerable relations with colleagues, and in diplomatic circles, often led to exchange of publications, speakers, favourable attitude from decision makers, etc. He travelled often: to the Institute in Istanbul, to other countries in the Middle East, as a tour guide or without a tour group, and on several school trips to Italy with students from Schiedam. The Netherlands-Iran Society was

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founded by Kampman as well as its annual journal *Persica* (starting from 1963). One has the impression that his private and professional life were intertwined to a high degree. When he reached retirement age in the early 1970ies, he had great difficulty letting go of the Institute in Leiden and its subsidiary in Istanbul. He initially stayed on as editor-in-chief of *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, which proved somewhat impractical, as he had moved to the south of the Netherlands. Only in August 1976 he stepped down, not long before he passed away in 1977.

New management, new developments

The new director, Dr E.J. (Emeri) van Donzel (1925-) was appointed in 1974. For many years he was the driving force behind the publication of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the authoritative reference work on islam and related cultures (2nd edition, 12 volumes). Among his further publications are editions of Arabic and Ethiopian texts, and studies on the history of Ethiopia in the 16th-17th century.

Several decades before, the aim of the Institutes in Leiden and Istanbul had been phrased with an emphasis on library and documentation services, i.e. supporting academic research – independently carrying out research was not mentioned in the original by-laws of 1939. In practice this soon changed, as scholars employed at the institutes' libraries and publications were expected to continue their own studies. The position of Dr. C. (Kees) Nijland (1928-) was the first to officially include a part-time research component. Though Van Donzel was compelled to remark: "Management of the institutes, an extensive publishing program,

and maintaining a large, specialised library leave little room for scholarly research", the trend was nevertheless continued and expanded. The task descriptions of the Leiden director and conservator, and of the Istanbul director, included and still include a research component.

The ties with Leiden University as well as the Ministry of Education grew closer during these years: the Institutes started to send yearly reports for approval. When the new management and procedures were introduced, the Institute had reached out to the Ministry, resulting in a revision of the flow of funds. It was further arranged that Institute staff would have the same terms and benefits of employment as University staff.

Electronic resources were gaining importance, and NINO recognised the need to adapt. In the early 1980ies the library catalogue was digitised, meaning that all titles on the existing index cards had to be typed out – a huge work, that took several years to complete. The choice was made to join PICA, the system that Leiden University Library had also adopted, thus ensuring that NINO's library items could be easily found by all researchers and students at Leiden University – before the introduction of the World Wide Web this was no matter of course. Innovations were also implemented in the publishing process: the Institute now possessed a machine that could process manuscripts into digital texts, designated as the "MK composer" or simply "the computer". Text files were saved onto magnetic cards; the appliance was an early intermediate between an electric typewriter and a word processor. Since the

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end of the 1970ies the annual *Anatolica* issues, as well as many *PIHANS* volumes, were typeset using this machine.

The move to Witte Singel

As early as the 1950ies Leiden University had expressed the wish to house all the departments and sections that made up the Faculty of Humanities, as well as the University Library, in one large compound. A number of academic but non-university institutes were involved in the project, including NINO. After long preparations, building of the complex at Witte Singel started by the end of the seventies. The Faculties of Theology and Philosophy also found a home here, as well as the Faculty of Archaeology, created later (and recently moved to a separate location). Several departments and institutes possessed their own libraries, and the buildings were adapted for their use. For instance, stock rooms for the Institute's publications – complete with a separate loading entrance – were built in for NINO, as well as library space, and a vault for the Böhl Collection. The Institute moved in in 1982.

As director Van Donzel put it, in an interview with a local newspaper: “At Noordeindeplein we mostly existed for people who were already acquainted with us.” Nowadays, NINO is more readily found – in Leiden, on the internet, and in the thoughts and memories of many colleagues.

This article is a translation of a few excerpts from the chapter on NINO's history in the jubilee volume “Waar de geschiedenis begon” (see p. 57).



Fig. 7. Dr C. Nijland and Dr E.J. van Donzel at the inauguration of the director's room in the new Witte Singel building (photo J. Holvast, 1984).