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NIASD NEWSLETTER SPRING 2010

We are happy to inform you about the activities which have recently taken place at the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD).

1. Science and Education

Lecture by Dr. Joshka Wessels 'Acequias and Qanats: a History' (1 February 2010)

In the evening of February 1st, 2010, the NIASD organized a Water Program with various elements, some of which will also be covered in the sections culture and co-operation of this newsletter. Dr. Joshka Wessels, who obtained her PhD at the University of Amsterdam in 2008 on collective action for the rehabilitation of traditional water tunnel systems (qanats) in Syria, gave an overview of the history of the Acequias and Qanat water systems in various parts of the world including Syria, Oman, Iraq, Iran and Spain. During her lecture, Dr. Wessels also showed parts of her (recent) documentaries about these water systems.



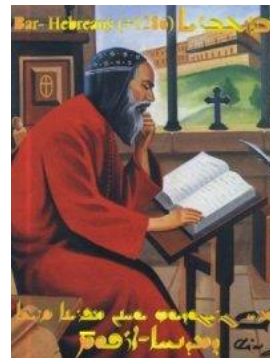
Lecture by Dr. Jesper Eidem 'Qala'at Halwanji – a bronze age fortress in Northern Syria' (22 February 2010)

Dr. Jesper Eidem, director of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East in Leiden (the Netherlands), gave a lecture on the results of a 2008-2009 Syrian-Danish excavation at Qala'at Halwanji, a 5 hectare fortress in Northern Syria. Recent sondages there revealed well-preserved ruins of a Middle Bronze Age II level (18th century BC) burnt down in antiquity. Dr. Eidem is Danish and was formerly based at the University of Copenhagen as an archaeologist.



Lecture by Prof. dr. Herman Teule 'Ibn al'Ibri, Syrian Orthodox Bishop of Aleppo (1226-1286) and his interpretation of Abu Hamed al-Ghazali' (28 April 2010)

Professor of Eastern Christianity at the Radboud University Nijmegen (the Netherlands) and Louvain University (Belgium), Dr. Herman Teulen, spoke about the Syrian-orthodox Bishop of Aleppo and later patriarchal Vicar in Iraq (Mafrian), Ibn al-Ibrî (or Bar'Ebrôyô in Syriac), who was one of the original Christian thinkers of Middle Eastern Christianity in the 13th century. He studied philosophy in Tripoli and medicine at the Bimaristan Nuri in Damascus under the leadership of the physician Jamâl al-Dîn Ibn al-Rahbî al-Dimashqî. He is the author of an important corpus of writings in the field of historiography, science, philosophy and theology. In his lecture Prof. Dr. Teule focused on Ibn al-Ibrî's interpretation of Islamic scholar Ghazâlî's Ihyâ' 'ulûm al-dîn and his openness towards a 'spiritual Islam'.



Cooperation Agreement between Damascus University and University of Groningen signed by the President of Damascus University (29 March 2010)

At the end of March 2010 the cooperation agreement between Damascus University and the University of Groningen on small scale student research exchanges in the fields of media and culture was signed by the president of Damascus University, Dr. Wael Mualla. At the moment of writing this newsletter, the agreement is in Groningen to be signed by university president Prof. Dr. S. Poppema. The NIASD has offered its assistance with implementing this co-operation agreement.

Study visit by Fontys delegation to Yarmouk Private University in Syria prepared by the NIASD (January - April 2010)

During the last couple of months the institute assisted Yarmouk Private University in Syria with arranging contacts with Dutch institutions of higher education with the aim of starting co-operation on quality management and control. Eventually this led to a visit by Fontys University of Applied Sciences to Yarmouk Private University being scheduled for 20-23 April 2010. Unfortunately however, the Fontys representatives could not travel on these dates due to the dust cloud from Iceland. Alternative dates for this visit will now be arranged.

NIASD attracted enough students to run its three 2010 summer courses (January – April 2010)

Since the end of last year the institute promoted its three 2010 summer courses: Arabic, Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture and Intercultural Communication. The first two courses attracted 46 and 21 students respectively, the third course 14. At present the institute is arranging housing for the summer course students and its teachers. The courses will run from 15 July – 10 August 2010 (Arabic), 20 June – 11 July 2010 (Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture) and 27 June – 8 July (Intercultural Communication).

Study in Holland promotion on international education fairs in Damascus (9-11 March 2010) and Beirut (25-28 March 2010)

NIASD free lance Education Advisor, Martijn Leeftink, was present with a Study in Holland promotion stand at EDU international education fair in Damascus from 9 to 11 March 2010, and at Forward Forum in Beirut, Lebanon, from 25 to 28 March 2010. In Beirut, Martijn also gave a Study in Holland presentation at the American University of Beirut. That presentation focused on study programmes in Holland in the fields of water management, hydrology and environmental studies. This presentation was attended by around 20 students.



MENA Scholarship Programme promotion and applicant selection (March 2010)

Upon the request of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the institute assisted in the promotion and the applicant selection of the Mena Scholarship Programme. This programme is an initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is aimed at mid-career professionals in a number of countries including Syria. It offers scholarships for study programs with a duration varying from 3 to 10 weeks, at four specific higher education institutions in the Netherlands (Wageningen International, ITC Enschede, MSM and UNESCO- IHE). In 2010 there are two application deadlines: 1 March and 1 July.

For the 1st March 2010 deadline there were in total 107 applicants. Of these applicants, in total 54 were forwarded to the Netherlands with a recommendation. The Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) together with the higher education institutions providing the courses eventually selected 16 applicants to receive a MENA scholarship.

Interns and research assistance to students (January – May 2010)

During the past few months the institute answered questions from several Dutch students enquiring about the possibility of doing an internship in Syria. One internship project at an English language Syrian daily is about to result from this, even though the details still need to be worked out between the parties concerned. Furthermore, the NIASD assisted Dutch student Jacolien van der Sar of the University of Amsterdam with collecting her tourism research data, by assisting her to join a number of tourist groups of several Syrian travel agencies.



Assistance with various Dutch study trips to Syria (January – May 2010)

The NIASD gave study trip program advice to a group headed by Bert Schreuder who came to Syria in April 2010 and met with Astrid Rijbroek on the 13th of April 2010. At the end of April 2010, a group of 18 students under guidance of Prof. dr. Herman Teule and assisted by Arabist dr. Gert Borg of Radboud University Nijmegen arrived in Syria for a study trip from 29 April to 9 May 2010 focusing on Eastern Christianity. For this group the NIASD not only arranged hotels and transportation but also meetings with relevant persons in Syria. Please find below two impressions of participants of this study trip.

“After a long period of preparation in The Netherlands, we finally arrived in Syria on the 29th of April. We spent our first day visiting several Christian churches in the old city of Damascus: the Armenian, the Syrian Orthodox and the Melkite church. Also along the straight street, the street where St Paul stayed in the house of Ananias, we visited many churches all of different denominations. I was pleasantly surprised about the easy and warm atmosphere in the Shiite mosque of Sayyida Zeinab. In particular I was touched by the solidarity between the women in the mosque.”



“Syria is a beautiful country with a lot of Christian bible-history and history of Islam. We visited a lot of different churches and patriarchates. The mix of cultures, languages, peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and religions was both amazing and fascinating. It was interesting to experience how Christians and Muslims have contact with each other. This we saw in particular at the Al Ard project 20 kilometers south-west of Homs and in the monastery of Mar Mousa. I was happy to be in area and environment where Abraham, important for both Christians and Muslims, once lived.”

Furthermore the NIASD assisted in arranging a study trip for 13 students and former students with art historian Prof. Dr. Machiel Kiel, formerly with Utrecht University. This trip is to take place from 23 May to 2 June 2010.

Courses Dutch (January – March 2010)

In the period January – March 2010 two courses Dutch were delivered by teacher Mrs. Trees ‘t Hooft to groups of respectively 12 students (beginner I level) and 6 students (beginner II level). In addition a tailor made course Dutch was delivered by Mrs. Johanna van Eeuwijk for in total three Arabic employees of the Dutch Embassies in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi and of the Dutch Consulate-General in Dubai.



Sculpture Workshop at the NIASD by sculptor Ida Kleiterp (1 February 2010)



On the day of the opening of her Acequias exhibition at the NIASD, Dutch sculptor Ida Kleiterp gave a workshop for a group of in total 15 Syrian students of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Damascus University. Ida said:

“The highlight of my stay was the workshop with students of the sculpture department of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus. With a lot of help from the NIASD assistants we had a very inspiring day. To warm up, we began with a PowerPoint presentation showing my sculptures and work process and explaining what I call the Acequias trail (www.acequias.eu). In the afternoon, the students created their own collages which were later displayed in the institute library”



Documentary making workshop at the NIASD by Rob Rombout (13-15 April 2010)



In the week of the NIASD film programme, a Documentary Making workshop was delivered at the institute as well, by Dutch documentary film maker Rob Rombout. In this workshop, which covered both the writing and directing of documentary film, 16 persons participated (14 Syrian, 1 Lebanese, 1 Iraqi).

Course Archaeological Pottery Research at Damascus University (11-15 April 2010)

Leiden University's dr. Bram van As, mr. Loe Jacobs and dr. Olivier Nieuwenhuyse delivered for third consecutive year their Archaeological Pottery Research Course at Damascus University for a group of students of the department of Archaeology. This course is supported by the institute.



Culture

NIASD Film Program 2010: “Amsterdam; City of Art” (13-15 April 2010)

With an average of 30 visitors at each screening, the first part of the NIASD Film Program 2010 titled ‘Amsterdam; City of Art’ was a success. The documentary ‘Amsterdam via Amsterdam’ was introduced by its maker Rob Rombout. After the screening an enthusiastic audience asked Rob Rombout questions about his film. The two other films were ‘The New Rijksmuseum’ (a documentary about the problematic renovation of Holland’s Rijksmuseum) and Peter Greenaway’s ‘Rembrandt’s J’Accuse’ (about the intrigues and conspiracies hidden in ‘The Nightwatch’). In addition, the experimental and artistic short films ‘Fence’ and ‘Reef’ were screened. The second of the NIASD Film Program 2010 will take place from 29 June until 1 July 2010.



Water Program: Acequias Exhibition by Dutch sculptor Ida Kleiterp (1 February 2010)

Dutch sculptor Ida Kleiterp came to Syria with her art works inspired by the ancient water channel systems known under various names including acequias. These water systems are still in use in several parts of the world, including Syria. For the background of Ida Kleiterp’s Acequias project, please visit www.acequias.eu. The acequias exhibition took place in the institute in the context of a wider water program with various elements, including the lecture by Dr. Joshka Wessels, the photograph exhibition by Adel Samara and the interview on the Syrian Dutch Water Co-operation Project.



Water Program: Exhibition photographs Adel Samara ‘WATER: Such A Big Deal’ (1 February 2010)

In the context of the Water Program on 1 February 2010, photographer Adel Samara exhibited a number of his photographs in the NIASD. His photographs covered several environmental aspects of modern Syria with a focus on the renowned Barada river.



NIASD partner in EU financed project (whole 2010)

Under the Local and Regional Cultural Activities scheme of the Delegation of the European Commission to Syria, the project "Cultural Participation for Heritage Regeneration" is funded by the delegation of the European Union to Syria and by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Syria. The project is coordinated by The Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) in partnership with the Syrian NGO the Art Renaissance Association, the Netherlands Institute of Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD) and the Danish Institute in Damascus (DID). In this project several activities are scheduled to take place in the course of 2010.

Until now the call for submission for “Art in the city: Competition for the design of art works in open public spaces” and the call for submission for “Brid-ging the gap: Cultural Heritage and Educational Resources, Competition for the design of educational activities” were launched. Furthermore the seminar “Innovative methods for the transfer of knowledge on heritage” took place at the IFPO on the 24th of April.



Co-operation

Water Program: public interview by Francesca de Châtel with Dr. Wael Seif on the Syrian-Dutch Water Co-operation Project (1 February 2010)



During the Water Program at the institute on 1 February 2010 attention was given to the recently prolonged co-operation project between Syria and the Netherlands in the field of water management. This was done in the form of a public

interview in the central room of the institute, conducted by Dutch journalist and water specialist Francesca de Châtel with Dr. Wael Seif, the Syrian representative of this co-operation project. The interview highlighted the results of the previous phase of the co-operation project and addressed issues which will be covered in the new phase.

Institutional

To-be-established Netherlands Institutes in Beirut and Amman (January – May 2010)

On the 1st of April 2010 a new foundation was established in the Netherlands which covers the to-be-established Netherlands institutes in Beirut and Amman in addition to the already existing institute in Damascus. The Dutch official documents needed in the Lebanese and Jordanian registration procedures are presently being legalized in the Netherlands.

Astrid Rijbroek remains director of the institute in Damascus and has been appointed Regional Coordinator of the Netherlands Institutes in Damascus, Beirut and Amman. Taco van der Zwaag has been appointed director of the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Beirut and Deputy-Regional Coordinator of the Netherlands Institutes in Damascus, Beirut and Amman. As of the 1st of May 2010 he can be reached through the following email address: director@ni-beirut.org. The director of the to-be-established Netherlands Institute in Amman still needs to be appointed. Finally Ruben Elsinga has been appointed deputy director of the Netherlands Institute in Damascus.