

IN MEMORIAM

J. T. P. de Bruijn (1931–2023) The bird of Time completes its round

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A Doyen of Persian Studies

Johannes Thomas Pieter de Bruijn was born on 12 July 1931 in Leiden, and died on Monday, 23 January 2023, in Voorhout, the Netherlands. He studied Semitic languages, and Islam and Persian and Turkish as minors, at Leiden University. From 1954 to 1960 he collaborated in the *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane* project, which was published under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam. He also contributed to the editing of the English version of Jan Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature*, which was published in Dordrecht in 1968. From 1960 to 1963, he was curator of the Middle Eastern department at the Dutch National Museum of Ethnology. In 1964 he joined the staff of Leiden University, where he took the chair of Persian in 1988. He built up a Persian department that included expertise on Shiism and modern Persian literature, and created a documentation center for modern Iran, under the directorship of the late Kamil Banak.

De Bruijn will be chiefly known for his erudition on classical Persian poetry, especially religious poetry. His name is linked with that of the great poet Ḥakīm Sanāʾī (d. 1131), as he spent many years of his active scholarship on this epoch-making poet. He wrote a seminal monograph on Sanāʾī's life and work, entitled *Of Piety and Poetry*, which has also been

translated into Persian.¹ De Bruijn was an authority on Sanā'ī, the religious context in which he lived, and the early period of Persian poetry. In addition to its meticulous literary analyses, this study unravels the convoluted history of the *Ḥadiqa*, the *Dīvān*, the short *mathnavi* poems, and the poet's tumultuous life. De Bruijn's monograph is often cited not merely for subjects related to Sanā'ī but also for the Saljuq period and for Persian poetry, as it offers original insights into religious poetry and the relationship between poetry, religion, and politics.

As he was an expert in Persian mystical poetry, Curzon Press invited him to write a book on Persian Sufi poetry, which he published under the same title, *Persian Sufi Poetry*. Whereas his *Of Piety and Poetry* was a book chiefly intended for a scholarly audience, *Persian Sufi Poetry* is a book for scholars, students, and anyone interested in mystical poetry and Sufism in the broadest sense.² This slim book of 142 pages displays De Bruijn's talent for explaining complex theological and philosophical material to a broad public without compromising his scholarly analysis. Devoting each chapter to a poetic form, he examines a rich constellation of themes, genres, doctrines, and motifs that are essential to understanding the nature of Persian mystical poetry. Rich in analyses and kaleidoscopic in contents, yet small in size, the book is an ideal course book on the subject.

In addition, De Bruijn collaborated with the late Ehsan Yarshater, first as an adviser and contributor to *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and later as a vice-chair and editor of the 20-volume *History of Persian Literature*. His entries for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* cover Persian literature, the history of oriental studies, and Persian manuscripts. Beginning in 1995 he was involved with planning and implementing the *History of Persian Literature* project, working closely with Yarshater. De Bruijn edited the first volume of the *History of Persian Literature* and contributed chapters to other volumes. Several of these chapters have the scope of books. His outstanding chapter on the Persian ghazal offers an indispensable survey of the genre in Persian literature, a model of how to analyze Persian ghazals, how these poems can be approached as texts for religious and secular rituals, and why they became a central poetic form in Persian and, under Persian influence, in other Islamic literatures.³

Another collaboration that certainly deserves to be mentioned here is his contribution to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition (1970–2005). He was involved with this *Encyclopaedia* project for a long time as an executive member, but also as a regular contributor. He published articles on Persian culture, literature, religions, and history. Several of his contributions to this invaluable *Encyclopaedia* are so comprehensive that they could easily be a book, such as his entry on "Iran." Some of his contributions, such as "Masraḥ (in Iran)," "Mukhtārāt," and "Muṣannifak," are less well-known to students of Persian studies. His commitment to this *Encyclopaedia* is evident with his contribution to the third edition.

De Bruijn also contributed to Khayyām studies. An active member of the *Dutch Omar Khayyām Society*, almost from its beginning on 17 February 1990, he always presented a paper at the biannual gatherings and wrote articles on various aspects of Khayyām's reception in European and especially Dutch culture. Among his articles, mention should be made

¹ *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Ḥakīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill/De Goeje Stichting, 1983), 300 pp. The Persian translation is entitled *Ḥakīm-i iqlīm-i 'ishq. Ta'thīr-i mutaḡābil-i dīn va adabiyāt dar zindigī va āthār-i Ḥakīm Sanā'ī-yi Ghaznavī*, trans. Mahyār 'Alavī-Muqaddam and Muḡammad Javād Mahdavi (Mashhad: Bunyād-i pazhūhishhā-yi islāmī-yi Āstān-i Quds-i Raḡavī, 1378 /1999); revised translation *Az sharf va shī'r: ta'thīr-i mutaḡābil-i dīn va adabiyāt dar zindigī va āthār-i Ḥakīm Sanā'ī-yi Ghaznavī*, trans. Mahyār 'Alavī-Muqaddam and Muḡammad Javād Mahdavi (Tehran: Hermes, 1400/2022).

² *Persian Sūfī Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1997). For a Persian translation see *Shī'r-i Sūfīyāna-yi fārsī*, trans. Majd al-Dīn Keyvānī (Tehran: Nashr-i Markaz, 1378/1999).

³ J. T. P. de Bruijn, "The Ghazal in Medieval Persian Poetry," in *A History of Persian Literature: Persian Lyric Poetry in the Classical Era 800–1500: Ghazals, Panegyrics and Quatrains*, vol. 2, ed. E. Yarshater, 315–487 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019). For a review of the book see A. Korangy, "Review of General Introduction to Persian Literature, ed. J. T. P. De Bruijn," in *International Journal of Persian Literature*, 1, no. 1 (2016): 195–200.

of his analytical survey of the sources used by Dutch poets such as L. H. Leopold (1865–1925) and P. C. Boutens (1870–1943). He also sought to expand interest in *Rubā'iyāt*, to include other Persian poets whose extraordinary qualities deserved more public attention. To illustrate his point, he published a Dutch translation of 100 quatrains under the title *De ware zin heeft niemand nog verstaan* (the title being the translation of Khayyām's line: کس مینزند دمی در این (معنی راست) in which sixty-eight quatrains were by Khayyām and thirty-two by other poets.⁴ In this way, De Bruijn wanted to show general readers that there were Persian quatrain authors other than Khayyām. Almost all of the essays he has written on Khayyām are unfortunately in Dutch, covering various aspects of the translation history of 'Umar Khayyām in Dutch literature.

De Bruijn as a Translator

De Bruijn was an able translator in both English and Dutch. His English translations of Persian poetry can be found in his scholarly articles, chapters, and monographs. The chapters he has written for several volumes of the *History of Persian Literature* are gems of scholarship studded with many splendid specimens of Persian poetry. Modest as he was, he used to say that his translations were just means to reflect the meanings of the original Persian and possessed no literary value, but these translations were executed with much care and attention. His Dutch translations are splendid both in style and in conveying the Persian spirit to the Dutch reader. His rendering of Sa'dī's monumental *Rose-Garden* (*Gulistān*) is matchless.⁵ The genius of this translation shows itself in the opening lines in which De Bruijn imitates the mesmerizing rhyming prose of Sa'dī in modern Dutch. Sa'dī was certainly his favorite classical poet, as he devoted his valedictory lecture to this Persian sage.⁶ Whereas his inaugural lecture entitled *De Ontdekking van het Perzisch* (The discovery of Persian), delivered on 9 March 1990, elaborates upon the role of the Persian language and intellectual tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his valedictory lecture entitled *Een Perzisch handschrift in Leiden* (A Persian manuscript in Leiden), delivered on 26 January 1996, concentrates on Sa'dī. Here he investigates the fascinating life of a manuscript of Sa'dī's *Rose-Garden*. De Bruijn explains how Austrian soldiers took the manuscript as war booty from the Ottoman army in a fortress named Cotuss in Hungary in 1566, and how after a long journey it ended up at Leiden University Library, to be numbered in the oriental collection as Or 242.

De Bruijn also published an anthology of Persian poetry under the title *Een karavaan uit Perzië* (A caravan from Persia; 2002, with reprints in 2004, 2008, and 2016), starting with Ḥanzala of Bādqeys and ending with the taboo-breaking female poet Furūgh Farrukhzād. I must say that this is an indispensable collection of Persian poetry in Dutch, which exhibits both De Bruijn's poetic virtuosity as a translator and his exceptional scholarly merits. The rich introduction and his explanatory notes display his mastery of medieval Persian culture in all its facets. Readers encounter Persian poetry as an expression of an ancient civilization, expressing the rites and rituals of Persian-speaking people in different domains, from courtly culture to religious ceremonies, in philosophy and ethics, for entertainment and for instruction in religion, medicine, and other fields. De Bruijn also translated modern Persian poetry and prose. He translated a volume of poetry by Manūchīhr Ātashī, and together we published three volumes on the poets Aḥmad Shāmlū, Nādir Nādirpūr, and

⁴ *De ware zin heeft niemand nog verstaan*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 2021).

⁵ Saadi, *De rozentuin*, translated by J. T. P. de Bruijn (Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 1997), 271 pp.; 2nd printing 2005. See my review "De Deur van de 'Sea of Stories' is geopend," in *Soera: Tijdschrift voor het Midden-Oosten* (1997), 38–39.

⁶ *De ontdekking van het Perzisch* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit, 1990), 19 pp. For a Persian translation see "Kashf-i zabān-i pārsī," in *Kilk 27* (Khurdād 1371/1992): 39–53; and the valedictory lecture *Een Perzisch handschrift in Leiden* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit 1996), 22 pp.

Hūshang Ibtihāj.⁷ De Bruijn also translated several Persian short stories, including Gulshīrī's *Fath-nāma-yi Mughān*, which he prepared when the author visited Leiden in 1990.

De Bruijn as a Poet

Few people know that De Bruijn also wrote poetry. His favorite poetic forms were the quatrain and haiku, which are included as an appendix to the collection of essays in his *Pearls of Meanings* published by Leiden University Press in 2020.⁸ His haikus are usually about birds and seasons, and his quatrains have the color of Khayyām's poetry. The following two examples suffice to give an impression:

De vogel Tijd voltooit zijn ronde.
Wij hebben nooit de tijd gevonden
Om af te maken wat nog moest.
Nu zijn ze weg, al die seconden.
The bird of Time completes its round.
We've never found the time
to finish what had to be done.
Now, all those seconds are gone.

And his haiku:

Drijvend in het wak
denken de vogels misschien
aan warme voeten.
Floating in the ice-hole
perhaps the birds are thinking
of warm feet.

History of Oriental Studies

De Bruijn used to say that the history of oriental studies in Europe was his hobby, but he made an academic specialization of this hobby, publishing several outstanding articles on influential European oriental scholars such as Adriaan Reland (1676–1718), Carl Hermann Ethé (1844–1917), Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), and Edward G. Browne (1862–1926).⁹

Appreciation for De Bruijn's Scholarship

De Bruijn's scholarship is internationally recognized and applauded. In addition to several conferences organized in his honor and a Festschrift published in the journal *Persica* in 2001 with thirteen contributions, he has been respected by Iranian people in Iran, as the

⁷ See *Zorgzaam als een nomade*, Vertaald door Hans (J. T. P.) de Bruijn (2010); *Schaduw: Hushang Ebtehādī* (2012); *'Een schipper van was, kleiner dan God': gedichten van Nader Naderpur* (2006); and *Aīda in de spiegel en andere gedichten: Ahmad Shamlu* (2006). All these volumes were published by Quist in Leidschendam.

⁸ J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Pearls of Meanings: Studies on Persian Art, Poetry, Sufism and History of Iranian Studies in Europe*, ed. A. A. Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).

⁹ On these individual scholars, see *Pearls of Meanings*, but also De Bruijn's entries in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.vv. Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph Freiherr von, and Ethé, Carl Hermann; and De Bruijn's "Iranian Studies in the Netherlands," in *Iranian Studies* 20 (1987): 161–77. On Reland see *Orient in Utrecht: Adriaan Reland (1676–1718) Arabist, Cartographer, Antiquarian and Scholar of Comparative Religion*, ed. B. Jaski, C. Lange, A. Pytlowany, and H. J. van Rinsum (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

prestigious Mahmood Afshar prize awarded to him in Tehran in 2006 testifies.¹⁰ During this event several scholars, such as the late Iraj Afshar (1925–2011), Shafi'i Kadkani, Majd al-Din Keyvani and Nasrollah Pourjavady expressed their appreciations of De Bruijn's scholarship for Persian culture. The most recent celebration of his work was organized in Leiden on 10 November 2017, in collaboration with *Shahr-i Kitāb*.¹¹

A Self-Effacing Man

Professor de Bruijn was a privileged man, living with his beloved wife, Anneke, and his children, Thomas and Petra de Bruijn. He created a department at Leiden University together with colleagues Professor Johan ter Haar, Mas'ud Mazgani, Kamil Banak (1942–2004), and Koushyar Parsi, training students at different levels who often did innovative research relating to an aspect of Persianate culture. De Bruijn was a respected colleague in the department, of the faculty, and on the executive and editorial boards of several academic bodies such as *Societas Iranologica Europaea* because of his care about perfection, his pleasant and collegial attitude, and especially because of his integrity. His desire for perfection can also be seen in the way he approached supervising students, from whom he expected meticulous analysis. He guided many students at various levels. As his last PhD student, I feel so privileged to have worked with him.

Having known him for some thirty-three years, I would like to emphasize his integrity, meticulousness, and generosity. There are many examples of his integrity: one is that when he reviewed a book and found mistakes, he would separately send a letter to the author, rather than openly criticizing them. His meticulousness showed in the comments he made on student papers. In addition to correcting the mistakes, he would write several pages, indicating the page and line numbers of inconsistencies. His generosity showed itself in various ways. A most recent gesture was offering his private library to the chair of Persian and Iranian studies at Utrecht University's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. The university library at Utrecht is the fortunate beneficiary of his rich collection of books on Persian literature, religion, Sufism, and history.

He was a true *javān-mard*, a gallant, self-effacing person whose life was to serve others through the dissemination of knowledge about Persian culture and Sufism. I shall deeply miss his smile, his gestures, his humor, and his enthusiasm. I shall especially miss his morally upright attitude and his commitment to students, friends, and colleagues. I shall cherish the uncountable moments we shared as companions. I would like to finish this in memoriam with the following quatrain by Omar Khayyām that we read together just two weeks ago. When I finished reading this Persian quatrain in his own Dutch translation for him, he looked at me with a smile and said, "why do you look so serious!"

گر کار فلک به عدل سنجیده بدی
 احوال فلک جمله پسندیده بدی
 ور عدل بدی بکارها در گردون
 کی خاطر اهل فضل رنجیده بدی

Zou wat de hemelen doen weloverwogen zijn,
 Met hoe het loopt zou men tevreden, allerwegen, zijn.
 Was er maar ergens in het heelal rechtvaardigheid,
 Voor goede mensen zou er niets te klagen zijn.¹²

¹⁰ For a Persian biography of De Bruijn and the lecture he delivered at that ceremony, see Seyed-Gohrab, "Kārnāma-yi ustād De Bruijn," in *14th Award of the Foundation of Dr. Mahmood Afshar, Johannes Thomas Pieter (Hans) de Bruijn* (Tehran: 31 May 2006).

¹¹ I would like to thank Mohammad Yahaghi, Mehdi Firuzan, and Ali-Asghar Mohammad-Khani for their initiative and cooperation in organizing this celebratory event.

¹² *De ware zin heeft niemand nog verstaan*, 28.

If heaven used fair weights, and scales, in all it does,
one would be satisfied with all the heavens do;
If there were only fairness in the whirling Wheel,
how could the learned men be vexed with that?