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## NIASD NEWSLETTER JULY 2009

In this newsletter you will read about the activities which have recently taken place at the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD). In the period May to July 2009 the focal point of the institute's activities was the delivery of our two summer courses: Arabic, and Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture.

### 1. Science and Education

#### *NIASD Summer Course Arabic 2009 (5-30 July 2009)*



From 5 till 30 July the NIASD Summer Course Arabic 2009 was being held. In total 41 students came to Damascus to improve their Arabic language skills. In accordance with their knowledge of Arabic prior to the course as tested in 2 written and 1 oral exam, the students were placed in 6 classes with in total 5 different levels, ranging from Absolute Beginners to Advanced. This

year's summer course was coordinated by the new NIASD freelancer Ruben Elsinga.



Unlike previous years, classes were given both in morning (9:00-13:00) and afternoon (13:15-17:15) blocks. Another innovation in the course was the introduction of weekly exercises and assignments in the city of Damascus, with which the students improved their Arabic language skills in practice. As for the housing of the students, this year the NIASD



provided housing both in rooms in Arabic houses in the Old City, and in studio-like accommodation in Hotel Sands in the neighbourhood of Jeramana. With the introduction of these new



elements in the course content and in the practical arrangements for the students, the institute took a new step in the continuous development and improvement of its Summer Course Arabic.

*NIASD Summer Course Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture 2009 (21 June - 16 July 2009)*

This summer the first edition of the newly developed NIASD Summer Course Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture was delivered at the institute. In this course 17 students participated: 13 Dutch, 1 Norwegian and 3 American. An international team of teachers, headed by Dr. Mat Immerzeel of Leiden University,



delivered the course

lectures and guided the students during excursions at various sites in Damascus and its surroundings. The NIASD meanwhile coordinated all practical arrangements. Housing for the students was provided in 2 Damascene houses in the Old City of Damascus and in 2 apartments.



The course provided an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to Christian and Islamic art and architecture, with particular attention to the Damascus area and with the inclusion of monuments and works of art from Late Antiquity. During the lectures and excursions the students were not only confronted with fine examples of Antique, Christian and Islamic art and architecture, but also studied their interrelations and their social and cultural contexts.

A number of mosques, churches and (for a wider perspective) synagogues in and outside Damascus were visited during the course. Furthermore, excursions were made to places such as the National Museum in





Damascus, Apamea, Deir Mar Musa and Sadnaya. The combination of in-depth academic lectures and articles, the integral approach to Christian and Islamic art and architecture and the direct confrontation with architectural and art-historical artefacts in Syria was very effective and well received by the students. The NIASD intends to run this course again in 2010.

*Sixth and seventh (final) session of the training course Project Development and Management (PDM), organized by the NIASD together with the Danish Institute in Damascus (DID), and delivered by the Maastricht School of Management (10-12 June and 14-15 August 2009)*

Our PDM course continued with its sixth session on 10-12 June 2009 and will be concluded with the final, seventh, session on 14-15 August 2009, both at the Danish Institute in Damascus. The PDM course was initiated and organized by the NIASD and the DID together. The course gave 15 Syrians, working in small to medium sized organizations, the opportunity to improve their skills with regard to the various elements of the so-called project cycle, most notably the drafting of project proposals and the proper management of projects. In total, the course consisted of seven two-to-five day sessions, delivered alternatively at the NIASD and the DID. The long duration of the PDM course allowed it to follow actual projects of the participants in real time at their various project stages.

*Lecture “Royal” Tombs of Third Millennium BC Syria: Excavations at Tell Umm el-Marra’, by Mr. Glenn M. Schwartz (28 May 2009)*

In co-operation with the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums (DGAM), the NIASD presented a lecture by professor of archaeology Glenn M. Schwartz (Department of Near Eastern Studies at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA). Mr Schwartz is co-author, with prof. Peter Akkermans of Leiden University, of the renowned work “The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies (ca. 16,000-300 BC)”.



The topic of the lecture was the excavation at Tell Umm el-Marra in the Jabbul plain (east of Aleppo) which has exposed a large mortuary complex associated with local rulers in the period of Syria’s first urban civilization. Skeletons and artifacts found in the tombs allow the reconstruction of funerary practices and beliefs in unprecedented detail, while nearby structures containing the skeletons of equids (donkeys, horses) and other animals

provide unique evidence of sacrificial rituals accompanying the burial of the illustrious dead. The Umm el-Marra data reveal the importance of ancestor veneration and kin relationships in Syria's first urban civilization elite.

*Promotion of Dutch Higher Education – Marketing 2009 MENA Scholarship Programme (April and July 2009)*

Upon the request of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the NIASD helped to promote and to process applications for the 2009 MENA Scholarship Programme, which had deadlines on 1 April 2009 and 15 July 2009. The programme was promoted through normal post, email and our website. For the 1 April deadline there were 15 applicants, for the 15 July deadline 45 applicants. Of the latter applicants, 28 persons applied for courses at the Maastricht School of Management, 6 for courses at Wageningen International and 11 for courses at the International Institute for Geo-information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) in Enschede, the Netherlands.

*Promotion of Dutch Higher Education – various activities (April – July 2009)*

During the past few months, the Study in Holland information on our website has been updated, preparations have been made for a 'Study in Holland'-event at the NIASD that is to take place in the fall, and a 'Study in Holland'-advertisement has been designed for the important Syrian higher education directory of Shebablik. That advertisement is due to be published in October 2009.

*And furthermore...*

[<> The NIASD arranged for an internship for June-July 2009 for student Soumaya Amjarso (medicine, University of Amsterdam) at the French Hospital in the city of Damascus. <> Following his conference lecture delivered on 5 April at Damascus University under the title "Depraved borderlands. The Representation of Love Affairs Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Contemporary Dutch literature", Sjoerd-Jeroen Moenandar (Groningen University) on 4 June 2009 sent prof. Abboud of Damascus University the revised version of his contribution for publication in a book with all conference contributions <> Following the lecture and tuition fee waiver offer presented in Lattakia on 10 March 2009 by prof.dr. H.E. Haralambides of the Center for Maritime Economics and Logistics (MEL) of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Taco van der Zwaag (NIASD) and Captain Achmed Abdeldayem (Lattakia Branch of the Arab Academy for Science and Technology and Maritime Transport) on 3 July 2009 jointly selected, out of a group of seven candidates, fresh Lattakia bachelor graduate Bashar Ghzayel (see picture) to receive the tuition fee waiver for the full-time one year masters program on Maritime Economics and Logistics at MEL/EUR. <> On 1 July 2009 Astrid Rijbroek and Taco van der Zwaag met with Dr. Wael Mualla, President of Damascus University, to further the process of establishing a cooperation agreement between the University of Groningen and Damascus University for small scale student research exchanges in the field of media and culture. The NIASD later on in July received suggestions from Damascus University for



some minor changes in the concept co-operation agreement; these suggestions will be discussed with the University of Groningen. <> On 23 July 2009 the NIASD received a letter from Dr. Wael Mualla, inviting the institute to co-operate in organizing a study trip for a group of media/journalism students of Damascus University to Holland. <>

## 2. Culture

*NIASD Film Programme 2009: “Three recent movies from Holland” (26-28 May 2009)*

On 26-28 May 2009 the NIASD screened the following three Dutch films at the institute with Arabic subtitles: *Duska* (Jos Stelling, 2007), *Tussenstand* (Mijke de Jong, 2007), *De Uitverkorene* (Theu Boermans, 2006). Each of these films was screened twice (1x around 18H00, 1x around 20H00). On Wednesday 27 May 2009, one of the lead actors in *Duska*, Gene Bervoets, gave an introduction to that film at the institute (see pictures).



The NIASD Film Programme 2009, which will bring Dutch films and documentaries in October and December 2009 as well, is sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus and Holland Film in Amsterdam.

*Screening of the Dutch feature films ‘Polleke’ and ‘Kicks’ at the European Film Festival in Damascus (17 May 2009)*

Upon the request of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Damascus, the NIASD arranged that two Dutch feature films were screened in the context of the 2009 European Film Festival in Damascus. That event took place at the Al-Kindi Theater from 9 to 21 May. The Dutch films chosen were *Polleke* (Ineke Houtman, 2003) and *Kicks* (Albert ter Heerdt, 2007). At the Al-Kindi Theater both films could be screened with Arabic subtitles because a year ago they had featured in the NIASD Film



Programme 2008 as well. On 17 May 2009 *Polleke* and *Kicks* each attracted about 80 to 100 visitors.

### **3. Institutional and Organizational**

*Subsidy for regionalization towards Lebanon and Jordan (29 May 2009)*

At the end of May 2009 the NIASD finally received the formal subsidy decision for its regionalization plans towards Lebanon and Jordan. In the past few months, the NIASD staff spent a lot of time on the various details and practicalities of this regionalization.

*New NIASD freelancer: Ruben Elsinga (May-July 2009)*



In the period of May – July 2009, Ruben Elsinga worked for the NIASD on a free lance basis, assisting the Dutch staff with various activities, most notably the organization of the summer courses Arabic and Christian and Islamic Art and Architecture. Ruben (26) studied Political Science and International Relations at the University of Amsterdam, Boston College and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In the fall of 2009 Ruben will continue to work with the NIASD.