

Institutional news

APPOINTMENT

Martin van Bruinessen initially studied theoretical physics and mathematics, only later turning to anthropology and Islamic studies. When still a student in physics, he took a number of long trips to the Middle East that aroused his lasting interest in the region. He then followed courses in anthropology and started learning Turkish and Persian. After a few years as a mathematics teacher, he received a research grant for fieldwork among the Kurds, which allowed him to spend two years in the Kurdish-inhabited parts of Iran, Iraq, Iran and Syria. He received his PhD from Utrecht University in 1978, with a thesis on the social and political organization of Kurdistan. One of the major themes in this thesis concerns the social and political roles of Sufi orders (especially Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya) among the Kurds. This work was established as one of the key texts on Kurdish society, and it was translated into various languages, including Turkish, Kurdish and Persian.*



ISIM Chair at Utrecht University

Professor Martin van Bruinessen

Van Bruinessen has frequently revisited Kurdistan, and has published numerous articles on Kurdish society and history, with a strong emphasis on the place of religion. In order to give his work more historical depth, he took up Ottoman studies and worked on a number of Ottoman sources about Kurdish society. Some of this work was published as an edition and analysis of one of the major 17th-century sources on Kurdish society, Evliya Çelebi's famous travelogue (*Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbekir*, Brill, Leiden, 1988).

Meanwhile, Van Bruinessen had moved on to another part of the Muslim world, Indonesia. A stroke of good luck landed him a temporary research position at the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) in Leiden, which allowed him to spend considerable time in Indonesia (1983-84). His first research project was concerned with whether the Islamic resurgence and Islamic radicalism were triggered by rural-to-urban migration and relative deprivation, as has often been asserted to be the case in the Middle East. Instead of starting with Muslim radicals, however, he decided to look at the situation of rural-to-urban migrants who clearly experienced relative deprivation and register their responses. He lived in an urban slum in Band-

ung (West Java) for almost a year. Not surprisingly, perhaps, he found little radicalism but a lot of magic and mysticism and discovered that 'traditionalist' Islam remains very vital in a modern urban setting.

Van Bruinessen's next Indonesian experience was to be when Indonesia's Institute of Sciences (LIPI) invited him as a consultant for field research methods (1986-90). He took part, *inter alia*, in a large research project on the worldview of Indonesia's ulama, carried out by Indonesian researchers. This position enabled him to travel throughout the Muslim parts of Indonesia and get to know numerous ulama and Muslim intellectuals. Having encountered many ulama affiliated with the Naqshbandiyya, he began collecting material for a systematic survey of that Sufi order (published as a book in Indonesian in 1992: *Tarekat Naqshbandiyah di Indonesia*, Mizan, Bandung).

In 1991, after a brief period in the Netherlands and in Kurdistan, he returned to Indonesia to teach sociology of religion and related subjects at the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) of Yogyakarta, within the framework of the Indonesian-Netherlands Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS). He remained there until early 1994, and wrote,

among other things, a book on the 'traditionalist' Nahdlatul Ulama, which is probably the largest organization in the entire Muslim world. Van Bruinessen spent altogether almost nine years in Indonesia and has published numerous articles in English and four books in Indonesian on various aspects of Islam in Indonesia.

Since 1994, Van Bruinessen has taught Turkish and Kurdish studies in the Department Oriental Languages and Cultures at Utrecht University, with a one-year interruption as a guest professor of Kurdish Studies at the Institute for Ethnology of Berlin's Free University. He was involved in drawing up ISIM's research profile and was initially a member of the academic committee but withdrew from it to apply for the ISIM chair at Utrecht University.

His present research interests include shifting religious and ethnic identities in Turkey, the transformation of Sufi orders in modern urban settings, contemporary developments in Muslim socio-political thought and civil society, and transnational Muslim networks. ◆

* A revised English version was published in 1992 as *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, Zed Books, London.