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Marcel Kurpershoek Chair of Arabic Literature and Politics at Leiden University
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Leiden University
MARCEL KURPERSHOEK

On 18 September 1998, Dr Marcel Kurpershoek delivered his inaugural speech as Professor of Arabic Literature and Politics at the Department of Languages and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East at Leiden University. Its title was: *‘Wie luidt de doodsklok over de Arabieren?’: Arabisme, Islam, en de Wereldbank* (‘Who Rings the Death Bell on the Arabs?’: Arabism, Islam and the World Bank) and is published (in Dutch) by Leiden University. The following is a passage from his speech:

‘Awad (Arab poet, literary critic, polemist and indefatigable rebel) remained an inimitable optimist until his death in 1990. But whoever is interested in the fate of liberal thinkers in the Arab world will sometimes get the same feeling as that which the Norwegian Arne expresses in his comments on the Lapps in W.F. Hermans’ novel *Nooit Meer Slapen* (Never to Sleep Again): ‘I sometimes get the impression that the stubbornness people display in hanging on to their traditions is enough to give up any hope of people becoming happier by implementing rational steps.’ Arne’s solution is a simple one: ‘A Lapp only has to take off his attire and he will become a Norwegian like any other.’ ‘So why don’t they?’, Alfred asks. ‘Because they think they are different (...). A Lapp fears he will become a fake Norwegian at best (...).’ ‘But it is highly uncomfortable’, Alfred argues. But Arne knows: ‘Most people base their self respect on one or another kind of lack of comfort.’

Chair of Arabic Literature and Politics at Leiden University

In the academic year of 1998/1999, Prof. Kurpershoek lectures on freedom of speech in the Arab world, together with Prof. Nasr Abu Zayd. This series of lectures runs parallel to a project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: ‘Freedom of Speech in the Middle East and North African Region’. ◆

Prof. Kurpershoek is the author of, amongst others, *Oral Poetry and Narratives from Central Arabia*, the third volume of which is forthcoming.

Marcel Kurpershoek

