

## **Gaarne aanvaard ik de taak mij door de rector magnificus der universiteit opgedragen**

Michael Cook and Patricia Crone are two of the giants of early Islamic history. And early Islamic history is one of the great turning points of human history. It is also one of the historically most challenging, because its source base dates from several centuries after the events it describes, so reconstructing this period requires exceptional control of the material and unusual ingenuity. It is for their remarkable contributions in confronting these challenges, and the illumination they have brought, that we honour them today.

Both Michael and Patricia trained at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London, in SOAS's golden age, where a new generation of Islamicists, experimenting with more sophisticated strategies of interpretation, began to apply to Islamic history the methods of source criticism that had been so successfully used in Islamic theology and law.

Ground-breaking work on the historical sources of Islam quickly followed. Two overarching themes especially stand out. The first is an unwavering commitment to the sources. Michael and Patricia stand fully in the finest Near Eastern studies tradition of philological exactitude and sheer, exhaustive *learning*. It is a tradition built upon total mastery of the source material acquired through many years of relentless mental exertion – a tradition whose 400-year history we also celebrate today. It is precisely this immersion in the sources and absolute loyalty to what they say – what they *actually* say – that has allowed them, again and again, to see their way through layers of accreted assumption and misinterpretation to reveal apparently long resolved historical problems in a revelatory new light. It is built on a profound respect for those whose voices the sources represent and a determination that these voices be clearly heard, without distortion and without embellishment.

The second outstanding achievement is to lift Islam out of the confines of Islamic studies and to restore it to its rightful place at the cross-currents of Near Eastern thought and religious history. What this has given us is an incomparably richer early Islam, one in which the 'sounds' of seventh-century Arabia have been brought brilliantly to life. Thanks to their work we can now see the pre-Islamic precedents, late Roman influences, Sasanian customs, Jewish rites and Christian practice that enlivened this world and shaped Islam's genesis from the very point of its conception. They have taken Islam, in other words, out of the peninsula and into the wider world of Late Antiquity, where it has remained ever since.

The comprehensive re-evaluation of early Islamic history that this set in motion continues and has inspired much of what is the most original and stimulating in the field today.

What has been so consistently striking to me in the years I have known Michael and Patricia is not just their extraordinary erudition, but the remarkable *pleasure* they derive from their work, and from sharing it with others. It is evidenced in the elegance and precision of their writing styles – Michael and Patricia are both unusually readable, and have both written works, with great success, for non-academic audiences. And it is what makes them such great readers of papers and chapters and such wonderful teachers.

Whether in a small tutorial at Cambridge, an overloaded lecture at SOAS, a preparatory meeting for an aspiring job candidate, or an informal dinner at her house, Patricia's generosity with her time and attention is a byword. I can think of no scholar of my generation in this field who has not benefited from it, and who does not cherish the memory of it. She is ever open to discussion, and adamant that any scholar or student, at whatever stage in their career, should be heard. To be listened to, to have one's ideas engaged with, seriously and critically, by someone of Patricia's intelligence, integrity and humanness, is an experience that stays with one forever. I, like so many of my colleagues, am eternally grateful for it.

To be trained in the Cook method is an incomparably rewarding – albeit challenging – experience. It has meant that a hoard of graduate students has worked and is still working thankfully with him. Michael takes on any argument with the same rigorously critical attitude, but he also has a fantastic eye for all the quirky, crazy details of history. It is this enthusiasm combined with thoroughness that has led to Michael's own outstanding contributions in the field, but perhaps even more importantly, his rigour calls upon all of us to strive for the very highest standards of scholarly excellence.

The contributions that Patricia Crone and Michael Cook have made to the study of early Islamic history can hardly be overstated. Any of these achievements would have earned them a place amongst the very first rank of today's Islamic historians; taken all together they place them amongst the first rank of Islamic historians *ever*. Leiden honorary doctorates are given rarely and sparingly. I am very proud to say Michael and Patricia stand in the very finest tradition of this honour.

Domna perdocta Patricia CRONE, praestantissima in inclito Instituto fovendis studiis superioribus Princetoniensi professor, ac historiarum Orientis citerioris simul et religionis Islamicae, assidua exploratrix; necnon vir doctissimus Michael COOK, insignis in illustri academia Princetoniensi professor ac rerum orientis citerioris sedulus inquisitor, multa et maxima in litteris praestiterunt.

Coniunctis enim laboribus studia originum Islamicarum ratione tam singulari excoluerunt, vt ea in perpetuum mutarint, reformarint, redintegrarint.

Ideo hoc persuasum habemus eos de studiis humanioribus egregie meruisse.

Statuimus igitur, et decrevimus, quadringentesimum tricesimum octavum diem natalem academiae nostrae sollemniter celebrantes, utrumque vere dignum esse, qui a nobis doctor honoris causa creetur.

Ex auctoritate igitur, nobis lege concessa eos nunc doctores honoris causa creamus, praedicamus, renuntiamus.

Cujus rei, ut sit certa atque testata fides, diploma publicum, manu rectoris,

facultatis decani, necnon promotricis subscriptum, et academiae majore sigillo confirmatum, eis tradetur, reddetur, tribuetur.