

JOSEPH JOHANNES SICCO (JOS) WEITENBERG  
(5 August 1943 Groningen - 14 April 2012 Leiden)

With great sadness we learned of the passing on Saturday 14th April 2012 of AIEA joint-founder and former President, Jos Weitenberg.

Joseph Johannes Sicco Weitenberg was born on 5 August 1943 in Groningen, the Netherlands. He studied Classics and Indo-European Linguistics, specialising in Old Norse, Hittite, and Armenian. His teachers in Armenian were Gérard Garitte in Leuven and Paul Jungmann in Bonn. In 1979, after teaching Classics at a secondary school, he became lecturer at the Department of Comparative Linguistics of Leiden University. He defended his thesis, *Die hethitischen u-Stämme* in 1984. In 1994, also at Leiden University, Jos became the first Professor of Armenian Studies in the Netherlands, as incumbent of a Chair made possible by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Dutch Armenian community under auspices of AIEA, created for his exceptional contribution to Armenian Studies. He retired from the Professorship in January 2009.

In 1981 Jos Weitenberg founded, together with Professor Michael E. Stone of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the *Association Internationale des Etudes Arméniennes* of which he became Secretary. In 2001 he succeeded Michael Stone as President of AIEA, a function he held until the end of 2006. AIEA became a focal point of Armenian Studies in particular in Europe and the Middle East, next to the Society of Armenian Studies, established in the 1970s in the United States of America. Many scholars in Armenian studies now are members of both organizations, which will hold their first joint workshop at Harvard University in 2013. Jos encouraged his students to join AIEA, so I applied and became a member in 1986. AIEA's fundamental characteristic turned out to be the friendly, encouraging and fertile atmosphere Jos and Michael, together with the founding members had created: a forum for scholars to meet, exchange ideas, work together, and so develop a field of scholarly enterprise that would be cohesive, foster innovative thinking, practical initiative, and the energetic carrying out of the huge task with which the ever expanding legacy of Armenian culture in its many forms presents us. Thirty years after its inception, AIEA, led by Professor Valentina Calzolari as its third President, continues in this vein as an association of well over 300 members worldwide. This is due in no small part to Jos' inspiring effort.

Jos is the author of a dozen monographs and some hundred scholarly articles and reviews, which have decisively advanced our insight in the development of Armenian from Indo-European, its dialectal variety and the development from Classical via Middle to the Modern Armenian varieties. Jos's knowledge of Armenian in all its varieties was profound and in many respects, unparalleled. He had been working on a Grammar of Armenian from Classical Armenian onwards, a book which now sadly remains unfinished by his hand.

Early on, Jos understood the possibilities computerised and digitised tools would offer scholarship and he set out to serve the field through his co-operation with Michael Stone in the *Leiden-Jerusalem Armenian Database*, and later by setting up, with Professor Peter

Robinson, the *Leiden Armenian Lexical Textbase*. In Leiden he worked together with the philologist and computer expert Professor Andrea De Leeuw van Weenen in devising computerised grammatical analysis tools, which led, among other things, to their jointly authored *A Lemmatized Index of the Armenian Version of Deuteronomy* (1992). Their collaboration also led to the successful completion in 1993 of *A Reverse Analytical Dictionary of Classical Armenian*, a project Jos had inherited from his teacher Paul Jungmann at his untimely death in 1979. Collaboration is a key-word in Jos' approach to furthering Armenian studies and in integrating the field in the wider endeavours in the humanities, as several further, and among these two recent books (2010 and 2011) show: his analytical wordlist to Christoph Burchard's *A Minor Edition of the Armenian Version of «Joseph and Aseneth»*, published in Michael Stone's [Hebrew University Armenian Studies](#) Series, and *Eusèbe d'Emèse. Commentaire de la Genèse. Texte arménien de l'édition de Venise (1980). Fragments grecs et syriaques avec traduction*, jointly edited with Françoise Petit and Lucas van Rompay, and published in the *Traditio Exegetica Graeca* series, also with Peeters in Leuven.

In 1992 Jos set up the series *Dutch Studies in Armenian Language and Literature* (DSALL) with Rodopi in Amsterdam, in which until 2000 six volumes were published. Two of these were authored by Altaïst Uwe Bläsing of Leiden University, another colleague and friend with whom Jos established a fruitful collaboration. Jos was member of the editorial boards of the *Annual of Armenian Linguistics*, *Het Christelijk Oosten/The Christian East*, and *Armeniaca* (English Summaries of Armenological Publications in Armenia).

Jos was an inspiring teacher, encouraging a questioning, and (self-)critical attitude. Once he had decided that a student had potential he gladly placed at their disposal not only his scholarly expertise and kind attention, but his exceptional library, and the warmth of his family, as well. His PhD students defended theses in Hittite and in Armenian Studies, benefitting from his deep love for and profound erudition in his field, and equally from his human kindness, encouragement, critical questioning, and wisdom. His trust in the positive outcome of the dissertation was particularly stimulating, as his other PhD students, Anna Prins, Alwin Kloekhorst and Hrach Martirosyan, as well as Jasmine Dum-Tragut, whose Austrian Habilitationsschrift he helped supervise, will be able to confirm.

Although Jos was a most avid reader, the ivory tower of scholarly aloofness was not his abode. When the collapse of the Soviet Union offered possibilities of direct collaboration with colleagues in Armenia, Jos actively engaged in research projects involving scholars in the Matenadaran and in the Academy of Sciences, in particular the Institute of Linguistics.

For over four decennia Jos also maintained warm ties with the Dutch Armenian community and the various associations of Armenians living in the Netherlands. There, as among colleagues and friends, he was much respected for his knowledge of the Armenians' language and culture, and deeply appreciated for his humanity. Not of a naturally combative disposition, Jos nevertheless knew well when to speak up, for example against Genocide denial, and to underline the positive contributions Armenians have made during the extended period of Dutch-Armenian contacts, of which the last

four-hundred years are the best known. This came to the fore once more during what turned out to be Jos' last public lecture on 10<sup>th</sup> March at the Sint Servaas Symposium in Maastricht. The kidney illness, which had defined so much of his life and that of his family ever since he was diagnosed with it, took an immense amount of his energy. He received a kidney transplant several years ago, which he gratefully accepted as a blessing, considerably prolonging his active life. He wanted to give some of his regained energy to good causes and joined various initiatives, in the Church and in organisations fighting kidney diseases.

All who have known Jos were touched by the warmth of his personality, his great friendship and his humanity and kindness, and will cherish these alongside the profound influence he left upon them as scholars – in fact these seem indistinguishable with Jos -- this is also my own lasting memory. In expressing my gratitude for the long years during which I have benefited from his warmth and knowledge as teacher, mentor, colleague and friend, I know I speak for many, many others. All will join me in wishing Ingrid, his wife of over forty years and mother of their four children Marjolein, Lidwien, Siebert and Thomas with their partners Martin and Roos, and their two grandchildren Jonas and Boris strength in these sad and difficult times.

*Lux perpetua luceat eum.*

Theo Maarten van Lint

Secretary, AIEA  
19 April 2012