Maarten Kuitenbrouwer passed away unexpectedly on 10 June 2008. He was still working on the final version of the English translation of *Tussen oriëntalisme en wetenschap*, a commemorative book for the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV), which was published in Dutch in 2001. This book stands out among books of its kind for the depth it reaches and the approach the author takes. Kuitenbrouwer goes beyond a factual summary and links KITLV history to historiographical concepts in a broader context, such as orientalism, occidentalism, universalism and relativism. He places KITLV in the larger international setting of institutions concerned with past and present colonies in the East and West. Kuitenbrouwer himself said that his book contained a ‘contextualized history’.

The Board and director of KITLV did not hesitate in their choice of Kuitenbrouwer as the historian of the institute. There was no one who had more knowledge of the field; he was in fact one of the very few Dutch scholars doing research on both the East and the West Indies. Kuitenbrouwer accepted the request to write the book and began with an outline of his ideas, asking Koos Arens to be his research assistant. In a display of exemplary self-discipline, Kuitenbrouwer handed in his manuscript after somewhat more than two years so that it could be presented on the day of KITLV’s anniversary, 4 June 2001. Though at the outset Kuitenbrouwer was not a member of the institute, he changed that upon the completion of his work.

Maarten Kuitenbrouwer was born in Utrecht on 18 July 1947, into a family with a broad range of interests: his father worked as a civil servant, his mother had a degree in Latin and Greek, his older brother also did a law degree, worked as a writer, and for many years published in one of the most important Dutch newspapers. Incidentally, Kuitenbrouwer’s nephew became a historian specializing in the same region as his uncle.

Kuitenbrouwer began his political sciences degree at the University of Amsterdam but soon switched to a double major in sociology and history. He completed these cum laude in 1974 and supplemented them with an education degree in history. After having briefly worked at the faculty of
education at the University of Amsterdam, in 1975 he became a lecturer with the department of history at the University of Utrecht.

In his doctoral thesis, Kuitenbrouwer decided to build on the topic of his Master's thesis. However, another researcher proved already to be further along on the same topic, so Kuitenbrouwer dropped it. It did resurface later in a few articles (1978, 1989, 1995). His second subject was the late-nineteenth-century Dutch economist and liberal politician, N.G. Pierson. But he voluntarily let another researcher have it and instead wrote only one article (1981) about Pierson and his colonial politics.

The third time was on the mark. Kuitenbrouwer ventured onto new terrain. He positioned the Netherlands as an imperial power with a role in the advent of modern imperialism: Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme (The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism, 1985). Till then no one had seen a connection between the tiny country of the Netherlands and imperialism, and whenever any scholar attempted to make this link, others were quick to deny its existence. Kuitenbrouwer summarized his own conclusion from 1991: ‘Dutch expansion in Indonesia can certainly be called imperialistic, with the Netherlands’ rather unusual status as a small power explaining a number of deviations from the general pattern of modern imperialism’.

With this cum laude dissertation Kuitenbrouwer caused an earthquake with a long-lasting series of aftershocks. A debate ensued, with the Leiden historian H.L. Wesseling taking a stance against Kuitenbrouwer in his article ‘Bestond er een Nederlands imperialism?’ (Dutch imperialism, did it exist?), though he later moved towards Kuitenbrouwer’s position. Kuitenbrouwer himself disputed the question with Wesseling in his article in an edited volume, ‘Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid’ (The imperialism of a small power, 1991).

The editorial board of ‘Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden’ asked Kuitenbrouwer for a historiographical and theoretical evaluation of the imperialism debate. After some hesitation – he was, after all, not impartial – he said yes to the request and wrote ‘Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving’ (The imperialism debate in Dutch historiography, 1998). It is an article that summarizes the debate clearly and comes to the conclusion that only a multifaceted explanation does justice to the complexity of imperialism. It is noteworthy that Kuitenbrouwer’s immediate colleagues in Utrecht, Jur van Goor and Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, play an important role in the debate, so much so that they received the tag ‘the Utrecht School’. Kuitenbrouwer puts this into perspective: that ‘school’ was no more than a room in the history department shared by the threesome...