



DE BRUIN, CORNELIS

DEBRUIN (or de Bruyn), CORNELIS, also known as Corneille Le Brun or Le Bruyn (b. the Hague 1652, d. Utrecht 1726 or 1727), Dutch painter and author of two accounts of his travels in Persia and other eastern lands. From early childhood he showed a keen interest in foreign countries and travel, and his love for drawing and painting was partly motivated by their usefulness in representing accurately what travelers had seen during their visits to foreign lands. In the Hague, de Bruin studied painting with the master Theodoor van der Schuur. Nicolaas Witsen, a wealthy travel enthusiast and burgomaster of Amsterdam, who had visited “North and East Tartary” in 1666, was so impressed with de Bruin’s enthusiasm for both travel and art that he decided to finance his first trip abroad.

De Bruin left for Italy on 1 November 1674; he remained there for four years before departing for Smyrna, whence he visited Asia Minor, and Egypt. In 1684 he returned to Venice, where he lived for eight years and studied painting with Carl Loth. On 19 March 1693 he arrived in the Hague; he spent the next five years writing his first travelogue (*Reizen van Corn. de Bruyn door de vermaardste deelen van Klein Asia, de eylanden Scio, Rhodus, Cyprus enz. mitsg. de voornaamste steden van Aegypten, Syrien en Palestina*, Delft, 1698) and preparing the 215 engravings that illustrate it. A French version (*Voyage au Levant . . . dans les principaux endroits de l’Asie Mineure*) was published by H. de Krooneveld in Delft in 1700 and reprinted in Amsterdam in 1714 (though Paris is given as the publisher’s address); it was the basis for an English translation (*A Voyage to the Levant. Or Travels in the Principal Parts of Asia*



Minor, etc., London, 1702).

On 28 July 1701 de Bruin again left the Hegue, this time for Russia, Persia, and the East Indies; he did not return until 24 October 1708. Witsen had interests in the Russia trade and close contacts with the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (V.O.C., Dutch East Indies company); he also financed this trip and facilitated de Bruin's access to important people and support from Dutch circles in the countries where he traveled. De Bruin arrived in Persia, at Darband, on 7 Rabi' I 1115/21 July 1703, and from there he generally followed the standard route of European travelers: Šamāḳī, Ardabīl, Qom, Kāšān, Isfahan, Shiraz, Bandar 'Abbās. He arrived in Isfahan on 4 Ša'bān 1115/13 December 1703 and remained for almost a year, during which he was frequently entertained by Frans Kastelein, the local V.O.C. director, and his staff, who also provided him with information and contacts. Through these contacts he was introduced to all levels of Persian society and introduced at court, where he made a drawing of Shah Solṭān Ḥosayn (1105-35/1694-1722).

De Bruin's travel account does not provide major new insights into Persian society, life, and customs, but it is a straightforward, thorough, and balanced account, without the elements of fantasy that mar most other works by contemporary travelers to Persia, particularly in their discussions of Persepolis. It is thus both a reliable and a richly illustrated work that throws light on changes and adjustments in the country since the visits of the 17th-century travelers. As de Bruin drew most of the illustrations from life, they are much more accurate and reliable than those of his predecessors. In particular he devoted much of his time to making drawings of Persepolis and to correcting the errors of Engelbert Kaempfer, Jean Chardin, and other earlier visitors. He also carved his name on Xerxes' portal in 1116/1704.

After returning from Asia de Bruin spent most of his time writing his second book and preparing 320 engravings; the work was published in Amsterdam in 1711 (*Corn. de Bruins Reizen over Moskovie door Persie en Indie, verrykt met 300 konstplaten, vertoonende . . . voor al derz. oudheden, en wel voornamentlyk heel uitvoerig die van het . . . hof van Persepolis*); it was reprinted in Amsterdam in 1714. According to de Bruin's own testimony, 1,000 copies of the first Dutch edition were printed. In the same year he published critical remarks on Kaempfer and Chardin (*Aanmerkingen over de Printverbeeldingen van de overblijfselen van het oude Persepolis uitgegeven door de Heeren Chardin and Kaempfer*, Amsterdam, 1714). In 1718 a French translation (*Voyage de Corneille Le Brun par la Moscovie, en Persie, et aux Indes Orientales*, 6 parts. in 2 vols.,



Amsterdam) of the second travel account appeared, combined with the criticisms of Kaempfer and Chardin (pt. 5), and the Dane Eberhard Isbrand Ides' account of his own three-year voyage as Russian ambassador to China (pt. 6); this work was reissued in eight parts and five volumes under the title *Voyage au Levant etc.* in Paris in 1725 (reissued in 1732). A similar five-volume edition, edited and "considerably augmented" by Antoine Banier, was published in Rouen in the same year, with the plates reduced in size. An English translation of the account of de Bruin's journey to Russia (*The Present State of Russia . . . Being an Account of the Government of That Country etc.*) appeared in London in 1723 and a Russian translation (*Puteshestvie cherez Moskoviyu*, from the 1718 French edition) in 1872-73. In 1737 an English translation of de Bruin's entire second travel account (*Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and Part of the East-Indies . . . Embellished with above 300 Copper Plates . . . with Remarks on the Travels of Sir John Chardin and Mr. Kaempfer . . .*, 2 vols., London, also based on the 1718 French edition) was published with irregular pagination; another (*A New . . . Translation of Mr. Cornelius Le Brun's Travels into Muscovy, Persia and Divers Parts of the East-Indies, etc.*, London) appeared in one volume in 1759.

De Bruin spent the remainder of his life pursuing his interest in art and visiting friends in various towns in the Netherlands. On one of those lengthy visits, to the home of David van Mollem in Utrecht, he died. Although all editions of de Bruin's books carry the information that the illustrations were drawn from life by de Bruin himself, it is not clear who made the engravings from his drawings (see, e.g., his observations in the preface to the 1700 French translation of his first book*). The 1711 Dutch edition of the second travel account includes the name "M. Pool sc." on some of the engravings. Only a few of de Bruin's paintings are known to have survived. Among them is a portrait of "a kneeling naked woman and a negro," sold at Christie's auction house in London, 12 July 1963 (catalogue of De Witt Institute in London). Another, "David and Abigail," is in the Galleria Colonna in Rome (Benezit, p. 369). A full-page engraving (by G. Valck) of a portrait of de Bruin by G. Kneller appears in the first Dutch edition of each of his travel accounts.



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