About Henri Claessen, an Old, Kind and Faithful Friend

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Like many Catholics, Henri had several names. It was assumed that Hans would be the main one. However, the occupation of Holland by the Germans, which Henri remembered well, changed a lot. The name Hans seemed to him too German, with which he did not want to have anything in common in the first post-war decade. He told me that when the first tourists from post-war Germany appeared in Holland, many of his compatriots, including himself, refused to speak German with them. Thus, Hans Claessen became Henri Claessen. So that was the name he put to his articles and wanted to be called by colleagues, acquaintances and friends in other countries. Therefore, those in Russia who suddenly began to call him Hans are obviously contrary to his own will.

Our long-term friendship, as is often the case among scholars, began with the discovery of common academic interests, at that moment those were issues associated with early states. At the initiative of Henri, a correspondence followed, gradually becoming more intense and lively, but concerned only with academic issues. Henri started inviting me to contribute articles to collections he published and to take part in various international conferences. I managed to do the former with varying success, because at that time I still had to follow many instructions and sent articles only after the permission of the institute administration and only through official channels. The participation in conferences was completely out of the question, and Henri did not immediately realize it. But one of my friends and colleagues, having met him at an anthropological congress in India, explained to him that he was wasting his time because I was ‘nevyezdnoy’ (not allowed to travel abroad). As Henri told me later, this previously unfamiliar sta-

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tus and the word itself, which no longer exists in any language, added another touch to his understanding of the Soviet regime.

Finally, in order to personally meet and get to know me, Henri made use of the easiest way for a Western European – he flew to Moscow with a group of Dutch tourists. I knew the flight number and the time of its arrival in advance, because even then we found ways to contact each other from time to time and managed it without the services of the Soviet post and without bothering the Soviet censors. We figured each other out instantly, although before that we did not even have the appropriate photos.

Then I boldly boarded the bus that was supposed to take the tourists to the hotel. And to the courier's question, on what authority I did this, I answered that I was a representative of the Academy of Sciences delegated to welcome Professor Claessen and to lend credence to this statement I showed an official ID. I knew long ago that such official IDs had an irresistible effect on a certain category of people. If a person has them and shows them, then he has the right. After Henri settled into the hotel, I immediately took him to my house for dinner.

We felt very soon what Americans call chemistry between people, that is, mutual understanding and sympathy. In addition, I intuitively felt that I could be completely frank with Henri, and this intuition about him has never failed me.

We sat then until late at night and the early states were only one of the topics of our conversation. We spent all the following days together. Of course, the guides and curators of the group preferred that all tourists kept together, but from my suggestion, Henri was considered almost a guest of the Academy. By the way, he really wanted to visit the Institute of Ethnography. I foresaw that nothing good would come of this – the Institute of Ethnography, like other academic institutions, did not like uninvited guests since they did not fit into the routine. But naturally I could not refuse such a seemingly natural desire, and at my own peril and risk I brought him to the Institute. As I expected, they met him very coldly. In the Directorate, everyone was busy and many employees were simply not interested in his visit. Perhaps, he had a somewhat professional discussion only at the department of the history of primitive society, where I worked then. And I got scolded by Kasia Yakimova, the academic secretary for foreign affairs, who generally treated me not altogether bad, but her duty was to scold me for constant violations of the rules of communication with foreigners. ‘You will get into trouble,’ she told me that time.

Henri strongly disliked Moscow. When he watched how the soldiers changing guard at the Mausoleum were walking at a goose step, he jokingly asked me, 'And who actually won the war, the Russians or the Germans?' And when he went to a couple of shops, he noticed that under capitalism life is easier and better, and you cannot fool anyone in the West with empty promises.

By the end of his stay, I shared with Henri what very few people knew, that in a few years, when I finished the already started academic projects, I would try to emigrate from the country of victorious socialism. Henri treated this with full understanding and approval and assured me, without any request on my part, that he would help me in any way he could. He already had experience in such matters. But Peter Skalnik himself will tell about this. And we also agreed on the Aesopian language in our correspondence and on the use of occasional opportunities for forwarding letters in unofficial ways. Thus, our friendship began, which lasted for nearly fifty years. Yet, we never thought that so many years would pass before our next meeting.

Of course, we corresponded not only about personal matters, but also about academic issues. At the same time, Henri's focus was always on the early states. In science and in his personal life, he was monogamous. And for this, in addition to purely academic interests, there were other reasons.

His path to science was by no means easy and typical of a Western anthropologist. For many years he taught at a small college where science was nowhere near. Therefore, he completed his doctorate at a very mature age, only in 1970, and became a full professor at Leiden University only in 1984, much later than very many of his age-mates. I visited his university and met his colleagues in his hospitable house at various times, and it was not difficult for me to notice that he enjoyed great respect and sympathy from his colleagues. And besides, he displayed extraordinary organizing skills at this university, which quickly led to the fact that Henri began to occupy leadership positions, first at his university, and later at the international level. But here I jump ahead of myself a little, breaking the chronological order of our growing friendship.

In 1980, I finally applied for emigration, which was rejected a year later, and became a so-called activist in the movement for the right to migrate to Israel. Accordingly, my relationship with the authorities changed and there was a time when a penal camp somewhere in Siberia was a more real alternative for me than the Mediterranean

coast in Israel. Henri supported me in every way he could. As the vice-president of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnographic Sciences at the time, he haunted the official leaders of Soviet anthropology, threatening that they would be expelled from all relevant international organizations if the worst happened to me. He himself later told me with a laugh that he was by no means certain that he would get the necessary number of votes for this. When, for example, he asked the representative of New Zealand if he could count on his support, he replied that he had never heard of me. But after Henri explained the essence of the matter to him, he immediately replied, 'Well, of course, the anthropologist Khazanov is well known in my country.' But Henri did not feel any embarrassment from such deception and leverage. And his sense of humor never failed him.

When he got to hear that his friends, acquaintances, or sometimes even strangers were going to visit Moscow, he always asked them to visit me, give some gift and find out the latest news. From time to time he called me with a very specific purpose. Realizing that my phone was probably monitored, he wanted to make it clear to the authorities that there were quite influential people in the West who were concerned about my fate. I always remember how during one of our telephone conversations, in response to my words that I hope for the humanity of the Soviet government, Henri replied, 'Oh yes, the humanity of the Soviet government is well known throughout the world.' At the same time, his voice was completely flat, devoid of any feelings and emotions, and it was precisely this that left no doubt what feelings he was overwhelmed at that moment.

Finally, after almost six years, I received permission to leave the Soviet Union. And a few months later I flew to Holland, having received an invitation to lecture at several universities, which was, of course, organized by the same Henri Claessen. He and his wife Iet met me at the Amsterdam airport Schiphol and immediately took me to their house in Wassenaar, a suburb of Leiden. A new tradition was established, which my friends would strictly follow for many years.

I do not remember exactly what we talked about that first evening of our meeting after a break of many years, accompanied by a fair amount of good wine, which Henri knew a lot about. We just skipped from one subject to another, from academic issues to my plans for the future, from mutual colleagues and acquaintances to the latest events in the European football world. But we already did it, as we would repeatedly do in the future: without any haste, without fear of missing

anything important, and being sure that from now on our friendship would lose its semi-underground character that we did not need any more and would become a sound friendship between two free persons who sympathized each who and had many common academic interests and almost similar political views.

Yet, differences between us would gradually show up. Thus, Henri was a monarchist, and I am a staunch republican, for whom all the royal houses with their fanfares, retinues, sinecures and servants are a bunch of parasites. Henri disliked Amsterdam, often saying that the Netherlands was a monarchy centered on the anarchist republic of Amsterdam, and I fell in love with the city at first sight. But both of us treated such disagreements quite calmly, believing that there simply could not be complete unanimity between adults. True, Henri, who loved to accompany me during my trips to different cities in Holland, waved his hand at Amsterdam, saying: enjoy it yourself.

This was perhaps for the best. Henri was a deeply religious Catholic and accompanied every meal with a prayer. He also told me quite a bit about the times in Dutch history when Catholics were discriminated. In general, he did not at all share my positive opinion about the Dutch Reformation and even about the Eighty Years' War for independence that this small country waged with Spain. But he was a very idiosyncratic and, in my opinion, a very controversial Catholic. He was very critical of the Vatican, and my son, after taking him to Bethlehem, said that Henri limited his impressions to one word: kitsch.

At the same time, there was something puritanical in his faith, although it was devoid of any moralizing features, and even more so of insisting that everyone should behave as he does. And here, among other things, a good sense of humor would help Henri. I remember that one evening when I returned to his house from Amsterdam, I answered questions about the day spent and said that I had finally visited the famous red-light district, where prostitution and other vices are concentrated. It impressed me that even such a specific area can be organized and made bourgeois, and among other things, turned into an attraction for tourists. The police were nowhere to be seen, but neither were the drunks. Everything is calm, everything is in order. Prostitutes are sitting in the windows, and by the way, they are members of a special trade union and are obliged to undergo strict medical control, and in the future receive a pension, like everyone else who pays taxes in the country. Sometimes potential customers come up to the window and if they agree on a price, then the curtain in the window drops for a

while. And elderly couples walk around the area, for whom its specificity with numerous porn shops, porn performances and cafes where marijuana is freely sold is nothing more than another local attraction. What a wonderful topic for ethnographic research!

When I shared my impressions with him, Henri frowned a little. I asked Iet, 'Listen, has your husband ever been there himself? 'I'll go out into the kitchen now and you can ask him this question in private,' she answered with a laugh. Then Henri told me a really interesting story. His department offered twice this topic to the graduate students. They would enthusiastically agree and, in accordance with the participant-observer rule (in my opinion, in Russian ethnography, this method is not quite accurately translated as participant observation) would settle in this quarter. But none of them would write a thesis. Obviously, the role of participants turned out to be more attractive for them than the role of observers.

But in general, we talked little about religion, believing that this is a purely private and personal matter of every individual. Henri never suggested that I visit the old Dutch churches – I did this myself, and it never occurred to me to invite him to visit any of the old Jerusalem synagogues.

In general, our friendship after my emigration acquired a sound character, common in the West. We quickly became family friends and this friendship extended even to the second generation. My son was very friendly with Bart, the son of the Claessens, and they often visited each other until the latter's tragic death. The Claessens often visited us both in Israel and in the States. Interestingly, Henri was somewhat jealous of the American anthropology, often telling me that in Europe there are also many interesting anthropologists, who are often underestimated by their American counterparts. I generally agreed with him, but answered, 'What do you want if about 90 per cent of all world professional anthropologists live and work in America? Moreover, you yourself know very well that many European anthropologists, if given the opportunity, would prefer to work in American universities. How can things be different in such a situation?' By his own admission, Henri did not have a convincing answer to these questions.

Of course, we frequently and in detail discussed our science, our colleagues, new publications, and new concepts. He was never an ethnographer and did no field work. He came to science too late for this. But at the same time, Henri always amazed me with his deep erudition. He read everything, knew everything, despite the fact that he

himself was faithful to one and the same topic. When I confessed to him that I lost interest in the idea of early states, because, in my opinion, the only thing that united them was that they were the first, Henri was probably upset, but he did not show it, noting only, 'You have a right to have your own opinion.'

Henri was a truly noble man. He was a good judge of character and always sought to find something good in people; he had a forgiving nature and was always ready to help.

And he was also very glad that his work gained such broad recognition in Russia where he was highly appreciated as a scholar and that he even became a member of the editorial board of one of the best Russian journals in the field of social sciences – *Social Evolution and History*. This was very important for him, because sometimes he told me with disappointment that in the West he felt alone and that no one was interested in his work. It was very difficult for me to say something comforting to him, because, in fact, it was so.

In the last years of his life, due to Henri's rapidly deteriorating hearing, we again switched from regular phone calls to correspondence. As I was writing these memoirs, I re-read the letter I received from him three months before his death, and I understood its hidden meaning much better than before. He began the letter with assurances that, apart from the usual ailments associated with age, he was doing quite well, although out of caution he walked with a cane. And in the second half of the letter, he spoke about the academic projects that he was interested in and about the new books that he had recently read. And only in the middle of the letter there slipped just one dreary phrase that contradicted the rest of the letter: 'I feel bad.' Now I understand much better what he meant by that. But now it is too late.

Iet, Henri's wife, a very courageous woman, told me that they should have moved to a comfortable retirement home long ago, but Henri wanted to die at home, which he loved very much. It is good that this desire of his was fulfilled. It remains for me to finish my far from complete reminiscences of Henri Claessen, an old, kind and devoted friend, with the traditional wish: Blessed be his memory!