
Dear Henri, ...

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For us, the generation of Russian political anthropologists that came to the academy on the brink of the Soviet and post-Soviet times, Henri Claessen has always meant a lot. The Early State theory was among the first Western theories in political anthropology of which we got knowledge and which served for us, people from behind the just lifting ‘iron curtain,’ as a window to the world of global scholarship.

That was time before email powerfully entered our lives, to leave apart mobile messengers. In the early 1990s, I found Henri Claessen's postal address in ‘Information on Contributors’ section in a journal with his article I read at a Moscow library, and sent him a letter describing who and what I am. Actually, that moment I had not so much to tell about myself: a very recent graduate from Ethnography Department with just a handful of publications in Russian. However, Henri, answered me. His letter was very kind; I felt real interest in my work and me as a young colleague from his side. Since then, we were in constant touch until the very end of Henri's life. Very soon after our correspondence acquaintance I began to start my letters not with official ‘Dear Prof. Claessen, ...’ but with friendly ‘Dear Henri, ...’ In the nineties, we exchanged letters and publications offprints by mail and it could take several weeks for them to reach an addressee. Later, we exchanged email messages and pdf files of our articles and books, what made our correspondence even much more intensive.

In our usually long letters and messages, we discussed many aspects of the Early State theory. Henri had a great quality: he was al-

ways eager to listen to the opinion of colleagues and develop his own views. Nevertheless, there is something what I recollect even more often than our so stimulating academic discussions when I think about our communication at a distance. In 1998, I begot the daughter, and Henri sent me a parcel for her: two nice pairs of tiny socks. Henri was not just a great scholar – he also was a person of great soul. In our communication we always went far beyond academic discussions writing each other about life of our families – Henri expressed real interest in his friends' personal matters, everyday life, as he cherished friendship and was a very kind-hearted person. His wise but unobtrusive advice of an elder friend has always been a great support for me.

So, Henri and I were in correspondence for about a decade when we eventually met in person. That was at the First International Conference 'Hierarchy and Power in the History of Civilizations' held in Moscow in summer 2000. Henri was the biggest star at that forum and delivered two papers at it. Together with several other colleagues, we toured the city and visited my Mom. She was exactly the same age as Henri (both born in 1930), very hospitable and open-hearted. No surprise that Henri and Mom felt affection for each other. After that meeting, they sent each other best wishes through me from time to time. During those days of personal communication with Henri the great scale of his personality became even clearer for me. And of course, the gift he gave me in Moscow is very precious. By 2000, Henri still had the last spare copy of *The Early State* published twenty-two years earlier, and he brought it to Moscow for me. The gift inscription reads: 'With great pleasure to a co-cooperator in the E.S. game! Henri.' Needless to say how much this gift and this inscription meant for me.

Next year, in spring 2001, I was making a three-day-long connection in Amsterdam on the way to a conference in Lagos, Nigeria. Henri picked me up at Schiphol airport and took by train to Leiden and then by car to his home in Wassenaar. I spent all the three days of my stay in the Netherlands with Henri and his wife Iet. Their hospitality did not know any limits. I felt how Henri and Iet loved each other even after many decades of living together; I saw how touchingly they care for each other. Iet is a beautiful woman. And I have never tasted such delicious fish as that she cooked for us. The Claessens' house, very big, with many rooms, reflects high intellectual and cultural standards, as well as kindness and warmth of its owners, in decoration

and atmosphere. Departing to the airport accompanied by Henri and looking at let saying me good-bye at the door, I was dreaming of visiting them again. This never happened, alas.

When such people as Henri pass away, an era goes with them. Henri followed deceased months before him Robert Carneiro and Marshall Sahlins. They were the last giants of their generation in neo-evolutionism whose works and personalities inspired my peers and me in anthropology when we were young. What remains after such people? Not only books and articles but also something intangible but no less real and important – a lesson of how to be a true scholar and a true personality throughout a whole life. Henri was teaching me this lesson for all the decades we knew each other, and I am incredibly grateful to him for this.