
Hans Claessen and my Story about the Early State

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I heard the name of Henri J. M. Claessen for the first time in the early 1980s, when I was a university student. At that time, foreign books and articles were almost inaccessible for the Russian students in humanities outside Moscow, Leningrad (Sankt-Petersburg), and Novosibirsk. I read two articles by the famous Russian sinologist Leonid Vasilyev about state origins (Vasilyev 1980; 1981) where he introduced chiefdom and early state theories to the Russian-speaking readers. Both these theories had a great influence on my views, and I was eager to get to know their authors personally in future. Moreover, a few Soviet scholars participated in the Early State projects. Some of my colleagues knew Petr Skalník, who studied in Leningrad.

I wrote to Professor Claessen for the first time in the early 1990s after getting my PhD. It was already after the fall of the Berlin Wall and post-Soviet Russia was open so we could boldly write to foreign scholars. I asked him to make me copies of the chapters from *Early State*. This book was hard to find in Russia then. He kindly sent me a large package and many new articles as well as an *Early State Economics* volume. This was the beginning of our thirty-year's friendship. Since this book was unavailable to the Russian researchers, in co-authorship with Dr. Andrey Zagorulko I wrote a review which was published in *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* journal.

Since then, we have regularly exchanged letters and discussed various aspects of theory on the origin of state. He often sent me books and articles and I would send him our publications in response. A few years later he retired and told me about this in his letter. Unlike many scholars, Claessen did not stop his academic activities. He wrote an important book on neoevolutionism theory (Claessen 2000) and many articles. I translated two of his articles into Russian: a review on

evolutionism (Claessen 1989; published in Russian in 2005) and chapter 25 from *Early State* (Claessen 1978; published in Russian in 2016). We first met personally at the famous international conference in Moscow in the summer of 2000. It was the first visit for many prehistorical anthropologists and archaeologists to Russia and it initiated a long series of *Hierarchy and Power in the History of Civilizations* conferences. This was our first meeting and Hans presented me his new book (Claessen 2000).

Claessen played an important role in the discovery of Russian anthropology in the world. Seven people from the Soviet Union participated in the Early State project. Later, several more scholars wrote their sections for the following books. For us, the first post-Soviet generation of anthropologists, he became a wise mentor who participated in many of our projects – four books published in Russian and English (Kradin and Lynsha 1995; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Grinin *et al.* 2004; Bondarenko *et al.* 2020) and several special issues of the *Social Evolution & History* journal. He was the organizer of the special issue devoted to the 30th anniversary of the *Early State* volume.

Ten years after our first meeting, I came to the Netherlands as a visiting researcher at the University of Bonn. I remember Hans standing inside the railway station and waiting for me. We were both very happy. We went to his house and had tea. We talked about everything for a long time and he gave me a lot of different books. Then Hans took me to see the famous Dutch dunes in Katwijk aan Zee. In the evening, Hans, his wife Iet and I had dinner by the sea. I remember that the restaurant had a menu only in Dutch. I picked a dish on the menu at random. Hans said, ‘Good choice. It is our local dish!’ And I was much surprised when they brought me a huge plate of shrimp with delicious sauce. Then I told him, ‘But look, this is our local dish as well! Fifteen thousand kilometers across Eurasia from ocean to ocean and the food is the same!’ We laughed for a long time.

The second decade of the new millennium was very eventful and full of trips and meetings. I frequently visited the Netherlands and every time we would meet with Hans. We met especially often in 2015 when I was a visiting member of the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden. Hans came to our cozy apartment on the corner of Stadhaunderslaan and Magdalena Munstraat several times. We drank tea and talked much so I profited by the occasion and questioned him closely on the Early State project. He also took me and my wife Tanya to the dunes and other places of interest.

Our last meeting happened in 2016. I came to the conference in Leiden and called to him. We had lunch in a small restaurant across from the Pieterskerk. We talked a lot, he asked about my expeditions, family, and our friends. I was very sad and felt this was our last meeting. It was before my new project started and I had to organize long-times field studies in Baikal area and Mongolia. When we said goodbye, I had tears in my eyes. Hans said, ‘Why are you crying. We will definitely meet again!’ I answered, ‘Yes, of course,’ but my inner voice told me that this was my last trip to Leiden and our last meeting.

Of course, we did not stop our correspondence. In 2020, when the whole world was locked down, I completed several large studies, including a collection of my articles *Origins of the Inequality, Civilization, and the State* (in Russian). I dedicated this book to my friends, Henri J. M. Claessen and Petr Skalník. In the summer of 2020, Peter turned 75 years old, and in November we celebrated the 90th anniversary of Henri. I emailed him the book cover and dedication page and then mailed the book after publication. I regret that Hans could not read the book in Russian. But I hope that he felt that he is appreciated and loved far away in Russia. We will miss him. Our warm friendship will always remain in our memory forever.

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FIGURES



Fig. 1. Prof. H. J. M. Claessen at conference in Moscow (2000)



Fig. 2. Henri and Iet in their house in Wassenaar (2011)



Fig. 3. Henri in my apartment in Leiden (2015)



Fig. 4. Our last meeting (2016)