



BENJAMIN CONSTANT E.J.B. HENDRICKX (25/7/1939 – 8/7/2021)

IN MEMORIAM

BENJAMIN CONSTANT E.J.B. HENDRICKX

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It was with great shock and deep sadness that academics here and abroad received the news of the passing of Benjamin (Ben) Hendrickx. His wide circle of colleagues, students, and friends in the three main areas of his interest and influence, Belgium, Greece, and Africa, mourn his death, but also celebrate his life as international scholar, inspiring teacher, and devoted family man.

Ben was born on 24 July 1939 in Deurne, a suburb of Antwerp. He received his early schooling at St. Stanislas College in Berchem, matriculating in Greek, Latin, and the *Studia humaniora*. Annual scholarships from the Belgian State enabled him to pursue his studies at the University of Louvain-Leuven from 1958 to 1962. In 1960 he was awarded the Candidature ès Philosophie et Lettres, Section: Ancient History, in 1962 the Licence ès Philosophie et Lettres, Section: Ancient History *cum laude*, with a dissertation on *Het Kroningsceremonieel in Byzantium: Onderzoek naar de Oorsprong der Kronings-elementen in de Teksten van Suetonius en de Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*, written under the supervision of Professor J. Vergote, and the Agrégation ès Philosophie et Lettres, also *cum laude*.

While still at university Ben had met Thekla Sansaridou, from Thessaloniki. They had corresponded since 1958, in English, the only language they shared. Two years later, when Ben and a friend visited Greece, they finally met in person on 3 September 1960, at the Thessaloniki railway station. Two weeks later, before Ben's return to Belgium, they got engaged. Thekla and her mother visited the Hendrickx family that Christmas and New Year. The following year, on 31 December 1961, they were married in Thessaloniki and in January 1962 they settled in Antwerp where Ben continued his studies.

Ben's first appointment, in 1962, was as a high school teacher at St. Ludargis School in Antwerp. He continued with his studies at Louvain: Philologie orientale chrétienne (1963-1964) and the Licence ès Histoire et Civilization byzantines (1964), with a dissertation titled *Poging tot Recon-*

structie van de Kroningsceremonie van de Keizer in de laat Byzantijnse Tijd, again with Vergote as supervisor.

His next appointment, from 1964 to 1969, was as a lecturer at the Collèges Lamennais, Javouhey and Pomaré, in Tahiti. Here he began work on his doctorate, but also studied for and obtained the Diplômes de morpho- et graphopsychologie at the Institut de Culture Humaine in Paris (1967-1968). The couple returned to Greece in 1969 when Ben received scholarships from the Greek State to complete his PhD at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. In 1970 he was awarded the degree *Doctor Philosophiae* for his dissertation titled *Οι πολιτικοί και στρατιωτικοί θεσμοί της Λατινικής Αυτοκρατορίας Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κατά τους πρώτους Χρόνους της Υπάρξεώς της* (*The Political and Military Institutions of the Latin Empire of Constantinople during the First Years of its Existence*), written under the supervision of Professor Ioannes Karayiannopoulos. This work was published as a book in 1970 and reprinted in 1999.

He continued research at the university until 1971, when his career and their lives took a decisive turn. In June, when they were preparing to move to Belgium, Professor Paul du Plessis, who with his wife Yvonne had travelled by bus from Athens, arrived in Thessaloniki to meet Ben, and persuaded them to delay their departure. Professor Du Plessis could not explain how he had obtained Ben's address and information about his qualifications, but he wanted to have Ben working with him at the University of Port Elizabeth (now the Nelson Mandela University). However, he failed to persuade the Rector of that university to appoint Ben and instead turned to the Rector of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU, now the University of Johannesburg, UJ), Professor Gerrit Viljoen, who offered Ben a signed contract as Senior Lecturer in the Department of Classics. Ben, Thekla, and their children Annoula, Raita, and Yannis arrived in South Africa in 1971. Assigned to meet them at the airport, I had to wait a while for them to emerge. There had been a hitch at immigration when Ben's passport gave his surname as Hendrickx, whereas Thekla's read Henrickiou. It took some persuading and time to explain the use of Greek onomastic conventions to the officials. The family was admitted and became permanent residents in South Africa. Professor Du Plessis subsequently joined the Department of Biblical Studies at RAU.

In those early years RAU was temporarily housed in the vacated buildings of South African Breweries, opposite the University of the Witwatersrand. Some of the lecture rooms still had a faint beery smell. Ben and I shared a small room with a table between us. Thus facing each other, we spent many hours discussing research, a practice we continued until our last telephonic chat in June. From him I learnt the importance, even necessity, of constant research and publication to advance knowledge in one's chosen field. Those

were the days before publication subsidies, when there was no pressure to publish, few scholars published anything, and appointment and promotion did not depend on one's list of subsidized articles and books.

Ben immediately settled into academic life. The medium of teaching at RAU was predominantly Afrikaans. Being Flemish, Ben coped rather well, but students were at first intrigued and disconcerted by his kind of Afrikaans, calling it 'Afriflaans' or 'Belgikaans'. However, he soon became fluent in Afrikaans, adding it to his arsenal of Flemish, French, Modern Greek, and English – all languages in which he would publish work. For good measure he added a course in Zulu in 1985. In 1976 he was promoted to Professor.

During his career he supervised 60 MA and PhD dissertations, mostly by postgraduate students in Greece. Five of these received the Faculty Gold Medal for best dissertations, and twelve were subsequently published as books. His wife, Thekla, who, as anthropologist and historian in her own right, was building her own career as teacher of Modern Greek and researcher, often had a role as co-supervisor. They were the main inspiration and driving force behind the introduction and success of Modern Greek and Byzantine Studies in the Department of Greek and Latin Studies at RAU, now the Department of Languages, Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics at UJ, the only university in South Africa to offer such courses.

At conferences and seminars (excluding departmental seminars) in South Africa, Belgium, and Greece he delivered 78 papers or talks in Greek, Afrikaans, Flemish, and English, and organized conferences on Greek cultural themes. He was interviewed on Greek, South African, and Flemish radio and television on Greek studies in South Africa, the Olympic Games, and his research projects and awards.

To conduct his research he received a series of grants and scholarships: from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, the predecessor of the present National Research Foundation, NRF) for research on the institutions of Latin Constantinople (1972); from RAU for research on the Frankokratia (1975); from the HSRC for research on documents of the Latin emperors of Constantinople (1977); from RAU and the HSRC for travel to Italy and Egypt and sabbatical leave for research on Hellenic and Roman Civilization (1983); from the Christoffel Plantin Foundation in Belgium for further research on the Crusades (1984); from the Missak Centre for a study visit to Flanders (1986); from the HSRC for research on feudalism in Mediaeval Greece, the Frankokratia, and from RAU for travel to Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey (1989); from the HSRC for a visit to Cyprus (1994); from RAU for research on the Missak Archives and from the HSRC for research on Mediaeval Ethiopia and Nubia (1996); and from the NRF for a project on Byzantium and East Africa (2002-2008, renewed 2009-2017).

At various times within the university Ben served as Secretary of RAU's Publication Committee, Chair of the Department of Greek and Latin Studies, Head of Modern Greek, Chair of the Missak Centre for Armenian and Flemish Culture, and Chair of the Higher Degree Committee (Languages) of the Faculty of Humanities. He was also active in various academic organizations and bodies: Chair of the Mediaeval Society of Southern Africa (1972-1976), representative of the Classical Association of South Africa (CASA) at the Fédération des Institutions des Études Classiques (1973-1975), Vice-Chair of the Transvaal Regional Branch of CASA (1975-1976), Vice-Chair of the Hellenic Society of Scientists and Scholars of South Africa (1974-1976), Founder and Director of the Institute for Afro-Hellenic Studies (1981-2021), Vice-President of the South African Association of Patristic and Byzantine Studies (1983), a Director of the South African Flemish Cultural Foundation (1988-1998), Founder-member and Co-Chair of the Hellenic Archive of Southern Africa at RAU (1995-1996); Chair of the Kazantzakis Association in South Africa (2000-2021); Member of the Board of Trustees of Yakh'isizwe Cultural Alliance South Africa (2001); Corresponding Member of the Society for Macedonian Studies (2001); Honorary Member of Parnassos, Athens (2001).

Equally impressive is his editorial work: Editor of *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, African edition (Alexandria and Johannesburg, 1984-2013) and *Bulletin of the Institute for Afro-Hellenic Studies* (Johannesburg); Editorial Adviser of *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* (Pretoria), *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* (Athens) and *Mesogeios* (Paris); Member of Editorial Committee of *Le Regard Crétois* (Saint-Genis-Pouilly, France); Co-editor with Professor A. Savvides of the Peloponnesos University, Kalama, and Associate-Professor Thekla Sansaridou-Hendrickx of the *Encyclopaedic Prosopographical Lexicon of Byzantine History and Civilization* (Vol. 1, 2007; Vol. 2, 2008; Vol. 3, 2012, Turnhout); Co-editor with Savvides of *Byzantinos Domos* (Thessaloniki); Member of the Advisory Committee of *Macedonian Studies Journal* (Melbourne); and Member of the Editorial Board of *Graeco-Arabica* (2018-2021).

His dedicated research and constant productivity earned him several international awards and honours: the Gold Cross of St. Mark from the Greek Patriarch of Alexandria (1983); the Christoffel Plantin Prize for research and academic excellence (1984); Membership of the Heraldic Council of South Africa (1984-89); an Onassis Grant, Category IA for excellence in research, Athens (1999-2000); an award from the Federation of Hellenic Communities of South Africa and Honorary Member of Parnassos (2001); an award for his contribution to Hellenism from the Lyceum Club of Greek Women (2004); the title of Commander of the Order of Honour for Contribution to Greek Culture and Studies, bestowed by the President of Greece, Mr. K. Papoulias (2008); the title for academic excellence, by Royal Decree, of Commandeur

in de Kroonorde, bestowed (unfortunately not in person) by King Albert II of Belgium on 7 July 2011, a knighthood which his colleagues celebrated by addressing him as ‘Sir Ben’; also in 2011, Member of Honour of the International Society of Friends of Kazantzakis in Geneva; honoured in May 2013 for his contribution over 20 years to the South African Hellenic Katrakis Archives and role as Co-Founder and Co-Chair and Convener; and on 10 October 2018 a *Doctor Honoris Causa* (History and Ethnology) degree from the University of Thrace, Komotini.

In 2004 he retired, but was immediately granted a contract as Emeritus Professor to continue with his teaching and research, and in 2006 the NRF granted him a B1 rating as a researcher for the period 2007-2011, an award that was renewed for another six years (2012-2017). In 2015 a *Festschrift* containing articles by colleagues and former students was published in Athens to celebrate his 75th birthday.¹

From 2008 Ben and Thekla received funding from the Faculty of Humanities of UJ as well as from the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a joint project: Aspects of the ‘Latin’ (Frankish) occupation of Byzantine territory in the late-Byzantine period: the Latin Montferrat Kingdom of Thessaloniki and the Principality of Achaia, and the Tocco ‘despotate’ in Epirus (13th-15th centuries).

Ben’s greatest academic legacy is his prodigious output of research work, 480 items in total, most of which have elicited multiple citations, including in Russian. Among these are six books, including his PhD (1970, 1999²), several volumes of edited documents, and two on Byzantine history co-authored with Savvides (2003, 2008², 2019³, English version 2001). A total of 164 articles appeared in journals and collective volumes, 285 entries in encyclopaedias and lexica, and 26 reviews. In addition he co-edited several collections, in particular the massive *Encyclopaedic Prosopographical Lexicon of Byzantine History and Civilization*, vols. 1-3, with Savvides and Sansaridou-Hendrickx.² Despite ill health, he was still engaged in research when he succumbed to the Covid 19 virus on 8 July 2021, 17 days short of his 82nd birthday. Savvides has announced that *Byzantinos Domos* 29 (2021) will be dedicated to the memory of Benjamin Hendrickx.

Esteemed in South Africa, Belgium, and Greece, Ben was a scholar of international status, an acknowledged and respected authority on Byzantine history and culture and its influence in North Africa. Yet in spite of his achievements and honours, Ben remained an unassuming, kind, and humble

¹ William Henderson and Effronsyni Zacharopoulou (edd.) 2015, *Greece, Rome, Byzantium, and Africa. Studies Presented to Benjamin Hendrickx on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*. Athens.

² For a list of his publications 1962-2015, see Henderson and Effronsyni loc. cit., pp. 25-49.

person, devoted to and proud of his family. As teacher, scholar, colleague and friend he enriched many lives and will be sorely missed. On behalf of academics in South Africa and elsewhere, we express our sincere condolences to Thekla, the children and grandchildren.

Appendix: publications in addition to the list in the 2015 *Festschrift*³

- Hendrickx, B. and Sansaridou-Hendrickx, T. 2013. 'Bourgs, faubourgs et bourgeois dans la Grèce franque après 1204.' *Byzantinos Domos* 19/20/21. 2011–2013:121–46. Reprinted in A. Savvides, B. Hendrickx, and V. Katsaros (edd.), Βυζάντιο – Ιστορία, Φιλοσοφία, Θεολογία, Πολιτισμός (*Byzantium - History, Philosophy, Theology, Civilization*). *Festschrift for Vasiliki Nerantzi-Varmazi*, 121–46. Thessaloniki.
- Hendrickx, B. and Sansaridou-Hendrickx, T. (edd.) 2016. *Graeco-Africana et Afro-Byzantina. Proceedings of the International Conference on Graeco-African and Afro-Byzantine Studies at the University of Johannesburg (27 October – 1 November 2014)*. Johannesburg.
- Hendrickx, B. and Sansaridou-Hendrickx, T. 2016. 'Les institutions de la principauté d'Achaïe sous les Villehardouin: la chancellerie et la trésorerie.' *Byzantiaka* 33:265–94.
- Hendrickx, B. 2016. A new project on Nubia: the establishment of a catalogue raisonné of the documents and *res gestae* relating to the Medieval Nubian and Sudanese rulers. In Hendrickx and Sansaridou-Hendrickx 2016, 132–36.
- Savvides, A., Hendrickx, B., Charizanis, G., and Bozinis, C. (edd.) 2016. *Byzantine and Modern Greek History and Civilization*. Special issue of *Domus Byzantinus: A Periodical of Medieval Greek History and Civilization* 22/23/24. Thessaloniki.
- Hendrickx, B. 2017. 'The "letter" of Constantius II to Ezana and Sezana: a note on its purpose, range and impact in an Afro-Byzantine context.' *Graeco-Arabica* 12:545–56.
- Hendrickx, B. and Sansaridou-Hendrickx, T. 2017. 'The state of the Duchy of the Archipelago (Naxos) during the reign of Joseph Naci and his locotenente Francesco Coronello, 1566–1579.' *South African Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 27:23–52.
- Hendrickx, B. 2018. 'The letter of an Ethiopian King to King George II of Nubia in the framework of the ecclesiastic correspondence between Axum, Nubia, and the Coptic Patriarchate in Egypt and of the events of the 10th Century AD.' *Pharos Journal of Theology* online Vol. 99 <http://www.pharosjot.com>, 1.

³ I wish to thank Professor Emerita Thekla Sansaridou-Hendrickx for Ben's updated 77-page CV which has enabled me to write this tribute.

- Hendrickx, B. 2018. 'Some remarks on the reconstruction of Ethiopian, Nubian, and Miaphysite Patriarchal archives and documents.' *Proceedings of the IAHS* 2:3–11.
- Hendrickx, B. 2019. 'Was King Merkourios (696-710) an African 'New Constantine', the unifier of the Kingdoms and Churches of Makouria and Nobadia? – a re-examination and alternative suggestions.' *Pharos Journal of Theology* online Vol. 100, [http://: www.pharosjot.com](http://www.pharosjot.com) 1.1–21.
- Hendrickx, B. 2019. 'Constantinople, Latin Empire of'. In C. Tucker (ed.), *Middle East Conflicts from Ancient Egypt to the 21st Century*, 297–99. Santa Barbara.
- Hendrickx, B. and Savvides, A.G.K. 2019. Εισαγωγή στη Βυζαντινή Ιστορία (284-1461). A Greek translation of the English edition of 2001 by A. Kondyles, third edition, augmented and revised, with bibliographical supplements by Maria Leontsini. Athens.
- Hendrickx, B. 2020. 'The *Kebra Nagast*: an Israelite-Christian dynastic and national epic?' In K. Seigneurie (ed.), *A Companion to World Literature*, 1293–1305. Hoboken, NJ.
- Hendrickx, B. 2020. 'Catalogue raisonné of the medieval royal documents of Nubia: introduction and the documents of the transitional period from Late Antiquity to the beginning of the Middle Ages.' *Graeco-Arabica* 13:235–64.
- Hendrickx, B. and Steyn, R. 2020. 'The controversial Anoole and Haile Selassie monuments as reflecting the religious and political tensions between Christians and Muslim Ethiopians.' *Pharos Journal of Theology* online Vol. 101. [http://: www.pharosjot.com](http://www.pharosjot.com).