

Трудно быть Клейном: Автобиография в монологах и диалогах [*Hard to be Klejn: an Autobiography in Monologues and Dialogues*], by Leo S. Klejn, 2010. [In Russian.] St Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriya; ISBN 978-5-98187-368-3 hardback US\$25.70, €19.70 & £16.60; xiii + 703 pp., 65 photos, 13 figs.

Olga Sveshnikova

Leo S. Klejn (born in 1927) is a renowned Russian scholar, archaeologist, cultural anthropologist and philologist. He has written books in virtually all branches of archaeology, excluding the Palaeolithic (p. 221). In Russia and abroad he is best known as a theoretical archaeologist and is arguably the most quoted and most famous Russian archaeologist.

The key moments of Klejn's autobiography written in English are available on his personal website (Klejn 2009); since such details are available to the English-speaking audience (http://klejn.archaeology.ru/eng/Klejn_autobiography_eng.html), I will not recount the contents of the book here.

Leo Klejn's approach to writing his autobiography was that of an historian of science not of a common man. *Hard to*

be Klejn is without doubt the most voluminous of all known archaeology autobiographies — all 703 pages of it. *My First Hundred Years* by M.A. Murray (1963) is about a quarter the size. *Hard to be Klejn* cannot be considered literally a book of memoirs. It contains rather few memoirs, that is, texts written especially for this publication in 2007. First and foremost, it is a collection of fragments from various biographical texts, sorted chronologically by stages of biography. Among them there are interviews with various mostly foreign media, author's publications, letters, official documents of all sorts, poems and photographs.

Leo Klejn started collecting an archive of publications and autobiographical notes when he was a young assistant at the Department of Archaeology at Leningrad University. This way of creating an autobiography has two obvious consequences. On the one hand, the book is not a consistent narrative: each chapter consists of a multitude of fragments and contains numerous repetitions. On the other hand, it is the history of a scholar — and thus the history of a whole era — with multiple minute details that cannot be preserved by human memory.

The book was clearly written and published for Russian readers; the title of the book is an allusion to the famous novel *Hard to be a God* by the Strugatsky brothers (Strugatsky & Strugatsky 1973). The choice of such a proud title is both deliberate and accidental. In the last chapter of the book the author explains the title, even though he himself translates it as *It's Difficult to be Klejn*. On the one hand, it is derived from other people's notions: the feedback on the book *The World Turned Upside Down*, the joke of a fellow archaeologist from Moscow, Evgeny Chernykh, the 'god of archeology' epithet. Klejn himself denies his similarity to the Strugatsky brothers' protagonist. On the other hand, the title indeed reflects the essence: the book is really about how hard it is to be Klejn.

Leo Klejn's life has not been an easy one, for two reasons: the history of the country which is reflected in his autobiography and his character which determined his biography to a large extent. Klejn's life is rather typical of a person of his generation and social circle. During World War II he was evacuated and then fought on the frontline. During Khrushchev's 'thaw', he joined the informal community — the circle (*kruzhok*) of A. Alexandrov, Rector of Leningrad University, defended a dissertation, worked as a lecturer, and led an archaeological expedition for a number of years. He was arrested in a frame-up case and spent 18 months in prison. In the Soviet period, he was forbidden to travel abroad. It was only in 1970 that he travelled to East Germany.

While thousands of people found themselves in similar historical conditions, only Klejn became an outstanding theoretician of archaeology who travelled virtually the whole world with teaching and research visits in 1990s–2000s, who lives and works in spite of cancer diagnosed over 10 years ago. His book, *Archeological Sources* (1978), has been read by almost every Soviet humanist. The key to this, as well as to other circumstances of Klejn's life, is definitely his character.

First of all, Klejn practices an analytical approach to everything. Where anyone else steps away saying 'this is not my field of study', Klejn remains a scholar. As a schoolboy he analysed Soviet reality applying Karl Marx's theory, which caused him to come under close KGB supervision.

He viewed his imprisonment as an 'ethnographic expedition' and described the camp society from an anthropologist's position. His article *Ethnography of the Camp* (Samojlov 1990), published in the main ethnographic magazine of the USSR (*Sovetskaya etnografiya*), drew a strong response and for many years was used by sociologists and anthropologists as an example of counterculture analysis. I myself based my seminars on this article. It always attracts great interest among students. Klejn even approached his illness as a research object. This has enabled him to lead an active academic life with diagnosed cancer.

Secondly, Klejn possesses a strong sense of justice. To a large extent he can be considered an academic dissident. Throughout his life he has been fighting for human rights in one given sphere of the society, science. He never wanted to overlook plagiarism of students' works by academic advisers, always tried to publish the material from archaeological sites excavated under his guidance himself, not co-authored with some big names. It is obvious that he violated 'the rules of the game', causing trouble for himself. But as an expedition leader he always helped his students, giving them the opportunity to produce their own publications based on the excavation materials.

Thirdly, Klejn is an incredibly generous scholar. He spent many years teaching; many distinguished scientists emerged from his seminars. His students used to refer the Chair of Archaeology of Leningrad University in 1970s–1980s as, 'It's Uncle Leo Klejn's school'. Now this name is used by scientists working all around the world — from Russia's Far East to North America (Vishnyatsky *et al.* 2005, 4). At present, being separated from teaching, he continues to monitor the work of his students, eagerly giving advice to young scholars, sparing no time or effort to read and comment on the works of postgraduate students whom he does not even know personally, provided they have an idea that they are ready to stand for and the desire to learn. In a collection of quotes on science published as an appendix to his autobiography, he states, 'Giving away his materials and ideas, a talented scholar becomes head of his own school. But, if a talentless scholar gave away his materials (as for ideas — he never had any of his own), he would be left with nothing' (p. 631).

At over 85 years of age, Klejn continues an active creative life. He revises the texts of his articles and drafts, putting together several monographs each year which are being published and read. His *History of Archaeological Thought* in two volumes (Klejn 2011) is published in St Petersburg; the English edition of his *The Phenomenon of Soviet Archeology* (Klejn 2012) was recently published in Oxford.

There is a certain degree of slyness in the title of Klejn's autobiography. It is not only hard to be Klejn. It is also incredibly interesting.

Olga Sveshnikova
Forschungsstelle Osteuropa
Universität Bremen
Klagenfurter Straße 3
D-28359 Bremen
Germany
Email: sveshnikova@uni-bremen.de

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