

2017-06-02

Memories of Hans Holländer

February 2nd, 1932, Hamburg - April 28th, 2017, Berlin



Andreas Saremba
Hans Holländer, 2016

Professor Hans Holländer passed away in April at the age of 85. Even though he was not a member of the KWA, many of us are at least familiar with his name because of his numerous publications on the culture and history of chess. Andreas Saremba shares with us some highlights of his achievements and personal memories (in German language) accompanied by photographs and voice recordings. Bert Corneth translated the German text into English.

[\(German original version\)](#)

 Hans Holländer - *Minotaurus im kinetischen Labyrinth*

The art historian Holländer came into the chess world when he followed up his book about the works of Paul Wunderlich (1985) with the small volume “Minotaurus im kinetischen Labyrinth” (1989), in which –

based on Wunderlich's chessmen – he describes the universe of chess and art in one hundred pages in such a captivating way that it almost takes the reader's breath away. The original thinker did not remain undiscovered for long and soon he was included in the Chess Collectors International, to which he stayed loyal forever. About his activities in the "Initiativgruppe Königstein" founded in 1991 at CCI-president Thomas Thomsen's home we will talk later.

A fortunate twist of fate brought Holländer and his wife Barbara after his retirement as professor in 1999 from Aachen to Berlin for family reasons. There the Emanuel Lasker Gesellschaft (ELG) was founded on January 11th, 2001, and both he and his wife were founding members until their withdrawal in 2007. Already at the Lasker conference in Potsdam Holländer drew attention by his lecture "Wildwechsel von Ideen" in which he embedded the intellectual roots of Steinitz' economy principle in the physics theories of Ernst Mach. (Is anybody surprised that an art historian connects physics with chess? Already as a student Holländer was interested in mathematics, physics and space travel. He even started with studying math and physics before he changed to art history. He knew what he talked about even when it was not about art.)

Schadow and the "Old Club": Berlin 1803-2003

Holländer's presentations and articles were always worth reading and listening to, but his real domain was the great display, in particular the exhibition, set up competently and with loving care. In particular the one on "Schadows Schachclub" stands out which together with his wife Barbara he rescued from oblivion at the occasion of their 200-year jubilee in 2003. Meticulously the researching couple reconstructed not only the history but also the social and personal setting of Germany's first chess club, and on top published a fascinating catalogue both in terms of content and appearance. Also the exhibition itself was teamwork of the Holländer family, having been shaped by daughter Friederike and her husband Thomas Joeken, both architects. Part of the overall event was also a meeting of chess historians of the "IG Königstein".

-

–

Andreas Saremba

The great sculptor Gottfried Schadow was one of the founding members of the "Old Club". The photograph shows Barbara and Hans Holländer in front of his most famous structure, the Quadriga of the Brandenburger Tor (Brandenburg gate).

-

Schadows Schachclub

Ein Spiel der Vernunft in Berlin
1803 – 1850



The front cover of the exhibition catalogue shows the starting point of the research of the “Old Club”: The painting “A game of chess in the Palais Voss” by Johann Erdmann Hummel.

- —
Andreas Saremba

Opening speech at the exhibition “Schadows Schachclub” on October 2nd, 2003, in Berlin.

Voice Recording:

- —
Andreas Saremba

Guided tour through the exhibition.

- —
Andreas Saremba

Group photograph of the chess historians conference on October 19th, 2003, in front of the Berliner Gemäldegalerie (paintings gallery of Berlin).

Schachpartie durch Zeiten und Welten

Already in the year 2005 the opportunity arose to arrange a great exhibition on the occasion of the 175th birthday anniversary of the largest German chess club, the Hamburger Schachklub of 1830, in the local “Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe” (art and business museum). The splendid chess sets and other works of art from public and private sponsors (in particular the Chess Collectors International) made the three months event a joy for the many visitors, and the lavishly illustrated 360 large size pages catalogue is a gem for every chess library. The fact that this exhibition once more originated from the teamwork of the Holländer couple, was clear from the joint opening lecture.

Voice Recording:

—
Andreas Saremba

Scacchia Ludus

_ Scacchia Ludus

There was already brief mention of the “Initiativgruppe Königstein”, named after the place of residence of the (co-)initiator Thomas Thomsen. The objective of this international group of chess historians was to systematically record and publish the discoveries and new insights since Murray’s “History of chess” (1913). After many start-up problems and delays they succeeded to publish the first (and unfortunately perhaps the last) volume of “Scacchia Ludus”, which gives a treatise of the history of the transition of the Arabic chess into the West until the modern era. Co-editor Hans Holländer is the only author represented by multiple (four!) contributions: Chess in medieval literature (together with his wife Barbara); Chess in the literature of the modern era; Chess as metaphor, structure and model of imaginary worlds; and (naturally) Chess and mathematics.



Andreas Saremba

Die Herausgeber Hans Holländer und Dr. Ulrich Schädler (Direktor des Schweizer Spielemuseums) beim CCI-Treffen in Altenburg, November 2016. Dies ist das letzte Foto, das ich von Hans Holländer gemacht habe.

Club Life

We could continue the list of exhibitions and publications substantially, but we should leave it with the few representative examples. You should also not get the impression that Holländer was a cloistered scientist locking himself in his study and who knew nothing outside his research. On the contrary: He was definitely not what is called in Germany a “Vereinsmeier” but especially at the meetings of the already mentioned Laskergesellschaft he was a regular and active participant. A few sound recording examples will make clear that Hans Holländer did not need the presenter’s stage to express himself, but could also share his thoughts during informal talks in a concise, knowledgeable and witty manner.

Voice Recordings:

Eckbauern: Landwirte und Gauner:

Tarrasch und die Ästhetik:

"Er wurde geboren, lebte, arbeitete und starb!":

"Der Mann, der sich selbst erfindet":

-

- Andreas Saremba

Edith-Keller Hermann is prime guest at a Lasker meeting on December 19th, 2001. She receives a birthday present from Hans Holländer.

-

- Andreas Saremba

August 24th, 2002: The ELG cleans the totally overgrown garden of Lasker's summer residence in Thyrow. An activity that causes lots of sweat in the burning August sun, but the seventy year old Hans Holländer is participating.

-

- Andreas Saremba

June 14th, 2003: The ELG booth at the summer festival of the Jewish Museum in Berlin; in the front the maquette of the Lasker house (by architect Christian Wohlfahrt).

-

- Andreas Saremba

September 21st, 2003: The ELG visits Lasker's birthtown Berlinchen (nowadays Barlinek in Poland). Group photograph in front of Lasker's birthplace.

I also cherish the memories of the joint car drives to the CCI meetings in Naumburg (2009), Weimar (2014) and Trier (2015). Too much chess chat would have been inappropriate since my wife is not a chessplayer, therefore many other topics were discussed. He always impressed me with his critical view on the established academic world and the art scene – sometimes I thought I was not talking to a pensioner but to a spirited twenty year old. If he occasionally became too lively, Barbara would diplomatically interfere

...



Andreas Saremba
CCI-Tagung Naumburg 2009

As long serving professor at the distinguished technical university of Aachen Holländer was himself of course a representative of the “Establishment” but not due to parentage but through achievement. The financial means for his study he had to earn himself, by hard labour in the mining industry. However he never saw this as lost time, on the contrary: The solidarity, supportive spirit and comradeship during the dangerous hours in the mines were an important and character building lesson for him, of which he kept dear memories. Decades later he still talked about his colleagues with sympathy and respect.

In his last years his anyway reduced eye-sight deteriorated further, which made reading – essential for his work – more and more difficult. Accurate observation was nevertheless important as ever and therefore had to be supported with specialised tools.



Andreas Saremba

Exhibition at the Altenburg castle, CCI-meeting November 2016.

He did not allow the age related physical limitations to spoil his enjoyment of his mental work. In his final years he was especially interested in the acceptance of Chinese culture in the Western world. During our joint travels he always reported with enthusiasm about the progress of his final major work. It must have been very satisfying that he was able to complete it, including the necessary corrections, and hand it over to the publisher. And so we will receive “Europas chinesische Träume – Die Erfindung Chinas in der europäischen Literatur” (Europe’s Chinese dreams – The discovery of China in European literature) as a posthumous publication.

Hans Holländer has given us a lot through his publications. Whoever was fortunate to have known him personally, will have thankful memories of a valuable, kind and interesting person.

Andreas Saremba

(Translation by Bert Corneth)