

In Memoriam: Hans de Casparis

On behalf of the Departments of the Languages and Cultures of South and Southeast Asia, I would like to try and express the respect and gratitude that we all feel as we say goodbye to our teacher and colleague Hans de Casparis. He began his appointment at Leiden University in 1978 and worked here nearly every day since, almost to the very end of his life. In his youth already he worked here: as an assistant before the war, from 1937 to 1939. Later, he came here regularly from London to study the so-called *Abklatschen*, or prints, of the Indonesian inscriptions stored at the Kern Institute. Above all, Hans de Casparis was a researcher. It is said that when he arrived at Schiphol from London he hired a car for the entire duration of his stay in the Netherlands in order not to lose any time that could be spent on research. His classes were of high standard; they were about

research – and indeed *were* research. The field that he covered in his teaching was broad; and in this vast field he saw the greater connections, above all the long-lasting relationship between the worlds of ancient India and of the Archipelago. His inaugural address here in Leiden in 1979 covered the entire South and Southeast Asian terrain. With that broad erudition he was an eminent representative of a predominantly Dutch academic tradition – one of the best things that remain from the colonial period.

Besides the breadth he had depth, the ability to do justice to the details of the epigraphic sources and to always discover something new. He laid the foundations for modern Indonesian epigraphy. The study of Indonesia's ancient history was immeasurably enriched by his erudite interpretations, that it now stands at a richer and more complex level.

As polite and friendly as he was in his personal life, as a scientist he was critical and outspoken. This could even be expressed when his students were defending their doctoral theses, as he would point out weaknesses in their argumentation. He genuinely *formed* and inspired many of his doctoral students by his love of the field. Young people who otherwise would have become discouraged could, if they would just give all their energy to it, count on him and were given a new chance to successfully finish their work. Thirty-three of them expressed their gratitude and their bond with him as their teacher by offering him a collection of studies, under the beautifully chosen title *Fruits of Inspiration*, for his 85th birthday last year. Writing from India this week, one of them referred to him as 'a guru in the true sense of the term'.

There was much power in Hans de

Casparis. He was not one to complain: even last year when it was so clear that he was in pain, he did not deviate from his self-imposed discipline. His will was strong and he was a brave person. He was brave in spirit but also physically brave. For example, already after his retirement, two robbers attempted to mug him in Amsterdam, and though he was small, he was athletic, and he managed to shake them off. Hans de Casparis was consistent in everything, but especially in his loyalty: to his colleagues and students, to his subject, and to Indonesia, the country where he felt at home and where he had friends. Hans will always be remembered by many, who will continue to be inspired by him. ◀

Leiden, 28 June 2002
D.H.A. Kolff



Prof. De Casparis teaching epigraphy at the Kern Institute (1979).