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ANDREAS FRIDOLIN WEIS BENTZON

1936-1971

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The announcement of the much too early death of ANDREAS FRIDOLIN WEIS BENTZON on December 20th, 1971 was a shock to his colleagues and the students of Danish anthropological institutions. The tragic message about Fridolin's death, caused by an incurable disease, seemed so meaningless and was quite unexpected.

Personally and scientifically Fridolin was an individualist possessing unusual qualifications. His anthropological interest was deep and genuine, and also extensive and without any prejudice concerning methods or schools, the relative importance of which he always tried to view in an objective way. His interests also surpassed the proper anthropological scope and included types of philosophy as well as general theory of science. Furthermore, he was in possession of an artistic enthusiasm and a scientific interest in music and in musical studies. It can truly be said that Fridolin covered wider fields than most anthropologists, and his diligence combined with his particular urge to deal with difficult theoretical problems added to his exceptionally comprehensive scientific view and vision.

Already as a student at the University of Copenhagen Fridolin was inclined to go his own way, and the somewhat loosely organized M. Sc. study of anthropology suited him excellently. He did not study merely to obtain a degree. Studying was to him a natural urge, and several years went by before he passed his examination. After that, however, he quickly obtained his doctorate (dr. phil.) on a thesis about the Sardinian musical instrument, *launeddas*. The thesis was publicly defended and printed in 1969. It was the first ethnomusicological dissertation ever defended at a Danish university, and it inaugurated a new ethnomusicological series.

The dissertation about *launeddas* is remarkable because it is based on material collected in the field by Fridolin very early in his life. He became interested in *launeddas* music as early as 1953 and 1955 when during his school vacations he had the opportunity to visit Sardinia, and during the period December 1957-May 1958 most of the material for the dissertation was being collected to be supplemented during a later visit to the island in 1962. The dissertation largely is inaccessible to scholars without a special knowledge of musical research. However, it also contains pure ethnological chapters concerning technology, the distributional patterns of this and similar wind instruments and their historical origins, and special attention is paid to the rôle of the *launeddas* in its social context.

The latter aspect has also been discussed by Fridolin in a paper printed at an earlier date in the present journal (1960).

Though Fridolin had an unusual talent for ethnomusicology, he did not seem to have any intention to continue just this particular line after his doctoral dissertation. His general anthropological interest was predominant, and when visiting Sardinia in 1965, 1966, and 1969 he collected field material concerned with all aspects of cultural and social life. Occasionally he gave seminars on this material to his colleagues at the university. However, he never succeeded in getting published this material on kinship and marriage, social sanctions, rites of magic, etc.

Fridolin was attached to the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the University of Copenhagen for a period of six years – from April 1st, 1966 and to his death. He started as a “kandidatstipendiat” and later became a “universitetsadjunkt”. These positions enabled him to deal with his personal field material in connection with his weekly teaching to advanced students. For this purpose he translated his non-music fieldnotes to English and had them stencilled in a certain number of copies with the title, “Material for courses in methodology”. These were then at the disposal of the students, who during the lessons learned to deal with the raw data. During a period Fridolin also lectured on anthropological theory dealing with the works of such authors as Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, Nadel, and others. The students—many of whom were of his own age—appreciated highly his ability to understand complex theories and likewise his talent for inspiration.

The interplay between research and teaching appeared to have been a very essential link in Fridolin's life. He was both comrade and friend of the students, and several will remember with special joy his success in making the students active musicians in the gamelan-orchestra of the National Museum.

It was quite natural that music developed into an essential part of Fridolin's life, because his family has a strong tradition of musical activity on a high and professional level. However, it was probably by accident that Sardinia became his particular field of research; originally he had different plans about fieldwork in more exotic regions. His special region of ethnography for the M. Sc. degree was Southeast Asia, and he was looking forward to carrying out extensive fieldwork under distant skies. He was longing for the study of “a truly primitive culture that would lead us back to the time when everything started”, as he once put it himself.

These plans were never realized. However, during the far too few years he was engaged in anthropological research, he accomplished more than most people. His work will remain as a lasting memorial of a young talented scholar who quite meaninglessly was torn away from his scientific vocation.

Publications by Andreas Fridolin Weis Bentzon :

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- 1966 Glædeligt nytår. Etnologisk blålys på en dansk overgangsrite. Jordens Folk, Etnografisk Revy, 2. årg., no. 1, pp. 173-174. København.
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- 1968 Sydøstasien. In Nicolaisen, Nellemann, Kehler (eds.), *Verdens folkeslag i vor tid*, pp. 44-64. København.
- 1969 The Launeddas. A Sardinian folk-music instrument. Two volumes. Acta Ethnomusicologica Danica No. 1. Copenhagen.