Eulogy for PAUL FEJOS
(1897-1963)

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Adopted formally April 26, 1963 by the Board of Directors of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research

Paul Fejos became Director of Research of the newly-created Viking Fund in 1941. He died on April 23, 1963, as President and Director of Research of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research—the new name for the organization of which, in a literal as well as a symbolic sense, he was the "only begetter."

It is with a becoming sense of humility that American scholars, now, realize that it took a brilliant and complex Hungarian to help shift the center of gravity of an academic discipline which needed new directions. In 1941 the Viking Fund was viewed with some suspicion. Anthropologists were not accustomed, before World War II, to special attention on their own behalf; and the Viking Fund was the first foundation in the United States explicitly devoted to the welfare of anthropology as it embraces the spectrum of ethnology, physical anthropology, linguistics and archeology. In point of fact, the suspicion had deeper roots than this, for Paul Fejos had a strange lack of concern for the ordinary abracadabra of the social sciences as frozen in the American academic mold. He could even argue that anthropology was, and should be, one of the humanities—and this brought him a certain aura of mistrust.

At bottom, of course, he believed in the cross-fertilization of the disciplines. If philosophy or literature or art or engineering or medicine or pure science could contribute to human welfare and knowledge he saw no reason to cling to the little ladders of learning formulated by any special academic interest. The measure of his success as a foundation executive was the extent to which he encouraged the opening up of new avenues of research and understanding. Twenty years later the Wenner-Gren Foundation had become the rallying point for anthropology, not only in the United States but around the world. Seldom had the genius of one man served so well the needs of so many. Nor was this because the Foundation had multiple millions of dollars to give away. As foundations went, it was smallish, and its impact was out of all proportion to its assets. No man ever made a dollar do as much as did Paul Fejos. He argued, he persuaded, he even bullied his colleagues in the social sciences into accepting new methods and techniques of research, and into refining old methods.

He could do this because his own prestige—the depth and breadth of his intellectual grasp—was unassailable. It is customary in reports such as this to emphasize the uniqueness of the man whose loss is being lamented. The career of Paul Fejos needs no such emphasis: its meanings were fully evident to all who knew him. But it can be said soberly that in all probability his like will not be seen again. Not only was he the product of a European culture that he saw disappear in his own lifetime, but he combined in himself talents and energies and depths of perception that are uncommon to any man in any age. Perhaps the nearest parallel that one can find for him in our own narrowly specialized generation is the well-worn image of Renaissance Man. He was aware of pretty much everything that was human, and it became a part of his life. Unlike most of us, who come out of safe niches in comfortable fields, he was a good doctor of medicine, an artist of scope in stage and motion picture direction, a startlingly imaginative and productive ethnological explorer, and a foundation leader of unparalleled brilliance. He could be this latter because, in a curious way, he brought his success in multifarious fields to focus in this last of his many careers. He encouraged the synthesis of the fragmented world of learning as we know it. He left it immeasurably better for the clarity of his intuitions.

Not the least of his accomplishment was to recognize that science is a seamless garment, geographically, and to reduce the insularity of American anthropology by making it aware of its world-connections. The establishment of the European Center of the Foundation was in this sense the crown of his achievement.

It might be permitted in a brief review of this kind, and on behalf of my fellow directors of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, to express a sense of what can never be said properly or fully: Paul Fejos' great capacity for friendship, his supreme warmth and understanding as a human being. He would smile if he were to read all this, for he was the most modest of men. But insofar as words can establish memory—words which call for simplicity of assertion rather than eloquence—what has been said here is less than the full truth. We have known in our time a man for the ages.
Dr. Paul Fejos was born January 24, 1897 to Desire and Aurora Novelly Fejos in Budapest, Hungary. In 1921 he received an M.D. from the Royal Hungarian Medical University of Budapest. Arrived in the U.S.A. in 1922, he became a naturalized citizen in 1930. In 1958 he married Lita Binns Fejos. He died April 23, 1963 in New York, N.Y. A summary of his professional history, honors and decorations, and publications follows.

Professional History
Research Technician, Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, 1923–26;
Universal and MGM Studios, Hollywood, 1926–30; produced and directed numerous films; made ethnographical films in Africa, East Indies and the Far East;
Director, Danish Ethnographic Expedition to Madagascar and Seychelles Archipelago, 1934–36;
Field collector, ethnographic division, National Museum, Copenhagen, 1935–37;
Director, Swedish Film Industries Ethnographic Expedition to East Indies and Siam, 1936–38;
Director of Research, Wenner-Gren Scientific Expedition to Hispanic America, 1939–41;
Director of Research, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, formerly The Viking Fund, 1941–1963; President, 1955–1963;
Consulting Professor of Anthropology, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1943–1963;
Lecturer in Anthropology, with professorial rank, Yale University, 1949–51;
Acting Director, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1951;
Associate in Anthropology, Columbia University, 1951–52;

Honors and Decorations
I. classe, Silberne Tapferkeits Medaille, Austria-Hungary, 1917;
II. classe, Silberne Tapferkeits Medaille, Austria-Hungary, 1917;
Bronze Tapferkeits Medaille, Austria-Hungary, 1917;
Signum Laudis, Austria-Hungary, 1918;
V. class, Order of Medjidje, Turkey, 1918;
Professor Honorarius, U. of Cuzco, Peru, 1941;
Knight Commander, Order of the Sun, Peru, 1941;
Orellana Gold Medal of the Geographic Society of Lima, Peru, 1943;
Honorary Fellow, Royal Anthropological Institute, Great Britain, 1957;
Golden Medal “ai Benemeriti della Cultura”, Italy, 1958;
Grosse Silberne Ehrenzeichen für Verdienste um die Republik Österreich, 1960;
Honorary Member, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1960;

Professional Scientific Societies
Fellow, American Anthropological Association
Fellow, Royal Anthropological Institute
Fellow, American Association for Advancement of Science
Fellow, New York Academy of Medicine
Fellow, New York Academy of Sciences
Chairman, Section of Anthropology, 1950–51
Vice-President, 1952

President-Elect, 1953
President, 1954
Member, American Academy of Political and Social Science
Member, American Association of Physical Anthropologists
Member, American Society of Human Genetics
Member, American Ethnological Society
Member, Society for American Archeology
Member, Institute of Human Paleontology

Chief Fields of Research
Ethnology of Southeast Asia
Ethnology of Upper Amazon
Andean Archeology

Publications

Unpublished
Applied anthropology, outline of lectures on applied anthropology, Far Eastern Area and Language Unit, Stanford University. 26 pp.
Mimeographed report on the Wenner-Gren scientific expedition to Hispanic America, 1940, to his Excellency Gunnar Reutersköld, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Sweden. Lima, 1940.
MS. on Mascho of Peruvian Montaña. n.d.
PAUL FEJOS
January 24, 1897-April 23, 1963

Oil painting by the noted Austrian artist, Robert Fuchs.
Dr. Fejos sat for the portrait during the summer of 1962, within Burg Wartenstein, which is pictured in the background.