

## STEPHAN F. DE BORHEGYI, 1921–1969

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**A**N automobile accident on September 26, 1969, took the life of Dr. Stephan F. de Borhegyi, Director of the Milwaukee Public Museum and one of this country's most able and productive archaeologists. Steve Borhegyi was born in Hungary on October 17, 1921. He received his early education at the St. Joseph of Calasanz Preparatory School in Debrecen, Hungary, where he lived on the baronial estate of his grandfather. On the death of his grandfather, and a male heir, he inherited the title of Baron. After graduation from high school in 1938, he entered Peter Pazmany University in Budapest. His education was interrupted by the Second World War, in which he served on the Eastern Front as a Lieutenant in the Royal Mounted Artillery. Near the end of the war he left the Army and joined the underground as a protest to the Nazi party in Hungary and the persecution of the Jews.

When the Germans had been driven from Hungary, Steve returned to Peter Pazmany University and received a Ph.D. (*summa cum laude*) in 1946. He then became Assistant Curator of Classical Archaeology at the Hungarian National Museum, an appointment which set the direction he was to follow throughout his professional career.

Steve came to the United States in the spring of 1948 on a Viking Fund fellowship to study Central and South American ethnological collections. He was one of several talented East European scholars brought to this country during this period by the late Paul Fejos, then Director of the Viking Fund, which is now known as the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The fellowship also enabled Steve to attend the archaeological field school at Point of Pines, Arizona, during the summer of 1948 and, subsequently, during the following year to continue his work at the University of Arizona. It was here that he met Suzanne Sims, an anthropology graduate student at Tucson. They were married in Guatemala City in July, 1949, and in the years following eventually had four children: Ilona, Stephan, Carl, and Christopher.

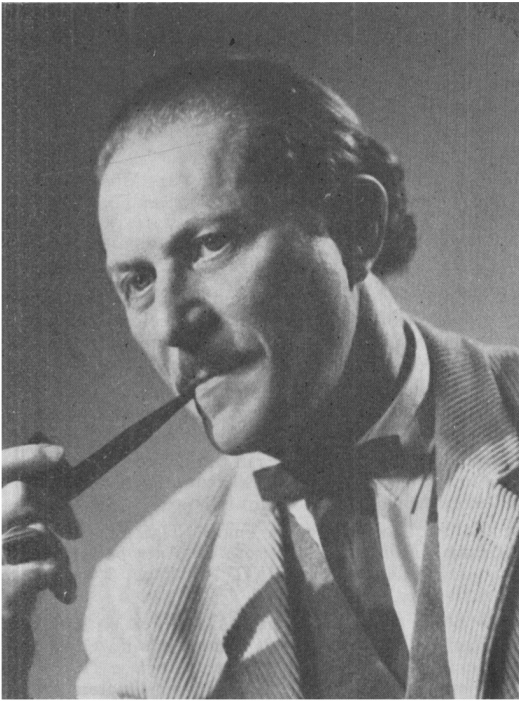
It was also during these years that many of us who regard ourselves as among Steve's closest friends first came to know him. It was a difficult time for Steve. He had left behind his family

and friends and those titles, lands, and perquisites which under different circumstances he could reasonably have expected to be his for life. His student associates, many of whom were just back from fighting against his side in the war, viewed him with suspicion and hostility, not only because he had been an "enemy" but also because he was European. Some of them mocked his dress and manners, and he was the butt of many jokes, including the planting of a distinctive female statue in his part of the excavations at Point of Pines. This got a bit out of hand, much to the discomfort and embarrassment of all concerned, but it remains one of the classic archaeological pranks, and the story is frequently retold even today. It is the measure of the man that those who perpetrated this hoax became his closest friends and admirers. We admired Steve, not because he changed, but because those who came to know him well realized that he was a man of real intellect and originality, with genuine charm and a warm personality.

Following his stay in Tucson, and through the good offices of Dr. A. V. Kidder, Steve finished his first year's fellowship in Guatemala working with staff members of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Division of Historical Research. The Wenner-Gren Foundation and a fellowship from the Bollingen Foundation made it possible for him to remain in Guatemala for an additional two years to organize the anthropology collection in the National Museum. When this task was completed, the government of Guatemala awarded him a Diploma of Merit in recognition of his outstanding services at the National Museum.

Steve returned to the United States in 1951 and attended Yale University as a postdoctoral fellow. He also worked with the Human Relations Area Files and was sent to Santa Fe where Bruce Inverarity was developing a visual file of ethnographic materials in a program jointly sponsored by Yale and the Museum of International Folk Art.

When the visual files project was finished in 1952, Steve received a two-year Bollingen Foundation grant to make a comparative study of religious phenomena in northern New Mexico and the Guatemalan Highlands. He and his family spent part of this period in Guatemala,



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but most of the time they lived at Santa Fe and Chimayo, New Mexico. He came to love the country and its people, and they responded.

In July, 1954, he was appointed Director of the Stovall Museum at the University of Oklahoma, a post which he held until 1958 when he became Director of the Milwaukee Public Museum. The Oklahoma position was crucial in Steve's later career, for it provided his first major opportunity to demonstrate the flair and originality which are so characteristic of his work. He transformed what had been a rather stodgy repository of antiquities, fossils, and other odds and ends into an institution whose vitality attracted a broad spectrum of interest and support throughout the state and the University.

It was Steve's belief that the proper role of a university museum was to serve the university community, and this could best be achieved if this community became involved in the programs of the museum and vice-versa. To achieve this, he sought ways where the Museum could take an active part in the intellectual and social life of the school. Many of these activities were not the things traditionally done by museums, and on occasion they displeased some of his more conservative colleagues, but they were suc-

cessful, for they brought both the students and the faculty into the Museum in ever increasing numbers. Part of his success may have been due to the fact that Steve also took a personal interest in campus activities. He was a good athlete and a skillful fencer, having been a champion during his army days. He organized a fencing club at Oklahoma and became the fencing coach for the University.

Steve moved to Milwaukee at a most favorable moment. The City had just approved a \$6 million bond issue to construct a new museum, and Steve arrived in time to participate in the final stages of designing the new structure and to direct the planning of the exhibits. Almost from the moment he arrived in Milwaukee, he obtained the enthusiastic participation of the superb staff of the Museum and the generous support of the community. The results were truly spectacular. Numerous innovations in museum and display techniques were introduced or refined, and, by general consensus, the now almost complete displays of the new Milwaukee Public Museum are among the finest and most successful in the world.

These new exhibits also reflect Steve's conviction that the museum should take an active interest in the pressing problems of life in the modern world. It was his view that museum exhibits should be less artifact-oriented and more concerned with concepts. Furthermore, museums have a basic responsibility in mass education in such present day problems as racism, war, and social change.

Steve also taught courses in anthropology and museum techniques at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Students were attracted to him because of his unusual breadth of interests, his humor, and his genuine concern for their problems.

Throughout his career Steve was a prolific writer, as is evidenced by the accompanying bibliography. His contributions fall into three major categories. As befitting someone so committed to the museum field, there are more than 50 papers dealing with museums and their operation. These include such subjects as administrative problems, visitor evaluation, exhibit techniques, the design of storage facilities, program development, and, in fact, almost every aspect of museum activity.

Most of his professional papers, however, reflect Steve's long interest in the archaeology and ethnology of Mesoamerica and the American

Southwest. Many of these are concerned with functional interpretations rather than simple description or chronological evaluation. There is another series of papers, mostly published while he was at the Hungarian National Museum, which deal with Classical Archaeology and Hungarian folk culture.

For all of his publications, however, Steve never wrote a "monumental contribution," nor is it likely that he ever would have done so. His interests were too diverse for him to spend several years in effort on one project or topic. He was also too generous with his time and energy on the projects of his friends. He was an active member of more than 40 professional societies and organizations, and at various times he served as a member of the managing boards, as executive officer, or as editor for at least 10 of them, including the American Association of Museums (Member of the Board), Mountain Plains Museum Association (President and Editor), Fort Burgwin Research Center (Board of Trustees), International Committee on Ethnographical Museums (American delegate), Society for American Archaeology (Executive Board Member), Oklahoma Anthropological Society (Editor), Society for Underwater Archaeology (Executive Board Member), Wisconsin Archaeological Survey (President), and Texas Tech University (Advisor to the President). It is a tragedy that such an outstanding career should be interrupted in midstride.

Steve's generosity with his time continued to the very end. He spent the summer of 1969 at the Fort Burgwin Research Center near Taos, New Mexico, and while there he contributed his remarkable talents to the design and installation of an exhibit gallery depicting this area and its people. Not only did Steve give freely of his time to do these exhibits, but his enthusiasm also captured the interest of the students working at the Center, and many of them volunteered their services just for the pleasure and opportunity to work with him. It is fitting that his last major project was undertaken in the area he loved among the people with whom he felt the closest affinity.

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