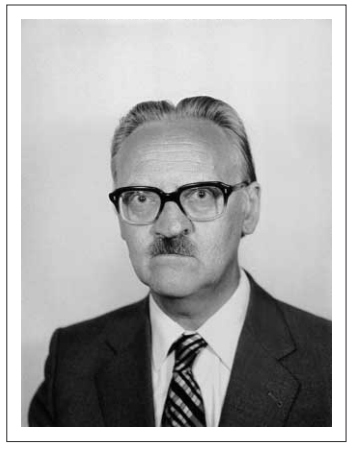
Coll. Antropol. **28** (2004) 1: 473–478
In Memoriam

IN MEMORIAM

Jens Ó. P. Pálsson

(1926–2002)



Professor Jens Ólafur Páll Pálsson died on 17 April 2002 in Mainz. In the Nordic countries he was one of the rare classical anthropologists. Particularly the population genetics and population history of his country Iceland was founded and developed by him. Over decades his work found its merited resonance in Europe and the world. Moreover, he was always esteemed for his hospitality, openness and his warm heart. He died of cancer, quiet and content and well prepared, in the house of his wife Anne Kandler-Pálsson.

He was born on 30 April 1926 in Reykjavík to a well known family of merchants, parsons and artists. After his school time in Iceland he attended the universities of Uppsala in Sweden (studying anthropology, ethnology, folklore with his teachers Lundman, Campbell and Strömbeck), Berkeley in California (biological and cultural anthropology, archaeology, history, literature and art history with McCown, Heizer, Birdsell and Hamre), Seattle in Washington (biological anthropology and human genetics with Hulse) Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts (physical anthropology and human genetics with Hunt and Howells), Oxford in England (biological anthropology, paleoanthropology, ethnology and social anthropology with Roberts, Weiner, LeGros Clark, Pittman and Evans-Pritchard) and finally Mainz in Germany (anthropology, geography and ethnology with Schwidetzky, Walter, Panzer, Jettmar and Haberland). In 1957 he recei-ved his BA in physical anthropology at Berkeley and in 1967 his Dr rer nat in Mainz, again majoring in anthropology and minoring in ethnology and geography. His long student time and his research was supported by numerous honorable grants, from Menningarsjoður (Icelandic culture foundation, 1953), Alþingi Íslendinga (Islandic parliament, 1954–71), Vísindasjóður Íslands (scientific foundation of Iceland, eight times from 1960 to 1970), Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung (the major German foundation for foreigners, 1962–64 and 1976), Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (the central German science foundation, 1968 and 1972–73), Nordiske Kulturfond (1972– 74) and Sátmálasjoður (Danish-Icelandic foundation, nine times since 1975).

This long list at once shows his determined activity as well as his difficult position as a scientist of a very small discipline in a very small country: in 1951 when he started his university studies, Iceland had 146,540 inhabitants, when he died 288,470. The fact that this tiny country afforded an institute of anthropology was his achievement.

Already as a student he collected data on the population of Iceland, on adults in the main regions of the country and in Reykjavík on children (between 1952 and 1963 more than 5000 individuals). In 1961 he studied medieval skeletons on Bornholm, Denmark, together with Prof Møller-Christensen. In the sixties and seventies he continued the physical studies in Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Ireland, Finland, Denmark and Canada. Parameters taken were anthropometry, pigmentation, dermatoglyphics and serology. Thus, he became the prime expert of the physical character of the population of Iceland and their history. In the case of the investigations in Canada (together with other Icelandic, American and Canadian scientists) his objective was to assess the modifications following migration (»Icelanders in two hemispheres«). For the Icelandic population genealogy is known for the complete history of a thousand years; now he could supplement and quantify these historic records by genetic data, also his own from other north European countries, purposely collected for this objective of origin assessment of the settlers. Thus Iceland became a unique region in the world. He knew practically every Icelandic family, also many abroad, and he had studied roughly 3% of the Icelandic population.

His institutional basis started in 1972 with a research center of the Icelandic association of anthropology. In 1975 he founded Institute of Anthropology at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík and became director, but only since 1993 he was professor of anthropology. His grant for Mainz started a long and close relation to Germany, first to his teachers Ilse Schwidetzky and Hubert Walter, then also to Winfried Henke, who for some years was a member of his population study group in Iceland.

He was a member in many learned societies. 1958 he was elected member of Phi Beta Kappa, a general association of scientists in North America; he always esteemed this an honorable reward. He was one of the founders of the Icelandic Society in Oxford, of the Icelandic Society of Anthropology and of the European Anthropological Association EAA. The Croatian Anthropological Society elected him honorary member in 1993. Since 1964 he was the representative for Iceland in the IUAES.

With all his activity he added much to the national soul of the Icelanders. For this and for his warm personality he will be well remembered by friends and colleagues.

Friedrich W. Rösing

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The Precise Colour of the Sky
Obituary to Professor Branko Cvjetanović

When the great international and Croatian epidemiologist, Professor Branko Cvjetanović, revisited School of Public Health "Andrija Štampar" in Zagreb in 1997, he was surprised to see me in the same office that he used to occupy for decades, unaware that a new person was appointed to our department. Still, he immediately became enthusiastic about teaching a newcomer the very essence of the epidemiological science. He told me a story of the tribe of creatures living happily at the bottom of the ocean, in a complete darkness. One day, the most curious creature among them decided to swim upwards, to the end of their world. When it surfaced above the ocean, it saw a clear blue sky and went back to tell all the others, but no one could believe something that strange.

However, this unexpected information intrigued other fellow creatures. One of them repeated the achievement several days later. The sky was cloudy with thunderstorms, so the creature anxiously dived back to the bottom, telling everyone that the end of their world wasn't blue and quiet, but rather grey, loud, with occasional flashes of light. The third creature, very old and respected, immediately went up to resolve this dispute. When it surfaced, it was midnight and the sky was again quiet, but this time it was black and covered with endless shiny stars. The creature went back and confirmed that there indeed was an end to their world, neither blue nor grey but black, and the light was not present as a strong single beam or spectacular flashes, but it was dispersed as fine dots all across the horizon. Finally, a whole group of the most respected creatures went up to reach the consensus and put an end to speculations. When they surfaced, the night was very cloudy. There was nothing but darkness around them, so they went back to the bottom and told everyone that their world is the same everywhere and there is nothing special at its end to see. This story that Professor Cvjetanović told me summarised the struggle of epidemiologists who often study the same problem using different methods, in different populations, environments and time periods, implying the need for consistency in their observations before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

Regardless of this relativistic view on epidemiological science and its limitations, Professor Cvjetanović always seemed to have the right answer for everything. »*The Devil is not wise because he is special. The Devil is wise because he is very, very old*«, he would like to teach his young colleagues. He always encouraged us to apply the concept of »*lateral thinking*«, which meant integrating knowledge from different segments of science into the others rather than going too far in a single direction, which usually

leads to a dead-end. He believed that »*lateral thinking*« is the approach most likely to result in unexpected chance findings, which have been the basis for most great discoveries in the human history. »*People think that they control events, but when we look back at our own personal histories or our collective history, nearly everything important that ever happened was a pure coincidence*«, he used to say. However, when I once suggested that the humanity would not have the natural selection or relativity theory as early if Charles Darwin or Albert Einstein were born in the developing world, he strongly disagreed. »*The true pioneers will inevitably surface, regardless of where they were born*«. He admitted this to be one of the rare certainties in our world.

Having fought against Nazism during the World War II, in the post-war period Professor Cvjetanović graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb. He became a collaborator of the great Professor Andrija Štampar, the president of the first World Health Assembly, the occasion upon which the World Health Organisation was founded. Learning from Professor Štampar and working with him, Professor Cvjetanović soon became a highly prominent member of the World Health Organisation and the leading expert of his time in the issues of vaccination, sanitation and modelling of epidemics. As a Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Bacterial Diseases of the World Health Organization, he contributed to eradication of some of the leading public health problems in large parts of the world, such as cholera, typhoid, meningococcal disease, poliomyelitis and measles during the 1960's and 1970's. He also continued to develop epidemiology at the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb, producing a comprehensive textbook used by his students for decades. The list of his 20 most important peer-reviewed publications that I selected from a large number of papers and books he left behind can be found at the end of this text (1–20).

Towards the end of his career, Professor gradually reduced the amount of his publications, wittingly concluding how »*...one needs to know when to retire from it all and make room for the others*«. However, this by no means suggests that he lost the touch with modern trends or that he ran out of ideas. On the contrary, his experience made him convinced that we should start building foundations for the new branches of epidemiological science that will become increasingly important in the future. One of his ideas was addressing the issue of tourist health, as the number of humans travelling at any given point in time is strongly increasing in recent decades. His other important idea was the need for developing the epidemiological study of violence and war, the two causes of morbidity and mortality that simply wouldn't go away. In both cases he even wrote some pioneering perspectives that were accepted for publication in the last years of his life (19).

During his career, Professor claimed to have visited virtually every single country and territory of the world apart from Albania. He always tried to find reasons to visit that country, sometimes even inviting me to join him. »*You eventually forget all the things that happened to you on day-to-day basis, and when you get old you'll only remember your travels*« – he used to say. He had a theory that people are simply unaware of their own existence when occupied with routine daily tasks in their common environments. »*Only dramatic changes of personal environment, occurring during travel, can slow the pace of time and re-ignite all the basic human instincts, including the survival mechanisms and long-term memory.*« – claimed the Professor.

Our trip to Albania, unfortunately, never happened. Still, in the last months of his life we managed to organise something that he regarded equally important: a research visit to the extremely isolated island of Susak. At the very beginning of his career, in

early 1950's, Professor Cvjetanović had led the extensive multidisciplinary investigation of this unique island as a project of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (then called »Yugoslav«). Fifty years later, in 2001, we organised another visit to this island. With several younger colleagues from the School of Public Health »Andrija Štampar« in Zagreb, Professor Cvjetanović managed to assess the dramatic impact of transition process on this small and isolated community. Professor Cvjetanović's last paper, presenting the results of this visit in 2001, is published in this issue of *Collegium Antropologicum* (**20**). Having completed this work several months before his death, Professor was satisfied with that achievement which had a considerable personal value. He claimed that he was in charge of studying the population cohort followed up by a single researcher during one of the longest periods in the history of biomedical science, i.e. for exactly 50 years.

The wisdom of this extraordinary man, a great scientist and humanist, was far-reaching. Frequently asked for advice about incredibly complex situations by his colleagues, one of his favourite answers was: »*If you don't know what to do, don't do anything. Just wait, and see*.« He believed that the time itself was the most powerful ally of them all, if a person had a gift of patience.

The time, unfortunately, took Professor Cvjetanović away from us. As I was just beginning to learn from him and formulate questions worthy of his answers, this seemed far too soon. Of all the questions I never got to ask him, one was related to his story from the beginning of the text. I thought I found a slight flaw in his story. I wondered how could the second creature to surface above the ocean, after having spent its entire life living in complete darkness, recognize a gray colour and distinguish it from blue? Nevertheless, I know that Professor Cvjetanović would just laugh and respond with an immediate answer. And it would most certainly be the right one.

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