

## Sigurd Erixon 1888-1968

**S**IGURD ERIXON WAS BORN on 26th March 1888 at Söderköping in the province of Östergötland on the coast of the Baltic Sea, a small town with a long history which goes far back into the early Middle Ages. His father was a merchant, but both parents came from old peasant families in the plains of Östergötland. Erixon wrote his first studies on the history of his native town and all his life he continued to make new contributions to the knowledge of its history. Thus, one of the last papers he saw in print before his death concerns a Söderköping businessman known all over Sweden for his trade in wine and spirits.

After the higher certificate examination at the secondary school of Norrköping, Erixon pursued manysided studies at Uppsala University where, in 1910, he graduated with honours. His "filosofie kandidat"-examination included Scandinavian languages, the histories of literature, art and religion, and Scandinavian and comparative pre-history. Already at this stage it is possible to see, from the choice of subjects for his examination papers etc., that the popular elements of cultural development had caught his interest in a particular way. Still, it was confrontation with such elements in a more tangible form that, in a way, had the decisive influence on his future. That was when, in 1912, he had been granted a small travelling scholarship and came to the village of Kila in the forest regions of south Östergötland, a village not yet affected by the land reforms of the 19th century. The study of this remnant of mediaeval community planning and organization led him to undertake extensive field researches that were to bring him to all parts of Sweden, giving him an opportunity to gather a unique knowledge of phenomena of this kind.

Two years later, in 1914, he was appointed an amanuensis at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, where he remained in different posts until he retired in 1955. In 1922 he became assistant keeper of the department for rural culture of the museum and in 1924 keeper of the department for cultural history of the open-air museum of Skansen. As a museum official he was unceasingly active and took many fruitful initiatives, the most important being perhaps the systematic development of research activities in the whole country, with the result that archives of an unparalleled comprehensiveness were created in the museum, consisting of photos, drawings and written records. Very often other institutions and authorities called him in as an expert on museum matters. The scientific objectives of the Nordiska Museet, based on traditions from Artur Hazelius, became still more accentuated thanks to Sigurd Erixon's contributions, and they also characterized his work at Skansen, where he paid particular attention to and tried to establish the milieus from which the buildings exhibited had been fetched. In this connection he reconstructed, with a cautious hand, the remarkable farmstead around the farmer's dwelling house from Mora Parish in Dalecarlia that had been transferred to Skansen by Artur Hazelius as early as in 1891. He also wrote a new and detailed guide book for Skansen which became, at the same time, a valuable handbook on the popular ways of building.

When Nils Lithberg, professor of Scandinavian and comparative folklife research at the Nordiska Museet, died in 1934 Sigurd Erixon was appointed his successor. By agreement between the Nordiska Museet and Stockholm University this research professorship was combined with academic teaching and examination in the subject represented by the chair (formerly called "Nordic ethnology"). The arrangement made

it possible for Sigurd Erixon to perform a rich and highly appreciated role as a teacher, and he had the pleasure of seeing a great number of students gather around him. Already before that, in 1926, he had passed his "filosofie licentiat"-examination at Uppsala University, and he had also held temporary appointments as a teacher at the universities of Uppsala and Lund.

Accommodation for the professor's teaching and for an institute for folklife research is provided in a separate building belonging to the Nordiska Museet and situated in its vicinity at Djurgården. In the same house there was also the private apartment of the professor. Numerous friends and colleagues in Sweden and abroad surely remember with the greatest pleasure the gatherings in this Art Nouveau house, "Lusthusporten", with Sigurd Erixon and his wife as charming hosts. As an emeritus Sigurd Erixon at first moved to Hässelbygård in the western suburbs of Stockholm and then to Lidingö, a neighbouring town of Stockholm. But his hospitality remained as generous and boundless as before at "Lusthusporten".

It is natural that many marks of honour were conferred upon Sigurd Erixon during his long life. In 1927 he was made a doctor of philosophy *honoris causa* by his old university and later on both by Oslo University in Norway and by Åbo Akademi in Finland. He was a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Literature, History, and Antiquities, one of the founders of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in 1932, as well as a member of the Royal Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters, the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, and of many associations of different kinds in other countries.

Sigurd Erixon died of a heart embolism on 18th February 1968. He had had some symptoms of weakened health earlier but seemed in full vigour again, until he fell ill only a few days before his death. The funeral took place on the following Saturday at the old church from Seglora at Skansen and was attended by many friends and colleagues.

SIGURD ERIXON PUBLISHED HIS FIRST SCIENTIFIC STUDY of importance under the heading "Några bidrag till det nordiska husets historia" (Contributions to the History of the North European House), in *Fataburen* 1917. Its first part describes the history of the four-sided house and of the hearth, as far as this was possible from the data available at that time. It must be considered a masterly work for a writer not yet 30 years old. The latter half of the study is an aperçu of his own field research during the two preceding years concerning in particular the shielings of the summer pastures of Dalecarlia. It was the director of the museum, he told me once, who put the pen into his hand asking him to state the motifs of these investigations, that had by then grown much more comprehensive than formerly, in various parts of Sweden.

For Erixon these travels had a very great importance and they were to be carried on until the end of his life. They brought him to all parts of Sweden but were gradually extended also to other parts of Europe. What he saw there made him set himself constantly new goals. In fact, the unpredicted *per se* seemed to stimulate his restless mind. His narratives from many such exploring tours, which were collected in 1941 in a big volume called "Strövtåg i svenska bygder" (Wanderings through the Swedish

Countryside), are often charming pictures of the discoverer's vivid joy at his finds.

Additional conclusions from Erixon's first field researches, viewed under other aspects, were presented in the following years in the paper "Bebyggelseundersökningar. Periodiska bebyggelse typer" (Settlement Studies. Periodical Settlement Types) in *Fataburen* 1918. Both papers constitute points of departure for two lines running through the whole of Erixon's production. One concerns the history of dwelling types, the other the organization of community life.

The former led him *inter alia* to most penetrating investigations of building techniques. A basic survey of them was given in "The North-European technique of corner timbering" (in *Folkliv* 1937), based on his inaugural lecture in 1934. Many detail studies deal with related matters, among them "Ett timringsredskap i kultur-geografisk belysning" (A Carpenter's Tool in the Light of Culture Geography) from 1933, a model study from a methodological point of view. At his death Erixon had been working for many years at a conclusive historical survey of log building technique with the chief stress laid on datable monuments. Already in 1947 he had published a general and very comprehensive survey in "Svensk byggnadskultur" (Swedish Domestic Architecture).

Of great importance for the development of building types is the place of the particular buildings in the farmstead. From the beginning Erixon had sought to define the distribution in Sweden of the different types of layout which existed in this connection, as for example in the paper "Svenska gårdstyper" (Swedish Farm Types) in *Rig* 1919. This was also the first time that he made use of cartographic representation, a method which later became a main interest with him. A valuable contribution to the discussion then current on the division of Sweden in natural regions was his paper "Svensk byggnadskultur och dess geografi" (Swedish Domestic architecture and its geography) in *Ymer* 1922. Sigurd Erixon never ceased to stress the significance of defining the spatial dimension of cultural phenomena, and in this respect he came to occupy an internationally recognized position as an expert and as a promoter of new enterprises in this field. As for himself he edited and published, in 1957, under the sponsorship of the Gustavus Adolphus Academy, the first volume of "Atlas över svensk folkkultur" (Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture) on the material and social culture of Sweden. The main part of its maps of distribution had been worked out by himself.

The first part of the gigantic work "Skultuna bruks historia" (History of the Brass Works of Skultuna), which appeared in 1921, may be characterized as a qualified parish monograph and has a completeness of detail not seen before. In point of principle, its greatest value lies in the thorough examination of villages and farmsteads that fills the second half of the first volume. By making an ingenious use of archive materials he proved it possible to elucidate in detail the development of the settlement and building types. A second, equally comprehensive volume of the same work appeared in 1935, being a description of economy, ways of living and social structure on the estates of the brass-works and in the parish of Skultuna. At his death he was making studies of the economic conditions of the brass workers in older times, as a preparation for a third volume, and he meant to have found new ways of calculating the real wages of the workers.

The first results of his investigations concerning social organization among the rural population of Sweden were published in 1921 with the important papers "Gården och familjen. Bidrag till belysning av storfamiljssystemets förekomst i Sverige" (Farm and Family. Contributions to the Study of the Extended Family System in Sweden), and "Ynglingalaget. En gengångare i samhället" (The Young Men's Association. A Revenant in Society). These studies were later extended to cover, in particular village organization and similar community forms. In this connection, the monograph on the village of Kila in Hycklinge parish in Östergötland should be remembered. It is remarkable in many ways. It was published in 1946 but it is based on Erixon's investigation of 1912-13; hence it is an account of his first piece of fieldwork. After several other case studies of this kind, Sigurd Erixon, in the autumn of his life, summarized a great amount of his experiences and vast knowledge in the comprehensive work "Svenska byar utan systematisk reglering. En jämförande historisk undersökning" (Swedish Villages without Systematic Land Partitioning. A Comparative Historical Study). It was printed in 1960.

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE and in connection with an interest in the history of art during his younger years Erixon gave much attention to the artistic aspects of folk culture. In "Möbler och heminredning i svenska bygder" (Furniture and Home Equipment in Different Parts of Sweden), volumes 1 and 2, from 1925-26, he made an inventory of the whole body of types in this field and brought order into terminology and systematisation. It has become highly appreciated as a handbook also by the public at large and a second edition followed in 1938, supplemented with many valuable data on the technical construction of furniture types, an aspect which until then had been rather neglected in Sweden. But also other sides of art life attracted his interest, as is proved by such titles as "Arv, nybildning och degeneration i svenskt bonadsmåleri" (Tradition, creativeness, and degeneration in Swedish wall tapestry painting), from 1934, "Målarna berätta. Historia, dikt och iakttagelse hos gamla svenska bygdemålare" (The Painter's tales. History, fiction, and power of observation of ancient peasant painters in Sweden), in 1935, and "Våra konstnärliga landskapskaraktärer" (Schools of provincial art) from 1931. In connection with his studies of brass manufacturing at Skultuna, which were never printed, Erixon published in 1943 a magnificent work on "Mässing. Svenska manufaktur och konsthantverksprodukter under 400 år" (Brass. 400 years of Brass Manufacturing and Art Craft Products in Sweden).

The wide range of Erixon's scholarly interests is reflected by the important and often quite fascinating essays in the collection "Svenska Kulturbilder" (Samples of Swedish Culture), issued in 12 volumes 1929-1939, with Sigurd Erixon and Sigurd Wallin as co-editors. He was sole editor of the 30 volumes of the collection "Nordisk Kultur" (Scandinavian Culture, 1931-1956), and there too some of the major chapters are by his hand, among them the basic survey of "Lantbruket under historisk tid med särskild hänsyn till bondetraditionen" (Agriculture in Historic Times, with Special Regard to Peasant Traditions), in volume 13, 1956. It should be remembered in this connection that from 1937 Erixon was the editor of the journal *Folk-Liv* and

in 1951–1955 of the journal *Laos*. He also carried out or edited a great many publications of other kinds, sometimes of great comprehensiveness and importance for later research. Such are for example the editions, in several series, of Swedish village bye-laws, valuable documents to the history of communal self-government in older times.

Besides what has already been mentioned above, there came from his hand, all through the years, a never ceasing flow of papers and other publications on the most varying subjects. In 1938 he collected some of his more important earlier studies in the book "Svenskt folkliv. Några kapitel svensk folklivsforskning med belysning av dess arbetsuppgifter och metoder" (Swedish Folklife. Some Chapters of Swedish Folklife Research Illustrating its Working Tasks and Methods). In a series of essays under the heading of "Folklivsforskningens framväxt" (The Development of Folklife Research), in *Folk-Liv* 1962–66, he finally brought forth a broad aperçu of the history of his discipline. Through all his life he was, furthermore, an assiduous reviewer of new literature in different scientific periodicals. His bibliography, which was compiled for his 70th birthday and contains his production up to 1958, comprises about 540 titles, besides book reviews and editorial works.

From the beginning, Sigurd Erixon had taken a vivid interest also in other social groups than the peasants and related strata of society. Among the broader studies of other occupational groups which he published himself and which merit special attention is "Stockholms hamnarbetare före fackföreningsrörelsens genombrott" (The Dock Hands of Stockholm Harbour before the Emergence of the Trade Union Movement) from 1949. During his last years his attention was, in growing measure, directed towards methodological problems in relation to intensified studies of the functioning of society as a whole. With keen interest he followed international discussions on these matters and also made several valuable contributions. He was particularly concerned with experiments at quantifying the human ways of living. He worked at such problems already in the program study called "Regional European Ethnology" (in *Folk-Liv* 1937–38), the latter part of which is called "Functional Analysis. Time Studies". He made some experiments with a new method partly his own, which he utilized in the course of extensive researches in different parts of Sweden. In *Ethnologia Europaea* 1967 he dwelt upon these questions under the heading "Urgent Ethnological Tasks". It was quite natural that Erixon's interest in methodological problems to a still larger extent made him take part in the international efforts to ameliorate the conditions of ethnological research work and to further a fruitful cooperation across all national and linguistic borders. He had long been the leading force in many associations with such aims.

Many personal qualities made him most suited for such tasks. The wide range and variety of his scientific work gave him great authority among his colleagues, and he was inspired by a strong desire to fight for strengthening the position of ethnology in society. Generosity and readiness to help were his characteristics, his talk had a colour and pith that made him a delightful companion. He was also a kind man and scientific polemics had little attraction for him. Instead, like Carl von Linné, he exhorted to "tolerance, using our short time for other things than apologetics that often cease only with life itself."