

Wilfried Menghin, Director, archaeologist, professor (1942–2013)

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Wilfried Menghin, the former director of the Museum of Pre- and Early History in Berlin, died on 19th of July 2013 after a serious illness. He was born on the 8th of April 1942 in Munich, where his family moved to from South Tirol. He passed his maturity exams in 1963 and, following a military service, subscribed to university courses in Pre- and Early History, Provincial Roman Archaeology and Ethnology.

Following studies in Munich, Regensburg and Gießen, he graduated with a doctor thesis titled 'Das Schwert im frühen Mittelalter' at the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität in Munich in 1971. His academic supervisor was Joachim Werner, one of the most famous specialist in early medieval archeology at this time. From 1971 to 1972 he became a scientific assistant at the university of Regensburg at the 'Lehrstuhl für Vor- und Frühgeschichte' led by Walter Torbrügge.

In the meantime Wilfried Menghin got married in 1969 and moved with his wife Waltraud from Regensburg to Nuremberg. He got a post as a 'Wissenschaftlicher Referent' in the National Germanic Museum's department of Pre- and Early History in Nuremberg. There Wilfried and Waltraud's daughter was born in 1974.

From 1972 to 1990 he worked in the Germanic National Museum as Lead Conservator and Director of the department. Under his leadership the significance of the department increased within the museum and also in a wider German Prehistory social circle. Menghin reorganized the permanent exhibition of Pre- and Early History. He also organized the first great international exhibition of the migration period in Western Germany titled 'Germanen, Hunnen und Awaren', with many exhibits on loan from countries from the other side of the Iron Curtain. He became very popular in the local community of the Germanic National Museum in Nuremberg.



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The experience gained there helped him to build a similarly successful career later on in Berlin. In 1986 he was appointed a professor at the University of Regensburg.

In September 1989 he applied for the seat of the director of the Museum of Pre- and Early History in Berlin. The impressive in size and well organized existing collection plus the human resources of the museum in Charlottenburg seemed to provide ideal conditions for research and great exhibitions. However in the meantime the political situation changed and the reunion of Germany and of the Museums in West and East Berlin dictated new and important tasks. When he became a director at the 1st of April 1990, the reunion of the collections and the staff in East and West became the first priority. Without any doubt the fusion of the 'Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte' in West Berlin and of 'Ur- und Frühgeschichte' in East Berlin was one of the great achievements during his time as a director in Berlin.

As the museum's director in Berlin Wilfried Menghin was also responsible for the excavations in Berlin and the new archaeological finds. Though not convinced of the significance of archaeology of Berlin's area, he recognized the importance of the finds for the museum. These activity and position gave him opportunity to become part of the current German archaeological research.

Main aim of Menghin's museum's policy was to restore the former role of the museum from before the World War II. To achieve this he wanted to publish the collection in new publication series as the 'Bestandskataloge des Museums für Vor- und Frühgeschichte'; a path, he had already trodden during his time in Nuremberg.

As a compensation for the losses the museum had suffered, Menghin succeeded to purchase objects of great importance. The most famous and expensive item was the so-called golden hat of Berlin. The acquisition of such objects also meant rescuing them for the benefit of the scientific community.

To sustain position of the museum his curators were obliged to organize special exhibitions. Four huge exhibitions 'Wikinger, Waräger und Normannen' in 1992, 'Die Franken – Wegbereiter Europas' in 1997, 'Menschen, Zeiten, Räume. Archäologie in Deutschland' in 2002 and 'Im Zeichen des Goldenen Greifen – Königsgräber der Skythen' in 2007 became a testimony of the new museum's relevance and the leadership of its director.

In his last ten years as a director a new subject became more and more important to him. The war losses of the museum had been rediscovered in the museums of Moscow and St-Petersburg and in his calm but resolute way in which he always acted he reached an agreement for cooperation with the Russian colleagues. It resulted in the information about the museum's finds in the depots of the Russian Museums and a common exhibition concerning the early medieval finds 'Merowingerzeit. Europa ohne Grenzen' in Moscow and St-Petersburg. At the end of these efforts Wilfried Menghin had built up a friendly relationship between him and his colleagues from the museums in Moscow and St-Petersburg. It was a great tragedy that because of his

illness he was not able to see the opening of the second common exhibition ‘Bronzezeit – Europa ohne Grenzen’ at Sankt-Petersburg last year.

Wilfried Menghin was very popular and widely respected among his Polish colleagues. When he started his work in Berlin he still believed that he could continue his research in Italy which he had started with the museum in Nuremberg. Very soon it became clear that because of its collections the new focus of the museum had to be put on the regions east of the Oder.

As a director of the ‘Westpolnisches Heimatmuseum’ new contacts and projects had been established between the museum and Polish scientists. Archive and collection were open to everyone and when the former Prussia collection of Königsberg was handed over to the museum, Charlottenburg became a hot spot of Polish research. The warm friendship between Wilfried Menghin and Polish colleagues have led to cooperation with Warsaw and Lublin and culminated in the foundation of the ‘Kommission zur Erforschung von Sammlungen Archäologischer Funde und Unterlagen aus dem nordöstlichen Mitteleuropa (KAFU)’, which had been established on 21.6.2001 in Warsaw. Its foundation was the result of an initiative taken by German, Polish, Lithuanian and Russian scientists in 1997, who wanted to restore the archaeological and archival sources of the northeastern part of Europe.

His popularity with the Polish colleagues could be witnessed on his retiring in 2008 and at his funeral. On both occasions many of his Polish colleagues and friends were present.

With the death of Wilfried Menghin German Prehistory loses not only an important representative but also a lovable and inspirational man.

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