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Max Währen to his 80th anniversary

Hermann Eiselen

Born 1926, H. Eiselen was co-founder of Deutsches Brotmuseum (German Bread Museum) in Ulm/Germany in 1955 and ever since involved in its development and its management. In 1951 he first met Max Währen. The 50 years of steady connection and co-operation were of great advantage for the Museum. Dr. Währen contributed considerably to its reputation.

- 1 It is with great respect and admiration that we today consider the life and work of an outstanding – initial – « Autodidact » and idealist : Max Währen.
- 2 He is an extraordinary personality. For 60 years he has dedicated most of his spare time in addition to his active professional life and his entire working capacity after subsequent retirement to researching the history of bread, and promoting the understanding of its importance to human life. He acquired his profound knowledge in different neighbouring domains as a member of the Swiss Society of Prehistory (Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Urgeschichte), in the group of Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory, founded at the University of Bern with some of the most remarkable researchers, and in years of lectures followed at the University of Bern. As the only specialist on his terrain he also gave himself some lectures in this circle of specialised researchers.
- 3 Max Währen pioneered research in the archaeology of bread and made it a recognised subject of the scientific agenda. His published output in this area – comprising 11 books and about 300 journal contributions – is testimony of his achievements. The range of his work is phenomenal, covering ethnological questions to describing his own archaeological work in at least 8 countries. While the variety of topics is immense he placed particular emphasis on analysing and interpreting his own and other excavation work. In addition there are numerous book reviews, contributions to encyclopaedias and proceedings, concepts for exhibitions and presentations to radio and television audiences. Countless interested people received his expert information and advice.

Science in this field without Max Währen's work is unthinkable. Since he was not a university professor he leaves no students to further his work. He will therefore remain à « Monolith » – his own monument in bread ethnology and archaeology.

- 4 It has always been his avowed intention to highlight the crucial importance of bread to humanity and to demonstrate that bread is, more than any other food product, central to our cultural, intellectual and religious life – proof that bread is fundamentally involved in the development of advanced civilisation. Consequently he was most likely the first to start collecting antiquities and other items documenting the history of bread and its importance to mankind. Already 20 years ago his collection consisted of 2000 objects from 54 countries around the world.
- 5 But he also shared his idealism by supporting the first bread museums; namely the German Bread Museum Ulm and the French Bread Museum founded in 1971 by the late Jacques Lorch (who died in 1998). For decades he maintained a close friendship with the founders of both museums, who are particularly grateful for his constructive, often critical, guidance and advice that led to many valuable clarifications and progresses of these institutions.
- 6 In 1960 Max Währen was one of the founders (and later Director) of the Swiss Archives for Bread and Baking Expertise (Schweizerisches Archiv für Brot- und Gebäckkunde). In 1978 he presented his collection in a public exhibition entitled « Welt des Brotes » (The World of Bread). In these ways Max Währen has lived up to his own principles. In diverse ways he tried to bring the idea of bread as the staff of livelihood back into popular consciousness; he was the first to research the importance of the « daily bread », documenting its relationship to human development, and sensitising the public to its ever lasting importance. He accomplished all this with his exemplary diligence, accuracy and scrutiny.
- 7 Max Währen is – and this too is part of his personality – a straight forward, probing and unswervingly honest person, always insisting on his independence. Ignoring an often weak health constitution, he worked with a dedication without comparison. This might perhaps be the source of his remarkable and admirable modesty.
- 8 On November 17, 1979, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich / Switzerland, paid homage to him with a honorary doctor's degree, « Dr. of Technical science h.c. », a high-ranking, rare honour for an « Autodidact ».
- 9 Several additional respectable recognitions of institutions in different countries were granted to him to strive for new horizons.
- 10 If today more people acknowledge the importance of bread than did five decades ago, this is the credit of Max Währen. He and his wife deserve the most sincere thanks of all who had the privilege to benefit from his work.
- 11 On his 80th birthday we, the friends of Max Währen, extend our best wishes for many more years of good health and vigour to the pioneer and mentor of Bread Anthropology. We hope that he will be able to continue his fruitful work for a long time to come and pass on more of his knowledge and experience.

AUTEUR

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