

## Obituary



**Gisela Freund**  
**(30-11-1920 – 09-03-2023)**

Gisela Freund, Professor Emerita at the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuernberg in Germany and a leading figure in Eurasian archaeology, passed away peacefully in Erlangen on March 9, 2023, at the ripe age of 102. She was a specialist in European prehistory and also promoted, in a considerable way, the interests of South Asian prehistory. Between 1940 and 1944, she completed her university studies in pre- and protohistory, German cultural history, art history, geography, and palaeontology at the central European universities of Greifswald, Breslau, and Prague. Five years later, Freund obtained her senior doctorate degree (called Habilitation in German Universities) from the University of Erlangen on the topic of leaf-shaped points (Upper Palaeolithic) in Europe.

Dr. Freund began her service career as an assistant in the Institute for Prehistory and Protohistory of the University of Erlangen in 1947 and then served as a Privatdozent (honorary teacher) from 1950 to 1954. She was later appointed as a professor in 1957 and then as Head of the Institute in 1969, the position she held until her retirement in 1987. Thanks to her leadership qualities and dedicated efforts in teaching and field research spread over three decades, the Erlangen Institute emerged as a leading centre for archaeology in Europe. It is also creditable that, in a discipline like archaeology dominated by men, Professor Freund carved for herself a place of eminence. She ranks with Dorothy Garrod, Bridget Allchin of England, and Denise Sonnevill-Bordes, who also specialised in Eurasian prehistory.

In the 1960s, Dr. Freund took part, for several seasons, in the Abri Pataud Upper Palaeolithic cave excavations in France conducted by Harvard University Professor Hallam Movius. From this experience in field archaeology, she gained clear knowledge of systematic recording, understanding, and interpreting complex cave stratigraphy in terms of its formation processes and cultural contexts. Further, this experience inspired her to initiate similar

investigations of caves in south Germany, with particular reference to Bavaria. These field studies were continuous, spanning nearly two decades, and are known for their systematic character, which brought Bavarian prehistory into the limelight. Simultaneously, these represent Professor Freund's principal contribution to European Palaeolithic archaeology. Her field studies covered Middle Palaeolithic sites from the Regensburg area and cave remains from Hunas and Obernederhoehle.

The most important aspect of Professor Freund's prehistoric research in Bavaria concerns her prolonged excavations at the rock shelter called Sesselfelsgrötte, which simultaneously attest to her expert knowledge of cave archaeology as well as her organisational skills, including the enlistment of specialists from sedimentology, palaeontology, and other scientific branches. The Sesselfelsgrötte excavations exposed a detailed culture sequence covering the Micoquian, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic, and Mesolithic phases. It must also be said to Professor Freund's credit that she brought out a series of seven monographs devoted to the results of this site excavation.

Professor Freund typified all the attributes of the famed German flair for orderliness and systematics. This is reflected both in her academic research and administrative work and in her organisational work for promoting the overall interests of prehistory. She was not only one of the founding members of the Hugo Obermaier Society for Research on the Ice Age and Stone Age but also took on the responsibilities of organising annual conferences of members and other related activities. She edited the society's annual periodical *Quartär* for nearly four decades, from 1967 to 2006. Professor Freund also initiated the monograph publication series, and the seven volumes pertaining to the Sesselfelsgrötte excavation form part of this monograph series. Over and above these, she had a philanthropic bent of mind and donated all her assets

to the Institute in Erlangen. She had nurtured and desired that these be formed into a trust and used for promoting teaching and research in archaeology.

This obituary will remain incomplete without a mention of Professor Freund's long-term interests in South Asian prehistory. She knew Professor H.D. Sankalia and met him once or twice on the occasion of international conferences held in Europe. My personal contacts with her span half a century and continued till her last days. She published my paper on high-level gravels in *Quartär* for the year 1971. In the following year, I visited her Institute in Erlangen and made a presentation about my pre- and protohistoric studies in the Shorapur Doab. In 1978, she visited Deccan College and gave a lecture on the Sesselfelsgrötte excavations. Subsequently, she took a keen interest in my Acheulian culture investigations in the Hunsgi-Baichbal Basin of the lower Deccan and was kind enough to publish several papers on this topic in the journal *Quartär*.

German scholarship about ancient India is not confined to Indological studies but covers archaeology as well. We may recall here that in the 1950's, Sophie Erhart took part in the Nevasa excavations conducted by Deccan College and also studied the human skeletons unearthed from this site. In the 1960's, another German scholar, Dr. Gudrun Corvinus, also associated with Deccan College,

excavated the primary Acheulian site of Chirki-Nevasa, and her two-volume report on this site was published in 1983 by the Institute for Prehistory of Tübingen University. Professor Freund provided excellent support to Dr. Gudrun Corvinus for continuing her work in South Asian prehistory and obtained large grants from the German Research Foundation to facilitate her Stone Age research in the Himalayan land of Nepal. Her field investigations spanned from 1983 to 1994 and brought to light many sites belonging to cultures ranging from the Acheulian to the Neolithic. Professor Freund not only visited these sites but also arranged for the publication of the results of Corvinus's work as a two-volume monograph in Germany. She was, of course, totally shocked by Corvinus's brutal murder in Pune in 2006. She made successful efforts to recover the stone tool assemblage of Chirki-Nevasa from the residence of Dr. Corvinus in Germany and arranged for its safe upkeep at the Institute in Erlangen. In Freund's death, we have lost a true friend and admirer of South Asia and its Stone Age past.

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