



Berlin, 12 September 2017

### **EXHIBITION PREVIEW**

#### **Museumsinsel Berlin, Bode-Museum**

Am Kupfergraben, 10117 Berlin

Opening hours: Tue – Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Thu 10 am – 8 pm

#### **Scholarship and Turbulence.**

#### **Wolfgang Fritz Volbach – A scholar between the two World Wars**

13 October 2017 – 28 January 2018

An exhibition of the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

**Opening:** Thursday, 12 October 2017, 6 pm

**On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth, the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin is commemorating Wolfgang Fritz Volbach (1892–1988) in a showcase exhibition.**

Fritz Volbach was born the son of the prestigious conductor, composer, and musicologist Fritz Volbach in Mainz, a city with which he would remain connected until his death. From 1917, he worked at the Berlin museums, first as an employee of Oskar Wulff, director of the Early Christian/Byzantine Collection, and from 1927 as his successor. The Nazis' rise to power ended Volbach's Berlin career. His mother Käthe, born Dernburg, came from a Jewish family that had converted to Catholicism. Because of this, he was dismissed from his museum position on December 1, 1933, following the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Services.

#### **Work at the Berlin museums**

The difficult period after the First World War was not a time of major acquisitions. Instead, it was to Volbach's great merit that he researched and catalogued the collections and published comprehensive, basic catalogues on individual material groups. In 1917, an initial compilation on ivory works was released, the third edition of which appeared in 1976, expanded to become the official collection catalogue, and today still forms the starting point for any engagement with late-antique ivory works.

In 1926, Volbach issued a likewise still indispensable catalogue of the collection's late antique and Byzantine textiles and began working on a new edition of the collection catalogue that Wulff had created in 1909 and 1911. A high point of Volbach's work in Berlin was the reinstallation of the entire collection in 1933 in accordance with aesthetic and scholarly approaches that were considered modern at the time. Volbach completed volume 2 of the collection catalogue in 1930. The manuscript of volume 1 was largely completed in 1933 but, according to his statements, he threw it into the Spree in anger over his dismissal.

#### **Exile in Rome and return to Germany**

Volbach survived the Nazi era in Rome. From 1934, he found employment in the Museo Sacro in the Vatican. He continued his work developing collection catalogues, now for the late-antique and Byzantine collections of this museum. After the Second World War, he returned to Germany to his

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hometown Mainz. First, he worked in the Hessian Ministry for Education and Arts. Later, he became deputy director, then director of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz. He would remain in the city until his death on 23 December, 1988.

### **The exhibition**

Wolfgang Fritz Volbach was among those academics forced to leave Germany due to persecution by the Nazis and stands as an example of the loss caused by the Nazis' expulsion of leading scholars to foreign countries. His achievements at the Berlin museums allow us to imagine what other fruitful work he could have accomplished if he had not been dismissed. The exhibition focuses on his time in Berlin. Biographical evidence makes it possible to breathe life into his activities at the museum and the circumstances of his dismissal. Objects related to his museum work demonstrate the wide range of his research and scholarly interests.

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