

The Messerschmitt Foundation

Prof. Dr. Ing. h.c. Willy Messerschmitt was born in Frankfurt am Main on June 26, 1898, the son of an established middle-class family (owners of the "Weinhaus Messerschmitt") from Bamberg, and grew up in Franconia. After initial involvement with the construction of gliders he achieved worldwide fame as a brilliant designer of aircrafts, first within his own firm in Bamberg, then at the Bayerische Flugzeugwerke GmbH and subsequently at the Messerschmitt AG in Augsburg. In particular his model designs for the fighter planes ME 109, ME 110 and ME 262 (the first production-line jet aircraft in the world) and for the ME 108 travel plane (the "Typhoon", launched in production with over 1000 planes) have gone down in the history of aviation technology as great achievements.

Professor Messerschmitt's developments and his outstanding industrial successes have been covered from the perspective of technology and military politics in numerous publications. Reference should also be made to the rebuilding of the German aviation industry and the revival of the Messerschmitt plant after World War II and to Messerschmitt's successful work in the postwar decades.

After 1945 Messerschmitt had to start from the beginning again. There was once more a creative phase during which he was compelled to turn his attention to other technological problems. Among other things he developed a new sewing machine, drew up elements for prefabricated houses, and designed the well-known Messerschmitt "cabin scooter", the small car of the 1950s. In the course of time he was again able to devote himself to his favorite interest, aeronautics, and his work was instrumental in enabling German aviation and space technology to regain its worldwide reputation after the war. His distinguished lifework reached its organizational conclusion, after various mergers, in the largest German firm for aviation and space technology, the Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm GmbH (MBB) in Ottobrunn close to Munich. In 1990 this firm was incorporated into the aggregate complex of the Daimler-Benz subsidiary Deutsche Aero Space (DASA).

It was during the last years of his long and fruitful work that the Messerschmitt Stiftung (Messerschmitt Foundation) was established with the intention of preserving the founder's substantial industrial fortune after his death. The original purpose, designated when the foundation was set up in 1969, was to support the rising scientific generation in the field of aviation and space technology, but Willy Messerschmitt subsequently altered the aims of the foundation. The motives which led him to this change became clear in detailed discussions between Messerschmitt and my father, Dr. Hans Heinrich von Srbik. My father was an intimate friend of Willy Messerschmitt during three decades of close coop-

eration and counseling on his financial interests; Messerschmitt asked him to take over for life the chairmanship of the foundation's board of directors.

Even during the period of the Allied prohibition that kept him from being involved in aircraft development or its theory, Willy Messerschmitt never gave up the hope of returning the German aircraft industry to its worldwide top position and of catching up – through his own personal efforts, despite the years of abstinence – with worldwide developments in technological standards, in particular those of the U.S. industry. In an era of more and more complicated technology and increasingly widespread electronics, even in airplane construction, Messerschmitt remained convinced that the German aviation industry should guard against resolving major problems only by means of the additive cooperation of large teams of specialists, thereby losing the creative strength of individuals. Moreover conventional steps in development would not be enough to recapture the lost advantage in international competition. Messerschmitt was further convinced that the next – perhaps for the present the last – really decisive step in aircraft development would be in the use of the vertical takeoff. Within the framework of the rebuilding of the Messerschmitt AG, significant resources and all of Willy Messerschmitt's efforts were applied to this idea; up to the final years of his life he devoted all his mental and physical strength to this theme, producing detailed structural studies and scientific works. The fact that the management of the merged firm barely supported these ideas and eventually shelved the "Rotor Jet" (the working title for an aircraft that lifts up and sinks by means of rotors) – the very project that Messerschmitt held to be the direction for the future – was the great disappointment of the last phase of his life.

This prompted him, as he confided in a depressed mood in many conversations, to change the original dedication of the Messerschmitt Stiftung from problems in the fields of aeronautics and astronautics to the "maintenance and preservation of German artistic and cultural monuments at home and abroad." He anchored these objectives in the foundation's new statutes. This new dedication was nevertheless in accord with Willy Messerschmitt's interests. As a brilliant engineer and technical designer he always allowed himself to be guided by artistic impulses. Each of his creations bears such a seal. His aircrafts were of great aerodynamic beauty; they were distinguished by the greatest achievable lightness and at the same time by an exactness of detail in construction which simplified, increased the efficiency and optimized a design which was at once congruent with its purpose. Thus the artistic element was always manifest in Messerschmitt's works. In addition to realization of his own works he was always interested in art and to a high degree in music. His

creative talent and his musical inclinations, combined with a national consciousness that remained unbroken through all the catastrophes and setbacks of the times, thus logically determined the dedication and scope of a foundation which should serve the preservation of the *German artistic and cultural heritage*. With the death of Professor Messerschmitt on September 15, 1978, the foundation entered upon the inheritance of his idealistic legacy and his industrial fortune.

An essential criterium for the foundation's work is to consciously focus efforts on the protection of those objects that – to rephrase the great art historian Hans Sedlmayr, who followed the work of the foundation with pleasure – can be considered a definite part of the “humanistic stage” of our culture and whose loss would diminish the hope for a renewal of the “lost middle.” A circle of highly qualified individuals who make up the foundation's six-member advisory board supports the board of directors (comparable to trustees), which selects the projects. These cooperative efforts are supported by the joint conviction that the danger of loss of cultural goods is great and that speed is essential if the foundation's projects are to be effective. In its selection of projects the board of directors is guided by the idea that, in addition to major tasks in preservation that must in general be in the hands of the public authorities, there is also an urgent need for preservation of a wealth of medium-sized and smaller art monuments that are the object of increasing interest but for which funds are scarce. It is precisely these monuments that, as a whole, make up our rich but endangered cultural landscape. Putting the foundation's help to work here represents a “cultural environmental protection” which has at least as much value as the ecological objectives that receive so much attention today.

Not only secular but also sacred art monuments are of importance to the foundation; we are however conscious that the protection of the physical fabric of the latter, as significant as it may be in aesthetic and art historical terms, can only achieve full significance in the context of a spiritual-religious renewal.

The foundation initially chose to limit the emphasis of its work to the southern German region, in particular Bavaria and North and South Tyrol. Already there are many buildings with a brass plaque indicating restoration by the Messerschmitt Stiftung. The foundation's funds have been made available for work on the preservation of churches, chapels and wayside crosses, farmhouses and townhouses, palaces and castles as well as a wealth of smaller monuments. One of the first projects in Bavaria was the conservation of some 120 epitaphs on the exterior walls of the Church of Our Lady in Munich, followed by the restoration of the doors of the pilgrimage church in Aufkirchen on Starnberg Lake and the conservation of the medieval frescoes in Urschalling. Subsequent projects have included the restoration of several very significant winged altarpieces and of the Augustus Fountain in Augsburg.

With the sale of MBB's shares to Daimler-Benz the foundation entered a new phase of development in several respects. On the one hand this meant an end to active participation in the history of German aeronautics and astronautics, a step that after six decades of substantial influence in the field – reflected even in the name MBB – represented a decisive change. The Europeanizing of space and aviation science and the new dimensions of worldwide competition

made it necessary to put the firm in the hands of a global concern such as Daimler Benz if Messerschmitt's intent to be technologically in the lead, or at least on par with the leaders, was to be realized. In accordance with the foundation's mission we supplemented this important step with a contract which ensures that we retain a small share in Daimler Benz Aero Space and that one of the concern's works, either in Augsburg or in Manching, will officially bear the name “Messerschmitt-Werk”. Finally a member of the Daimler Benz Konzern was appointed to our advisory board in order to document our desire to preserve Messerschmitt's aeronautical legacy in the future together with Daimler Benz.

This transition also signified a turning point for the foundation economically. From its beginnings, the foundation's largest asset was its shares in the MBB; however they did not provide us with any financial yield because the expansion of the ambitious Airbus program demanded one increase in capital after the other, thus draining the foundation's financial strength. The sale of the MBB shares, as hard as it was in terms of tradition, multiplied the foundation's capabilities for getting involved in monument protection. The timing also proved to be extremely fortunate. The resolution of the East-West confrontation with the end of the Cold War led to a comprehensive restructuring of the aeronautics and armaments industry. This was combined with substantial costs which the foundation would no longer have been able to shoulder.

Thus, at the right moment and equipped with new financial possibilities, we were well prepared to meet the opening of the East. Even before the wall came down, as it was already becoming clear that the German Democratic Republic could not continue in its present form, an initial visit took place with the director of the preservation office in East Berlin. In ideology-free discussions he asked if the foundation might be able to help acquire marble for the restoration of the two figures by Schinkel's *Neue Wache*. He explained that he first became aware of the foundation through a project he saw as a tourist in Lienz in eastern Tyrol; he had since been following the foundation's activities attentively. We later traveled together to Potsdam, where he showed me his greatest problem project, the Belvedere on the Klausberg. Only makeshift protective measures could be considered, complete restoration was only a dream.

It was with such impressions that I returned to Munich. A few weeks later I was in contact with Professor Otto von Simson from the Friends of Prussian Palaces, and he too mentioned the Belvedere. In a memorable advisory board meeting, which took place under the impression of the fast-moving developments taking place by then in the GDR, we resolved in February 1989 to make restoration of the Belvedere a major project of the Messerschmitt Stiftung. In particular former Bavarian Minister Dr. Otto Schedl (since deceased) urged this step as a signal which should if at all possible be made public before the decisive elections in the region. At the time it was a financially bold decision; there was nothing other than a completely inadequate “GDR cost estimate”, and we were aware that our budget would be bound for several years by the project. Nevertheless no one has regretted this step.

In the meantime we know that we decided in favor of a project that was probably the most difficult and certainly the most expensive preservation undertaking in the new *Länder*

to be attempted in its entirety by a private foundation. Including the costs of partial reconstruction of the interior of the Belvedere, a decision reached later, 12 million DM have been spent by the foundation in nine years in Potsdam. But the results are visible. The foundation was able to anchor its reputation in the future capital of Germany and has won many friends. The experiences that we had, as well as some disappointments, are in many respects a reflection of the course of developments as the country has attempted to "grow back together".

The Belvedere in Potsdam was followed by projects in the other new *Länder*, whereas in western Germany we have continued to adhere to our self-imposed geographical restrictions. We made substantial contributions to the restoration of the so-called "French Building" of the Heldburg Fortress in Thuringia and to the rehabilitation of the tower of the Naumburg Cathedral in Saxony-Anhalt. In Mecklenburg we took over the structural repair of eight village churches that were in danger of collapse, financing as well the complete renovation of one of them, in Hohen Mistorf. In Saxony several projects have been undertaken, thanks to close cooperation with Professor Heinrich Magirius; the most important of these include the lay brothers house and the Wettin crypt in the Altzella Monastery in Nossen, the fresco cycle in the small church in Döbra in the Erzgebirge, the restoration of the Prince's Rooms in Hoflößnitz in Radebeul, and most recently the very significant cloister of the Marienstern Convent in Sorbenland with its re-exposed wall paintings.

All of this was and is possible only because of the foundation's method of operation, which is unlike what one might expect for such sponsorship activities. The Messerschmitt Stiftung always functions as the building owner, regardless of who the legal owner really is, by entering into a partnership with the legal owner for purposes of the project. The foundation issues the contracts, indirectly exercises control during the entire construction period, and pays the bills. The restorers and artists thus know their patron. This procedure has proved very successful over the years. We have also thus been able to ensure the high standards that we have for restoration measures; I believe that I can say with some pride that precisely this distinguishes the Messerschmitt Stiftung. I am happy to admit that this direct commitment also gives great pleasure. We are always very involved in the work, we can intervene in an emergency, we spot cost increases in time, and we are continuously building up our own fund of experience. The foundation identifies itself with a project – and often, in reverse, participants in a project identify themselves with the foundation.

Of course this procedure has its consequences: it is much more intensive in terms of supervision and work. In this situation a further characteristic of the Messerschmitt Stiftung is of special relevance, namely the close partnership in all projects between the foundation and the local preservation offices. The latter already play an important role in the selection of projects; indeed suggestions often come from the preservation offices, since they are most familiar with the problem cases. The continuous on-site supervision of work also is taken on by the local preservation office, which sends interim reports to the foundation. The preservation office is always represented at the regular major meetings on a project. Without the friendly involvement of the directors of the state conservation offices the exacting form in which we re-

alize our projects would be unthinkable. But with some of the largest projects not even this assistance is enough, and we must in addition engage an architect with expertise in the field of preservation (for example for the Belvedere in Potsdam, the Meseberg Palace near Berlin, and the *Pflegghof* in eastern Tyrol). With this network we have been able to keep the administrative apparatus of the foundation itself as small as possible. As chairman of the board of directors (a secondary occupation for me), I am supported by a deputy for legal issues. The administrative work is in the hands of a very experienced half-time employee.

I have already mentioned that the foundation itself has increasingly become a vehicle for know-how in the field of preservation. Consequently we also publish books which not only report on the technical execution of a project but also present the built monument as a whole, placing it in its cultural context. In this manner we hope to bring a monument and its preservation story closer to the interested reader, thus creating a multiplier factor; or, to put it in more popular terms, we are advertising preservation. This objective is served by the occasional support of publications on practical preservation work, such as the many years of assistance provided for the standard publications of the Bavarian State Conservation Office (*Arbeitshefte* or Working Journals). The international dissemination of this series has contributed significantly to the considerable reputation of that office and has promoted the international exchange of expertise for the general benefit.

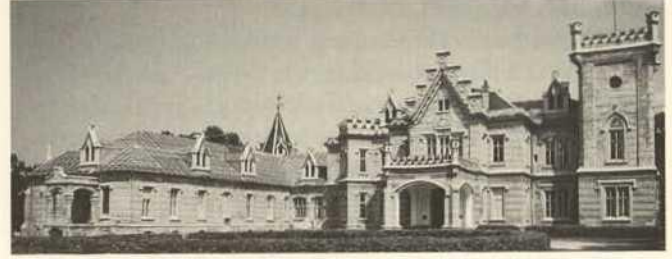
Our work has recently brought us into contact with new technologies in preservation, for instance with the possibility of cleaning valuable stone sculptures with laser instruments without causing damage to their substance. We are convinced that such developments are merely at their starting point. Often the acquisition of such instruments is not possible for the average restoration workshop. Together with the Deutsche Ausgleichsbank, the foundation has therefore taken shares in the Bauhütte Naumburg; our capital contribution made it possible for the majority partner from Bamberg to acquire two laser instruments and to employ them, with great success, throughout Germany. Such projects likewise represent a means for the foundation to realize its objective of preserving cultural goods, as does a joint initiative by the Messerschmitt Stiftung, the Bavarian National Museum and the Bavarian State Conservation Office to set up and support a Chair for Restoration and Historic Preservation at the Technical University of Munich as part of the school of architecture.

The foundation's financial possibilities have also led us to confront other types of problems in the last years. Often a city or community owns a badly deteriorated but very significant historic building. There are discussions as to whether demolition is unavoidable or whether renovation is possible although there is only a very vague concept for a cultural use. The financial shortages of the public authorities more and more often lead to the first alternative – or sometimes continued inaction solves the problem on its own. We have often invested in buildings in such situations and thus contributed substantially to a change of opinion. To give an example, in the community of Navis in North Tyrol our promise to restore the complete rococo facade of a building brought about a reconsideration. Today the building, for which a demolition permit had already been issued, is the

showpiece of the town center and houses, remarkably enough, the entire local administration. In another case such a partial promise was not enough. Therefore the foundation acquired the prince-bishop's *Pfleghaus* in Anras in eastern Tyrol, completely restored it, and contracted for long-term use with the *Land Tyrol*. Today the stately building houses the local administration, the local tourist association and a very interesting museum on Tyrolean jurisdiction. Something similar, but on an even greater scale, is currently in progress in the old town of Hall in Tyrol, where we are installing, together with the Augustiner Brewery from Munich, a beer hall in magnificent vaulted spaces (*Gasthof Engel*). This object is particularly impressive because it demonstrates that a decidedly commercial use is possible in a sensitive manner in a building that was already given up.

These examples will gain in significance in an era that is marked by purely economic considerations, since they make it possible for the preservationists not only to insist upon having difficult conditions met but also to point to concrete examples of success. This aspect of model restoration work plays an important role for the foundation in a Munich project involving comprehensive revitalization of the Orlando Block on Platzl, although here the factor of a capital investment with appropriate returns should not be played down.

Finally, allow me to go into a further characteristic – a “political” one – of the Messerschmitt Stiftung. Our statutes expressly state that we are dedicated to the preservation of German art and cultural monuments at home and abroad. Such support is history-related, reaching out to those parts of German culture that are outside our national state borders. It has nothing to do with “Pan-Germanism”, as an Italian journalist once provocatively asked me, but rather with the preservation of those cultural goods of German origin that have been neglected precisely because of nationalism in the last decades. This was for example a problem in South Tyrol from the end of World War I until into the 1970s, one that is hopefully resolved by the hard-fought but model autonomy; it is a problem that still exists in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Transylvania. The Messerschmitt Stiftung has mastered a mammoth project in Transylvania, the complete restoration and structural repair of the famous *Bergkirche* in Schäßburg, not only financially (since costs are hard to calculate with a three-digit inflation rate and a construction period stretching over four years) but also logistically. The outstanding support of experts from the Bavarian State Conservation Office and the supervision by the Rhenish Conservation Office (Professor Machat) led to magnificent results, which we will make public in the Messerschmitt Year 1998. The psychological effect on the remaining German population in Schäßburg was also extraordinary: “If you fix our church up so beautifully that is a sign for the future and a hope which at least causes us to rethink our plans for emigration.” In their anxiety about their own existence



Hungary, Nadasdy Manor House, restored as a conference centre by the Institute of State Care of Monuments in cooperation with the Nadasdy Foundation (description at page 54)

these people are influenced by factors whose scope we had not been able to anticipate but were then able to experience. As a result the foundation decided to take charge of one of the oldest and most imposing buildings in the town, to be used as a cultural center after restoration. This former *Gasthaus zum Hirschen*, which could just as well be in Germany, will be open to the entire population of Transylvania.

A further example involves the village of Fertőrákos (formerly Kroisbach) on the Hungarian side of the Neusiedler Lake, where a former Bavarian resettlement farmstead is located. In a joint project with the Bavarian State Conservation Office (for planning and advisory services) and Hungarian colleagues (for construction supervision) the Messerschmitt Stiftung has completely renovated this building, which now houses a local museum. A television program about this project, shown throughout Hungary, pointed out the importance of this cooperation, which hopefully has served as an example that might be followed. Aside from the fact that the building was highly appropriate for this project, there was a further reason for such a project to be in Fertőrákos and to provide support for that town's *Bürgermeister*: It was in this community in 1989 that the barbed wire on the border was severed, allowing thousands of citizens of the German Democratic Republic to go to the West without the intervention of the Hungarian authorities.

Allow me in conclusion to bring a third example, a project that will not get started until the fall of 1998. There is an agreement between the city of Prague and the Messerschmitt Stiftung for the joint restoration over the next years, probably with the use of laser technology, of the figures on the Charles Bridge, some of which are by the famous Tyrolean sculptor Matthias Braun. Given the wounds of the past this project is in my opinion particularly valuable.

As a result of decades of division, we still speak carelessly today of Eastern Europe. We would like to bring Central Europe with its German cultural elements into people's consciousness again, an important task in the widest sense for a cultural foundation such as the Messerschmitt Stiftung.

