

Obituary for Dr. Alfonz Lengyel

Dr. Alfonz Lengyel, PhD, art historian and archaeologist, died Sunday, January 24, 2016, at his home in Sarasota, Florida. He was 94 years old.

Dr. Lengyel was born on October 21, 1921 in Gödöllő, Hungary. He attended law school in Miskolc, Hungary, and later graduated from the Ludovika Military Academy. He then served in the Hungarian Royal Army, and in 1944 was seriously wounded when defending a bridge against Soviet invaders. A piece of cannon-shot remained in his right shoulder throughout his lifetime and often caused him trouble, especially at airport security checks.

After the end of World War II, Cardinal Mindszenty helped him receive a position at the Religion and Public Education Ministry, where he organized a village museum in Tihany, Balaton. When the secret police arrested him in November 1950, he was charged with conspiracy because of his work at the Ministry. He spent six years in Communist prison camp, where he was subjected to torture in solitary confinement and later, as a prisoner, was put to work in coal mines for three years. During the whole time he was forced to stay underground and developed serious asthma which was to plague him all the rest of his life. One of his prison cellmates was Dr. Göncz Árpád, who was to become a very popular President of Hungary for two consecutive terms following the fall of Communism. Dr. Lengyel was released just before the Hungarian Revolution in 1956.

During the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, he participated in battles around the Budapest Radio Station, and worked on the reorganization of Catholic Action, founded the Christian World-View of Hungarian Political Prisoners Association. After escaping from Hungary, he came to the United States and helped found the Association of Former Hungarian Political Prisoners. In January, 1957, Dr. Lengyel arrived in the U.S. via Austria and worked as a manual laborer (including grave digging), while attending San Jose State University, California.

Dr. Lengyel received his law degree in 1948 in Hungary, a bachelor and master's degrees in Art History from San Jose University, California in 1959, and in 1964 earned his Ph.D. in Museology from the University of Paris, Sorbonne. He was obliged to rewrite his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne because his room, together with his manuscript, was blown up by an OAS terrorist bomb at the university in 1962. The same year he became naturalized American citizen. He taught art history, archaeology and museum management at universities in Paris, France, Heidelberg, Germany, and several universities in the United States and China.

Beginning in 1968, Dr. Lengyel directed archaeological excavations in Yugoslavia (as a representative of the Smithsonian Institution), and in Italy at ancient Roman sites (Project of the Institute of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Etruscan Foundation, 1969-74). In China, beginning in 1991 and continuing through 2008, he led excavations at numerous Chinese historical sites, including Xi'an.

In 1980, as part of a U.S. education delegation, Dr. Lengyel went to China, where he helped establish the Master's program in Museology in Fudan University, Shanghai. He was invited to be Advisory Professor at Fudan University and at Xi'an Jiaotong University. In the early 1990s, he established the Sino-American Field School of Archaeology (SAFSA), and was the first foreigner to be awarded government permission to engage in archaeological excavation in China. Over the past two decades, Dr. Lengyel conducted annual seminars on Museology and

Archaeology and led excavations throughout China. He played a leading role in excavating the tomb of the Emperor Jing Di with the famous terracotta warriors. Dr. Lengyel was very proud that the Xi'an Tomb Museum erected a plaque with his name on it to honor his excavation work at Li Hill. In 2009, SAFSA was handed over to Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, where the program started by Dr. Lengyel has been successfully continued.

Dr. Lengyel was elected to the International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO), and was a member of a number of American and foreign professional organizations related to art history, archaeology, and museology. He received a Gold Medal from the Academy of Human Sciences of Brazil and The Officers Cross of Merit from the Republic of Hungary. He was mentioned in *The Marquis Who's Who*, *The Strathmore Who's Who* and other biographies. He received a Gold medal from the Academy of Human Sciences of Brazil (1975), an honorary doctor degree in Law from the London Institute for Applied Research ((1973), and The Officers Cross of Merit from the Hungarian Republic (1993). Between 1987 and 1991, nominated by President Reagan, he served on the advisory board of the National Park Service of the Department of Interior. During his four years of service, he fought vigorously for a national recognition of the Colored Troops Training Camp located at LaMott in Pennsylvania during the Civil War.

In Sarasota, Dr. Lengyel was member of the Board of the US-China Peoples Friendship Association, and also a member of the Ringling Museum of Asian Art Division.

On his deathbed, Dr. Lengyel directed that his beloved cross, a relic worn by Cardinal Mindszenty during the years following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution while the Cardinal was given asylum in the United States Embassy in Budapest, be donated to the Hungarian Society of Mindszenty. As a national hero with an honorary military rank of Colonel, he will be officially buried in the National Memorial Place Cemetery in Budapest, where he will find his resting place in his beloved Hungary.

Dr. Lengyel is survived by his wife, Dr. Hongying Liu-Lengyel, a professor retired from universities in Nanjing, China. Since 1980, they have worked as a team on promoting good relations between China and the United States.

A memorial service was held on Saturday, February 6th in their home.