

## From Van to Bastam: Wolfram Kleiss (1930-2020)

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On 18 December 2020, at the age of 90, the famous German architect and archaeologist Wolfram Kleiss passed away.

W. Kleiss was born on 17 November 1930 in Berlin. He studied at the Technical University of Berlin and was awarded his doctorate in 1959 with dissertation titled *The Public Buildings of Cambodunum*. In the same year, he received a travel grant from the German Archaeological Institute, which enabled him to travel to Iran. Kleiss then worked as a research consultant at the Istanbul branch of the German Archaeological Institute and carried out architectural measurements at the archaeological sites of Van. It was in Van that he developed a deep interest in Urartian architecture. His experience in Van, combined with his previous travel to Iran, shaped the scientific identity of the young scientist.

The biography of Kleiss is essentially connected with the German Archaeological Institute's Tehran branch. The branch was established in 1961 after the initiation of excavations at Takt-e Solaymān by Hans Henning von der Osten and Rudolf Naumann in 1959. Von der Osten, a Near Eastern archaeologist, was named the first director, and after his death in the same year Heinz Lushey, a classical archaeologist, succeeded him, serving until 1971, with Wolfram Kleiss as deputy director from 1967. In 1971 Kleiss became director and Peter Calmeyer deputy director of the Tehran branch. During the period of directorship of Kleiss (until 1995) the activities of the branch were essentially widened, encompassing the entire territory of Iran, from prehistory to the 19th century. The investigations of the branch were published in *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, *Iranische Denkmäler*, *Teheraner Forschungen*, *Führer zu Archäologischen Plätzen in Iran*. Excavations of the Sasanian and Mongol periods at Takt-e Solaymān, Firūzābād, as well as at the Urartian fortress and settlement of Bastam are marked during this period. Due to the Islamic Revolution in 1978, archaeological activities at all these sites were interrupted. The general surveys conducted between 1967 and 1978, especially the surveys of remains from the Urartian period, came virtually to an end in 1979. In 1983, the members of the Tehran branch were transferred from Tehran to Berlin,



Photo: Wolfram Kleiss, Bastam 1974  
(Courtesy of Stephan Kroll)

and finally in 1985 director Kleiss followed suite. From 1979, work in Iran continued in small scale surveys into the country from the base at the German Archaeological Institute's quarters in Tehran, including explorations of old caravan routes and systematic photographing of caravanserais, road stations, old bridges, dams, etc.

As for his scientific expeditions, during 1970s and 1980s Kleiss headed archaeological research at Takt-e Solaymān, Masjid Soleymān, Bastam, and Bīsotūn. The scientific interests of Kleiss were most focused on Urartu and connected to the 1969-1978 international excavations at the Urartian site Bastam, which he had discovered in 1967. However, during field surveys he discovered and examined sites dated to various periods. With his colleague Stephan Kroll, they visited and investigated (surface find collections, plan drawings, etc.) more than 1000 archaeological sites.

All of his investigations, covering various topics dealing with architecture and urbanism of Iran, were published in more than 300 articles and reports, mostly in the *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*. In addition to numerous articles, Kleiss also published several books on Iranian architecture and the results of his excavations in the North-Western and Western Iran, among which especially noteworthy are *Topographische Karte von Urartu* (1976), *Bastam* (1977, 1979, 1988), *Karawanenbauten in Iran* (1997), as well as *Geschichte der Architektur Irans* (2015).

During his scientific inquiries, Kleiss also studied the Armenian heritage in North-Western Iran, around and beyond Lake Urmia. Particularly the Armenian churches and fortresses made up the background of his research (cf. the articles 'Le monastère arménien de saint Thaddae en Azerbaïdjan (Iran)', *Archaeologia* Nov./Dez. 1967: 72ff.; 'Das armenische Kloster des heiligen Stephanos in Iranisch-Azerbaïdjan', *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 18, 1968: 270ff.; 'Eine armenische Kapelle bei St. Thaddäus', *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 17, 1967: 291ff.; 'Das armenische Kloster Ozlu und andere christliche Denkmäler in Nordwest-Azerbaïdjan', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 11, 1978: 181ff.; 'Früharmenische Burgen in Nordwest-Azerbaïdjan', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 12, 1979: 289ff.; 'Armenische Kirchen in Azerbaïdjan', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 12, 1979: 361ff.; 'Armenische Wüstung und Kirche in Tarasjanb am Araxes', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 18, 1985: 241ff.). Additionally, Kleiss also presented the results of research in Bastam, among others, in Armenian symposia ('Die Ausgrabungen in der urartäischen Burg und Siedlung in Bastam 1977', *The Second International Symposium on Armenian Art* 1978, Yerevan, 1981, vol. I: 152ff.; 'Bastam and the East of Urartu', *Atti del Primo Simposio Internazionale di Acte Armena*, Venezia, 1978: 395ff.).

The scientific contribution of Wolfram Kleiss is enormous not only in context of ancient Iran but also for other countries of the Near East, including Armenia.

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