

In Memoriam
Klaus Schmidt
(1953 - 2014)

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Prof. Dr. phil. Klaus Schmidt, prehistorian, director of excavations at Göbekli Tepe, and co-director of the Jordanian-German cooperative project ASEYM (Archaeological Survey and Excavations in the Yutum and Magass Area), passed away on 20th July, aged 60.

Klaus Schmidt was born on 11th December 1953 in Feuchtwangen, Franconia. From 1974 to 1983 he studied prehistoric archaeology, classics, and geology-palaeontology, first in Erlangen and subsequently in Heidelberg. It was during his time in Heidelberg that he came to participate at excavations headed by his university professor Harald Hauptmann at the site of Norşuntepe, in the Turkish Upper Euphrates region. In 1983 he obtained his PhD, his doctoral thesis focusing on the lithics from this site (*Die lithischen Kleinfunde vom Norşuntepe*). In the same year, he was awarded the travel scholarship of the German Archaeological Institute. Between 1986 and 1995, Klaus Schmidt was research associate at the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology (Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte) at the University of Heidelberg, and research fellow of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).

Between 1983 and 1991 he became involved with research in an area that would later be inundated by the waters of the Atatürk reservoir, more specifically the Early Neolithic settlement of Nevalı Çori, again under the direction of Harald Hauptmann. It was the experience gained from working at this site which would influence the rest of his working life. For the first time, at Nevalı Çori, excavations revealed a special type of building that was furnished with fantastic imagery which provided unprecedented insights into the mind of prehistoric peoples living in the



9th millennium BC. This period is synonymous with a developed stage of the Early Neolithic, in which, in the course of several hundred years arable farming and animal husbandry emerged, a process which would eventually culminate in our modern lifeways.

In 1999, following completion of his habilitation thesis, entitled 'Functional analysis of the Early Neolithic Settlement of Nevalı Çori' (Funktionsanalyse der frühneolithischen Siedlung von Nevalı Çori), Klaus Schmidt was awarded the status of *Privatdozent* at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. From 2001 he was advisor (*Referent*) for Prehistoric Archaeology of the Ancient Near East at the Orient-Department of the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin. In 2007 he was appointed honorary professor at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg.

The stylized T-pillars and sculptures discovered at Nevalı Çori motivated Klaus Schmidt to search for other similar sites in the Southeast Turkish province of Şanlıurfa. In addition to the discovery of Early Neolithic sites in the plain, east of Şanlıurfa (Gürçütepe), he also visited the higher lying site of Göbekli Tepe, which

had been detected many years previously in the southern foothills of the Taurus Mountains. His important impulses for the interpretation of this site number among his greatest scientific achievements. The discovery of fragments of Early Neolithic sculptures, and the location of the site, led him to conclude that this was no 'ordinary' settlement site, but what appeared to be a 'ritual centre' belonging to complex hunter-gatherers. It was only in the course of several subsequent transformation processes leading on from this stage that crop cultivation and animal husbandry would eventually evolve. In the last two decades of fieldwork, under the direction of Klaus Schmidt, excavations revealed buildings with richly adorned pillars and sculptures dating to the 10th and 9th millennia BC. Especially the earliest, monumental enclosures make this a site of unique importance for the study and evaluation of neolithisation processes and associated symbolic worlds. In addition to numerous scientific contributions, it is his book 'Göbekli Tepe: A Stone Age Sanctuary in South-Eastern Anatolia', (translated into several different languages), and written for the much wider audience, which has contributed to the growing popularity of this site, making it and Klaus Schmidt known well beyond the scientific community, and stimulating scientific discussions enormously.

In addition to his work at Göbekli Tepe, Klaus Schmidt co-directed the ASEYM Project

in the Aqaba region of Jordan, where he undertook excavations together with Jordanian colleagues at the Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Age sites Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan and Tall al-Magass. His excavation methods and archaeological astuteness culminated in important research results which have significantly improved our picture of prehistoric settlement in the Gulf of Aqaba. Mention should also be made of his scientific contributions relating to the study of materials from Predynastic Egyptian sites in the Nile Delta.

With the passing of Klaus Schmidt, we have lost one of our most eminent archaeologists. Through his foresight and his openness for alternative ideas and approaches, he enriched and enhanced scientific debate. He has provided us with the foundations for many years of research to come. His time spent in Turkey led a close bond with the country and its people. Nevertheless, throughout his life, he remained faithful to his Franconian home, frequently returning there to find peace and relaxation from his otherwise very active everyday life. Researchers the world over are mourning the loss not only of an international renowned and revered colleague, but also an inspiring teacher, and a loyal and faithful friend.

The German Archaeological Institute will always remember him with greatest gratitude and appreciation.

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