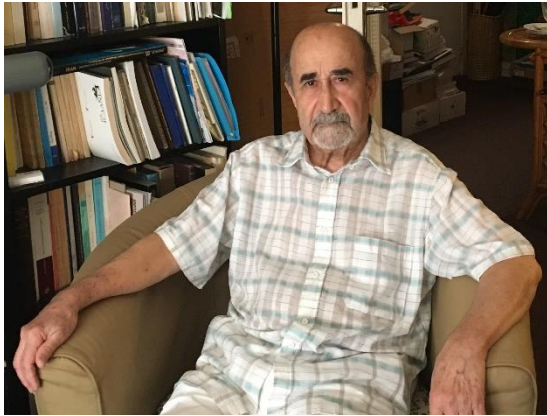


## Dr Firouz Bagherzadeh (1930 – 20210)

### Former and Founding Director of the Archaeological Centre of Iran



*Firouz Bagherzadeh, Paris 18 August 2018. ©V.S.Curtis*

Firouz Bagherzadeh was born on 31 May 1930 in Tabriz, Eastern Azarbaijan. He graduated from Tehran University with a BA in English and Literature in 1954, and two years later he joined the Department of Fine Arts (*Honarha-ye ziba-ye keshvar*) which at the time was part of the Ministry of Education (*Vezerat-e amuzesh o parvaresh*). It was here that he founded and edited the periodical *Honar va Mardom*.

In 1959 at the age of 29 he left Tehran for the US accompanied by his wife Éfat Khanum, née Mo'men, and their little daughter Mardjan. A Fulbright Scholarship enabled him to study at Southern Illinois

University at Carbondale.

In 1960 he came to London and studied for two years with David Storm Rice and David Bivar at the School of Oriental and African Studies. It was here that he forged a deep and lasting friendship with Geza Fehervari. The Bagherzadeh family lived in Queensway near Whiteley's Department Store, and it was here in London that their second daughter Morvarid was born. The family moved to Paris after two years, where Firouz Bagherzadeh continued his studies at the CNRS and obtained a PhD before returning to Tehran in 1971.

Back in his homeland he was appointed Head of the Archaeological Service and the National Museum by Mehrdad Pahlbod, the then Minister of Culture and Arts. He founded the Iranian Centre of Archaeological Research (ICAR), and he embarked on a period of intense activity which transformed archaeology in Iran and gave it an international standing. Firouz Bagherzadeh was instrumental in preserving ancient sites and monuments of Iran, bringing to an end the division of finds for foreign excavations, and giving a scientific shape to Iranian archaeology. Amongst his many achievements were annual archaeological conferences in Tehran with the publication of Iranian and foreign excavation reports. In June 1977 he was elected the first President of the World Committee of Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO).

Unfortunately, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 cut short his meteoric rise in the Archaeological Service, and in 1980 he left Tehran for Paris with his wife and two young daughters and never returned to his homeland. The geographical distance from Iran did not prevent him from keeping in close touch with friends and former colleagues. Throughout his life Firouz Bagherzadeh remained kind and down to earth, and he cared passionately about his colleagues in Iran and kept an open house for young Iranian scholars who came to Europe to study.

He was an unusually approachable person even at the height of his career in Iran. It was always possible to make an appointment to see him, ask his advice and help, or just to say hello. I first met Dr Bagherzadeh in 1973, when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Göttingen in Germany. Before going back home for my summer holidays, Klaus Schippmann, Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology, gave me instructions to introduce myself to two people in Tehran: Firouz Bagherzadeh, Director of the Archaeological Centre of Iran, and David Stronach, Director of BIPS.

Both figures, each a giant in the field of Iranian archaeology, welcomed me with open arms and left a profound impact on my archaeological career. Firouz Bagherzadeh sent me to the Department of Seals and Coins of the Iran Bastan Museum (now National Museum) to gain work experience. Mr Jahangir Yassi, the Head of the Department, treated me with kindness despite my total ignorance and knowledge of ancient coins at the time. Dr Bagherzadeh's office also arranged for me an appointment with Professor Wolfram Kleiss, the Director of the German Archaeological Institute. The result was that I joined the German excavations at the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Urartian site of Bastam near Khoy for one season in the summer of 1973. My second meeting was when Dr Bagherzadeh visited the excavations of Tappeh Nush-i Jan near Malayer in 1974 while I was working with David Stronach. When in 1977 I returned to Nush-i Jan- this time from London where I was studying as a postgraduate – and the Archaeological Centre could not find a representative to join us at Nush-i Jan, a phone call from Dr Bagherzadeh determined that I should take on that role, despite the fact that I was not employed by the Archaeological Centre. With his great charm but authoritarian approach he told me in no uncertain terms that it was either that or putting an end to the season! Foreign excavations had to have an official Iranian representative throughout the season.

My friendship with Firouz Bagherzadeh continued after his departure to Paris, and in 1992 he attended the first archaeological conference of Ancient Iranian Archaeology organized by us at BIPS in London. He was a life-long member of BIPS and enthusiastically read about lectures and events in the UK and in Iran. In 2005 at the time of the Forgotten Empire exhibition at the British Museum he and Éfat Khanum made an unexpected visit to the Department of the Middle East when couriers from the National Museum were checking the condition reports of the objects. Dr Bagherzadeh and Mrs Zahra Jafar-Mohammadi, the Head of the Treasury and Exhibitions, were both in tears when they met again after more than two decades.

The last time I saw both Dr Bagherzadeh and Éfat Khanum was in August 2018 when John Curtis and I visited them in Paris and spent several happy hours talking about his career and life. The sad passing of Éfat Khanum in late 2019 left a great void in his life despite the attention of a caring family with his two daughters and grandchildren. His own death on 3 February of this year was hard to bear for those of us who knew him and remembered him. Archeologists and art historians young and old, both in Iran and worldwide, feel a deep sadness for this kind and gracious man who revolutionised the Iranian antiquities service, but paid dearly for his achievements at the early age of 50 when he was obliged to leave Iran for good. Fortunately, he knew how much colleagues admired him worldwide, and how much he was loved and cherished by archaeologists in Iran, even those who were born after 1979.

BIPS sends its condolences to Dr Bagherzadeh's daughters, Mardjan and Morvarid and their respective families.

Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis