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Editorial

Life is unpredictable. This issue was planned to honour Prof. Dr. Günter Nobis on the occasion of his 80th birthday on June 1, 2001, but shortly before completion of the festschrift, Nobis passed away on 8 March 2002, suddenly and unexpectedly to most of us. We lost a colleague widely acknowledged in the community of archaeozoologists (Becker & Benecke 2001). He had also been elected Honorary Member of the International Council of Archaeozoology and Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI).

The present issue is an expression of the appreciation of his former colleagues. It contains eleven papers presented in his honour by thirteen specialists and covers a wide field of archaeozoological research. I thank all these colleagues who submitted interesting papers and patiently waited for them to be edited and published.

Günter Nobis was born on 1 June 1921 in Güsten/Anhalt, Kr. Bernburg (Germany). After highschool he studied natural history at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle/Saale, but was soon drafted into military service. After the end of second world war he continued his studies in Kiel at the “Christian-Albrechts-Universität”. He attained a Ph.D. there in 1948 and became assistant at the “Institut für Haustierkunde der Universität Kiel” under professor Wolf Herre, one of the founders of the German school of animal domestication research. During his teaching contract at Kiel University, he attained a qualification as a school teacher in 1954, a profession he held in Kiel, Duisburg, and Frechen until 1976. In 1972 he was appointed extra-curricular professor by the University of Cologne. In 1979, after a two years’ intermezzo as a curator and interim director, he became director of the Zoological Research Institute and Museum Koenig in Bonn, the position he held until retirement in 1986.

The research interests of Günter Nobis were centered around the problem of animal domestication and evolution. He was particularly interested in the evolution of horses, an issue to which one of his major works is dedicated, “Vom Wildpferd zum Hauspferd” (Nobis 1971). A constant work throughout his career was the analysis of faunal remains in the context of archaeological surveys. He personally visited many excavations and studied bone material in situ. Outside Germany, he studied faunas mainly in Mediterranean contries such as Bulgaria, Greece, Jordan, and Tunisia. His interest in the classical Mediterranean culture was also emphasized by the fact that he founded a private research institute for archaeozoology in Pylos, Greece, in 1992. There he celebrated also his 80th birthday in 2001, together with his family and Greek friends.

Nobis published more than 100 scientific and popular papers. His research focussed on the evolution of horses, including Pleistocene horses from Mexico (Nobis 1973), on the domestication of the dog (Nobis 1981), and on the zoological interpretation of archaeological bone material from various continents. Bulgaria was one of the major places he concentrated on, together with Lazar Ninov and Henrieta Todorova (Nobis 2002).

Günter Nobis was sometimes not an easy character to deal with, and particularly his time as a director was not always accompanied by harmony. However, he could be very kind and generous, and after his retirement he served the museum as head of the newly founded society "Friends and Sponsors of the Museum Koenig" for almost 25 years. This volunteer service included the edition of a popular journal, "Tier und Museum", as well as fund raising for the benefit of the institute.

Günter Nobis left his wife Dr. Asta Nobis and two daughters behind him. He knew about the festschrift and was informed about its contents, and I think he looked forward to it.

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