

Editors' Preface

For millennia, draft animals played a key role in the survival of many cultures. Even today, draft animals still secure the livelihood of millions of people around the globe. Be it in transportation, agriculture or forestry: draft animals can offer sustainable, eco-friendly, and economically valuable ways of land use. Nevertheless, there are a lot of challenges, ranging from the pressure of high-profit markets or politics to animal welfare, breeding, and harnessing. The total number of draft animals is universally declining – in May 2021, our international conference ‘Draft Animals in the Past, Present and Future’ addressed these challenges. For the first time ever, more than 400 people from 18 countries came together virtually to discuss this topic and using a holistic approach: both scientists as well as practitioners, museum professionals, farmers, NGOs and associations took a deep look into past, present and future use of draft animals around the globe. This resulted in many different perspectives – all of which benefited from the mutual exchange of ideas and challenges.

Draft animals certainly deserve respect and recognition: Draft animal power helps to tackle the climate crisis by replacing fossil energy and by offering opportunities for sustainable, minimally invasive land use from which our ecosystems and biodiversity benefit. Moreover, the use of draft animals is by no means backward, but future-oriented, as the latest know-how and the further development of technologies and science are constantly being worked on – especially to ensure that the animals have a dignified life because they are not commodities, but valuable partners.

By teaching the broad public about the draft animal cause and promoting draft animal power, we are not only sharing and preserving traditional skills, we are also passing on how to handle and teach animals – in particular to a younger audience among whom we are raising awareness about responsibility for animals and our environment. This also contributes to a bottom-up approach, as draft animals are usually ignored in politics, but if the general public is educated about the positive aspects of draft animal power through workshops, shows, and educational work, this can shift perspectives on it up to the highest political levels and help to implement actual sustainability instead of mere words.

With these conference proceedings, we are trying to make a joint contribution to sustainable future development, the preservation of traditions and skills, as well as to cooperation and networking across regional and national borders. As we want to make it possible for everyone to have access to the information from the conference, and as we consider it important to spread the information about draft animals as widely as possible, we are providing the publication both in book-format as well as free of charge in an open-access digital format.

This can only be a first but nevertheless important and valuable step into a changing perception of draft animal use, but we are happy to have played and continue to play our part in that development.



Claus Kropp
 Manager Lauresham Laboratory for Experimental
 Archaeology
 UNESCO World Heritage Site Lorsch Abbey



Lena Zoll
 Scientific Trainee at Lauresham Laboratory for Experi-
 mental Archaeology and UNESCO World Heritage Site
 Lorsch Abbey

