

Preface

For about 100 years *Blastocystis* stages are known to occur in normal and diarrheic feces of humans and of many species of animals. Many important papers in this daily enlarging field of research appeared in Parasitology Research at Springer, Heidelberg, New York. From the very beginning of the research approaches, there had been intense disputes whether there exist different species in humans (e.g., *B. hominis*) and in animals, whether these cyst-like appearing spherical stages are true pathogens or just live as passaging commensals, whether they belong to the phyla of fungi or protozoans, whether they induce diarrheas in humans and animals or whether they reproduce better in hosts under diarrheic conditions, and finally whether they are really able to act as zoonotic organisms switching from humans to animals and back or take the inverse route of primary infection.

Especially the last 45 years delivered worldwide thousands of publications on *Blastocystis* presenting results that were obtained by the use of a wide spectrum of standard and of very sophisticated methods. Although these provide deep insights into the life cycle, the physiology, morphology, and genetics of this peculiar organism remained a mysterious sphinx among the intestine-inhabiting organisms.

Against this background this volume of Parasitology Research Monographs unites renowned specialists and asked them to “put all hard facts onto the table” that had been obtained in *Blastocystis* research as well as in the knowledge on diarrheas and on other apparently zoonotic agents of disease.

Thus this volume tries to evaluate the recent knowledge in the *Blastocystis* field. When focussing on open questions the book may stimulate relevant research in burning problems such as adequate diagnosis and chemotherapy. Its detailed review articles are directed not only at researchers in this field and physicians and veterinarians who are confronted with infected individuals or animals but also to teachers, students, and technical staff in the fields of microbiology, parasitology, and diagnostic methods.

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