

In memoriam Udelgard Körber-Grohne

Karl-Ernst Behre

Received: 27 November 2014 / Accepted: 27 November 2014 / Published online: 5 December 2014
© Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2014

On November 6th 2014 Udelgard Körber-Grohne died at the age of 91 years. For many years she developed and shaped the archaeobotany of central Europe and beyond.

She was born in Hamburg on July 11th 1923, the daughter of the well-known archaeologist Ernst Grohne, who headed the Focke Museum in Bremen for a long time, in the city where she grew up. At home she received much stimulation towards archaeology; for her academic studies, however, she turned to biology and finished 1948 at Braunschweig Technical University with a thesis on plant physiology. At that time it was difficult to find an adequate job, but in 1949 she got a chance for a part time position in Wilhelmshaven at the Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research, as it is called nowadays, which later became a full time position.

At this institute, which is mainly engaged in the geology and archaeology of the Lower Saxony coastal area, she started a new kind of work that from then on would determine her activities and her whole life (Fig. 1).

From the leading experts of this period she learned pollen analysis and in her early work she was occupied with research projects on vegetation history in the coastal area (Grohne 1957a). Already then she aimed to make methodological progress and in 1957 she published a paper on the identification of cereal pollen by using phase contrast microscopy (Grohne 1957b). The start of the long-term excavation of the large dwelling-mound of Feddersen Wierde by the Wilhelmshaven Institute in 1955 became a

new challenge for her. This excavation, the largest in Germany at that time, provided huge amounts of water-logged botanical macro-remains in excellent preservation. New possibilities for identification had to be worked out and now she elaborated detailed and extensive keys for *Juncus* seeds and grass caryopses which were later considerably expanded (Körber-Grohne 1964, 1991). Also, in the interpretation of her results she broke new ground. Together with Reinhold Tüxen she used the available very pure samples of macro-remains to reconstruct the plant communities of the salt marshes even down to the subassociations.

After her marriage to Jürgen Körber she left Wilhelmshaven, but beside the education of her three children she evaluated the very extensive material from the Feddersen Wierde over several years and published her most important scientific monograph with which she set new standards for archaeobotany (Körber-Grohne 1967).

After the death of her husband she started her next scientific period from 1970 at the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim where she built up an archaeobotanical section at the Botanical Institute of Burkhard Frenzel. It is to her credit that archaeobotany in southwest Germany, which was then in a somewhat backward state, was brought right up to date. She did her habilitation, qualifying as a lecturer, and soon became professor. Through her teaching activities she also now gained students and together with them she carried out numerous projects in southwest Germany. Most prominent of these were the monographs on the Roman eastern castellum of Welzheim (Körber-Grohne et al. 1983) and on the Hallstatt period chieftain's grave of Hochdorf (Körber-Grohne 1985). Particularly at the latter her special interest in archaeological finds of textiles is evident and she developed new methods for the investigation of plant fibres and animal hairs, which she later also used on Viking age

Communicated by F. Bittmann.

K.-E. Behre (✉)
Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research,
Viktoriastr. 26/28, 26382 Wilhelmshaven, Germany
e-mail: behre@nihk.de



Fig. 1 Udelgard Körber-Grohne at the start of her career

finds from the settlement of Haithabu in Schleswig-Holstein (Körber-Grohne 1977).

After her retirement in 1988 she in no way stopped her scientific activities, but produced further publications. She now dedicated herself particularly to the development of stone fruit, of which there still existed numerous old races especially in southwest Germany. This resulted in the *Geschichte der Pflaumen, Kirschkpflaumen und Schlehen* in 1996 (History of damsons, cherry plums and sloes), which will be the standard work for a long time (Körber-Grohne 1996). Somewhat earlier she had compiled her extensive knowledge about cultivated plants and their history in a comprehensive volume *Nutzpflanzen in Deutschland* (Crop plants in Germany, Körber-Grohne 1987) and presented it not only for the scientific world but also for the ordinary reader. Particularly this book, which filled a great gap, will preserve the name Körber-Grohne for a long time with a wide readership.

The scientific activity of Udelgard Körber-Grohne was characterized by a varied and broad knowledge that she had acquired and brought into her publications. She never

paused but was always anxious to develop new methods and to pass them into publications and so she has promoted our science generally.

It has also to be emphasized that she not only started many projects but always finished them and published her results in an exemplary manner and illustrated them with numerous and good figures.

Udelgard Körber-Grohne was a respected and widely esteemed person. She always had a fixed aim and went her way in a direct and determined manner, which sometimes resulted in conflicts.

After her retirement she spent her last two decades at Wiesensteig in the midst of the landscape of *Schwaben* that she had learnt to love, but her final resting place she found in her home city of Bremen.

With her death we have lost a versatile colleague who has strongly shaped and furthered archaeobotany. Her scientific input will still be felt for many years to come and we will keep her well-remembered.

References

- Grohne U (1957a) Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des ostfriesischen Küstengebietes auf Grund botanischer Untersuchungen. *Probl Küstenforsch südl Nordseegebiet* 6:1–46
- Grohne U (1957b) Die Bedeutung des Phasenkontrastverfahrens für die Pollenanalyse am Beispiel der Gramineenpollen vom Getreidetyp. *Photograph Forsch* 7:237–248
- Körber-Grohne U (1964) Bestimmungsschlüssel für subfossile *Juncus*-Samen und Gramineen-Früchte. *Probl Küstenforsch südl Nordseegebiet* 7. Lax, Hildesheim
- Körber-Grohne U (1967) Geobotanische Untersuchungen auf der Feddersen Wierde. *Feddersen Wierde* 1. Steiner, Wiesbaden
- Körber-Grohne U (1977) Botanische Untersuchungen des Tauwerkes der frühmittelalterlichen Siedlung Haithabu und Hinweise zur Unterscheidung einheimischer Gehölzbaste. *Ber Ausgrab Haithabu* 11:64–110
- Körber-Grohne U (1985) Die biologischen Reste aus dem hallstattzeitlichen Fürstengrab von Hochdorf, Gemeinde Eberdingen (Kreis Ludwigsburg). *Forsch Ber Vor- Frühgesch Bad-Württ* 19:85–265
- Körber-Grohne U (1987) *Nutzpflanzen in Deutschland. Kulturgeschichte und Biologie* (2nd edn 1994). Theiss, Stuttgart
- Körber-Grohne U (1991) Bestimmungsschlüssel für subfossile Gramineen-Früchte. *Probl Küstenforsch südl Nordseegebiet* 18:169–234
- Körber-Grohne U (1996) *Pflaumen Kirschkpflaumen Schlehen. Heutige Pflanzen und ihre Geschichte seit der Frühzeit*. Theiss, Stuttgart
- Körber-Grohne U, Kokabi M, Piening U, Planck D (1983) *Flora und Fauna aus dem Ostkastell von Welzheim*. *Forsch Ber Vor- Frühgesch Bad-Württ* 14. Theiss, Stuttgart