

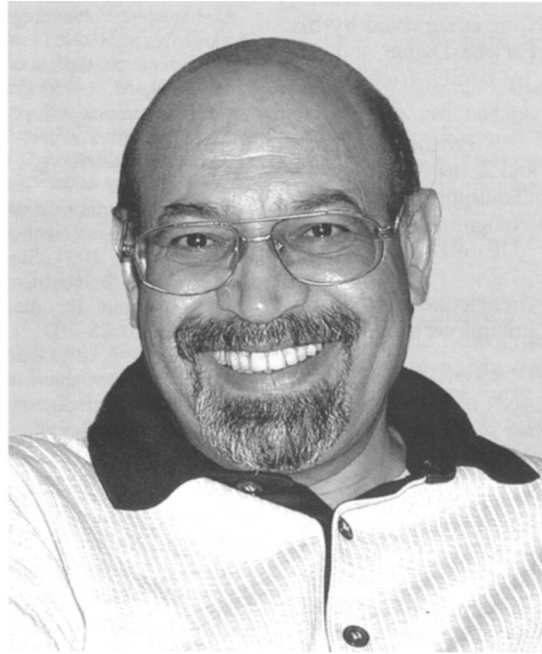
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MEMORIAL

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NOOR MOHAMMAD FARSAN (1940–2003)

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Noor Farsan will always be remembered for his friendliness and cheerful demeanor as well as for his contributions to paleontology. His premature death from a long-standing cancer illness on 23 April 2003, at the age of 62 is not only a great personal loss to family and friends but to the world of science as well. His passing marks the end of a unique type of research into the paleobiology of tentaculitids, in which the shell structure rather than external shell morphology of these animals was emphasized as a basis for taxonomy and phylogeny.

Noor was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, on 15 September 1940. His parents divorced shortly before he was born and he was raised by his maternal grandfather. His grandfather was employed by the king of Afghanistan, who in turn was acquainted with the German emperor Wilhelm II, and as a result, it was through his grandfather that Noor first came in contact with German culture. He received his education through high school at a German-Afghan school in Kabul. His aim was to study construction engineering, but the Afghan government ordered him to study some branch of natural science. Noor chose geology and in 1962 earned a Bachelor of Science degree at Kabul University. He then became a research assistant at the Geological Institute in Kabul. From 1964 and during the next 14 years he alternately worked at Kabul University and studied at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Bonn in Germany, where in 1972 he completed his PhD dissertation in geology and paleontology under Heinrich Erben. Noor was successively promoted by Kabul University during this time to become the head of the Geological Institute the following year and a full professor in 1976. While serving as a visiting professor in Paris,

from 1978 to 1981, Noor received word that his life would be endangered if he returned to Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion in 1979. He decided to stay in Europe and for the next 10 years held research positions at the universities in Mainz and Giessen in Germany. In 1992 he began his career at the University of Heidelberg, where he remained until his death.

At the Geologisch-Paläontologisches Institut in Heidelberg, Noor soon became a highly esteemed colleague and teacher. His door was always invitingly open and freshly brewed coffee ready to be served to the visitor. Be it a professional colleague or a first-year student, each was received with the same warmth and genuine human interest. Noor was responsible for the undergraduate teaching in paleontology and was constantly awarded high ratings in course evaluations. His lectures had the right mix of facts, wit, and personal touch. In addition to undergraduate courses, Noor also lectured on micropaleontology, held seminars, and led field trips for students to the Paleozoic of the Czech Republic and Poland and the Triassic of southern Germany. He was also adviser to MS and PhD students. Since 1995, Noor held positions as research associate and, in later years, museum curator at Heidelberg. In the latter function he developed plans for a reorganization of the geological and paleontological exhibitions which, unfortunately, he did not live to see materialize.

Noor's research interests were wide-ranging. His first publication, in 1962, was a short article on earthquakes and since 1967 he published some 30 articles and monographs on mainly Devonian and Triassic bivalves, gastropods, brachiopods, trilobites, ammonoids, and even ostracoderms. From 1981 most of his work

focused on tentaculitids. At the time of his death, he was in the process of gathering tentaculitid material for several works, including a monograph on the faunas of North America. JMM will never forget the joyous expression on Noor's face when they located exposures of tentaculite-rich layers of Devonian limestone in Maryland and West Virginia. He was also engaged in a project concerning Devonian faunas of Iran with colleagues at the University of Tübingen.

On the private side, Noor was an excellent tailor, a talent inherited from his uncle. His other interests included Persian literature and art. In three years he would have retired, and, among other plans, he wanted to learn Italian. Noor is survived by his wife of 23 years, Bärbel, and his sons, Parwez Daniel and Alexander Sorud. He will be sorely missed by family, friends, colleagues, and students.

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