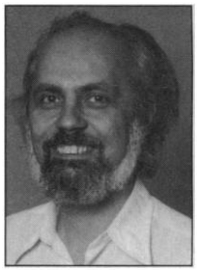
edited by RICHARD STONE

EMBL Homes In On New Chief

Greek developmental geneticist Fotis Kafatos has emerged as the leading candidate to become director-general of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg, Germany.

Kafatos' appointment should end months of strife that have wracked EMBL, the leading multinational center for molecular biology in Europe. Much of the turmoil revolves around EMBL's current director-general, Swedish molecular biologist Lennart Philipson, who has been at odds with the lab's governing council over its failure to back his plans to expand EMBL—a dispute that led Philipson to announce last summer that he would step down in April 1993, 2 years ahead of schedule (*Science*, 31 July, p. 607). Philipson has also made enemies in the European Community's (EC) Brussels headquarters by launching a blistering attack on EC science policy in an article that appeared in the 12 November *Nature*.



Fotis Kafatos

Kafatos, who currently divides his time between Harvard University and the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology in Herakleion, Crete, was the only candidate for the top EMBL post discussed last week at a meeting of the EMBL council, sources told *Science*. But no formal announcement is expected until after the next council meeting in March. Indeed, EMBL officials are handling the appointment with kid gloves: They'd like to avoid a repeat of what happened in 1989, when the EMBL council had to reverse its decision not to ask Philipson to serve a second term as director-general after the lab's member states unexpectedly rejected the sole candidate for the job, crystallographer Tom Blundell of London's Birkbeck College. At the time, some EMBL national delegates argued that a structural biologist would be a poor choice to head the lab.

Kafatos, who declined to comment when contacted by *Science*, is expected to be a popular choice among EMBL's member states. Moreover, he's highly regarded in Brussels as an "effective political operator," according to one EC biotech official. And that might prove especially useful to EMBL in its bid to get the EC to help fund a planned European Bioinformatics Institute.

Transition Talk III

Is it time to recalculate the odds that Bernadine Healy will remain director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH)? NIH handicappers think so, now that President-elect Bill Clinton has nominated Donna Shalala, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to be secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Although Shalala (Healy's boss-to-be) is by training a political scientist, not a researcher, she has served for the past year and a half on Healy's hand-picked advisory committee, even attending a meeting earlier this month in between discussions with the Clinton transition team. Healy seized on the connection, noting in a statement that Shalala has a "keen interest" in biomedical research and has been an "active leader in our discussions on scientific issues."

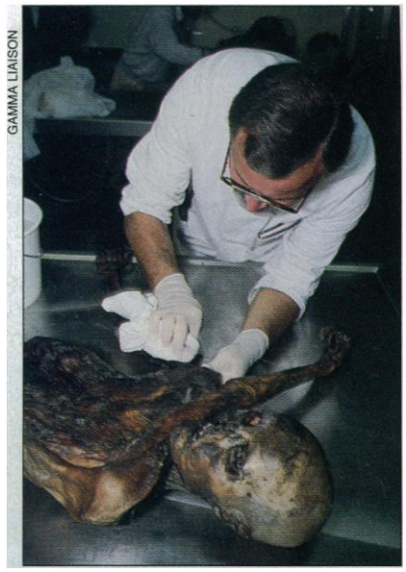
Since arriving at Madison in 1988, Shalala has focused much of her attention on improving undergraduate education, even as the university continued a decade-long decline in snaring NIH research funding. But she has of late been striving for a higher profile in research matters—besides her stint on the advisory committee, Shalala served on the recent Commission on the Future of the National Science Foundation.

With Shalala in place, NIH watchers say, don't bet on Healy departing—especially if Clinton lets his new health secretary pick her own team.

The Iceman's DNA Cometh to Munich

Ever since the mummified body of a 5000-year-old Stone Age man was hacked out of a glacier in the Ötz valley in the Alps 15 months ago, many scientists have wondered what the "Iceman" could tell them about the migration of people over the past 50 centuries. Based on an analysis of his tools, scientists are guessing that the man—known as Ötzi—lived in an area south of the Alps in modern-day Italy. Now a team of biologists led by Svante Paabo of the University of Munich is about to try to identify his modern kin—by analyzing Ötzi's DNA.

Paabo, an expert on ancient DNA, will travel early next month to the University of Innsbruck, where he will remove bits of Ötzi's rib and flesh and return with it to Munich. There, Paabo plans to study the condition of the genetic material and search for unusual genetic markers that might show up in a modern population. But in the absence of such a marker, it could be hard to draw any conclusions about the genetic makeup of Ötzi or his contemporaries, Paabo says.



GAMMA LIAISON

Long-lost relative? DNA studies might reveal Iceman's modern kin.

Even if Ötzi's DNA fails to reveal anything about his roots, it may shed some light on the ancestry of other creatures: viruses, that is. Paabo hopes to sample Ötzi's lymph or bladder to see if they contain remnants of DNA from viruses. "It would be truly interesting to look at the rate of viral evolution over 5000 years," he says.

Is *The Chicago Tribune* Done With Gallo?

Even for most scientists, the controversy over who should get credit for discovering the cause of AIDS—U.S. or French researchers—delves into details so esoteric that it's taken years for expert panels to sort out the claims. Pity, then, the poor readers of *The Chicago Tribune*. Three years ago, the *Tribune* ran a 55,000-word article alleging that Robert C. Gallo, an AIDS researcher at the National Cancer Institute, had appropriated a French sample of AIDS virus through "an accident or a theft." Now, one of the *Tribune* editors has written a commentary that seeks to justify why the newspaper has devoted "endless columns" to a story that some readers have found "too scientifically forbidding to read."

The 6 December editorial by Douglas E. Kneeland, the *Tribune's* public editor, accompanied a 7500-word article on the Gallo affair by John Crewdson, a senior writer who's been gumshoeing around the National Institutes of Health for the past 4 years. The latest Crewdson opus shifts the focus from Gallo—whose claim to the AIDS virus "has never been the most significant aspect of the case," he writes—to the more fundamental question of whether U.S. science can police itself.

But all this Gallo business seems to be weighing heavily on *Tribune* editors. "...If you felt our persistent in-depth reporting on the Gallo affair was obsessive—or perhaps excessive—for a newspaper, you were not alone," writes Kneeland. Among the malcontents, he cites, are a "fair number" of *Tribune* writers and editors.

So is the *Tribune's* infatuation with the Gallo case over? Its editors refused to say. But Jack Fuller, an editor of the Gallo series, assured *Science* that the latest Crewdson article "wasn't meant as a valedictory piece." And "John would be as happy as everyone else to put this behind him," says Kneeland. To that Crewdson heartily agrees.