

ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОЕ АГЕНТСТВО НАУЧНЫХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ  
ИНСТИТУТ АРХЕОЛОГИИ И ЭТНОГРАФИИ  
СИБИРСКОГО ОТДЕЛЕНИЯ РОССИЙСКОЙ АКАДЕМИИ НАУК  
ГЕРМАНСКИЙ АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ИНСТИТУТ  
ЕВРАЗИЙСКОЕ ОТДЕЛЕНИЕ

МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И НАУКИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ  
НОВОСИБИРСКИЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

# **МУЛЬТИДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЕ МЕТОДЫ В АРХЕОЛОГИИ: НОВЕЙШИЕ ИТОГИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ**

**Материалы международного симпозиума  
«Мультидисциплинарные методы в археологии:  
новейшие итоги и перспективы»  
(22–26 июня 2015 г., г. Новосибирск)**

Ответственные редакторы  
академик РАН *В.И. Молодин*  
профессор *С. Хансен*

Новосибирск  
Издательство ИАЭТ СО РАН  
2017

FEDERAL AGENCY OF SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATIONS  
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF SIBERIAN BRANCH OF RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
  
GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE  
EURASIA DEPARTMENT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
NOVOSIBIRSK STATE UNIVERSITY

**MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH  
TO ARCHAEOLOGY:  
RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND PROSPECTS**

**Proceedings of the International Symposium  
“Multidisciplinary Approach to Archaeology:  
Recent achievements and prospects”  
(June 22 – 26, 2015, Novosibirsk)**

Editors  
Academician RAS *V.I. Molodin*  
Professor *S. Hansen*

Novosibirsk  
IAET SB RAS Publishing  
2017

DIE BUNDESAGENTUR DER WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN ORGANISATIONEN  
INSTITUT FÜR ARCHÄOLOGIE UND ETHNOGRAPHIE  
DER SIBIRISCHEN ABTEILUNG DER RUSSISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

DEUTSCHES ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT  
EURASIEN-ABTEILUNG

MINISTERIUM FÜR WISSENSCHAFT UND BILDUNG DER RUSSISCHEN FÖDERATION  
STAATLICHE UNIVERSITÄT NOWOSIBIRSK

# **MULTIDISZIPLINÄRE METHODEN IN DER ARCHÄOLOGIE: AKTUELLE ERGEBNISSE UND ZUKUNFTSPERSPEKTIVEN**

**Materialien des Internationalen Symposium  
"Multidisziplinäre Methoden in der Archäologie:  
Aktuelle Ergebnisse und Zukunftsperspektiven"  
(von 22. bis 26. Juni 2015, Nowosibirsk)**

Verantwortliche Redakteure  
Akademienmitglied der RAW *V.I. Molodin*  
Professor *S. Hansen*

Nowosibirsk  
IAET SA RAW Verlag  
2017

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## **THE BASEL-GASFABRIK RESEARCH PROJECT: ADDRESSING COMPLEX TOPICS BY AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH\***

*The la Tène period) site of Basel-Gasfabrik has been under investigation for more than a century. During that time, the unfortified settlement with its two cemeteries has yielded huge amounts of everyday and exceptional objects and features. Beginning in the mid-1970s, samples were systematically collected for scientific analyses during ongoing excavations, thus producing ideal preconditions for interdisciplinary research. In 2011–2014, the international research project “Approaching the living via the dead: human remains from the Late La Tène site Basel-Gasfabrik and their cultural-historical interpretations” addressed the multifarious ways in which the Iron Age community handled their deceased. The intense collaboration involved researchers from the Archäologische Bodenforschung Basel-Stadt and the universities of Basel (CH), Mainz, and Freiburg i.Br. (D) and spanned eight disciplines: archeology, archeoanthropology, archeobotany, archeozoology, geoarchaeology, biogeochemistry, molecular genetics, and statistics. Research topics and theoretical frameworks were developed jointly as well as procedures to combine the disciplinary results in multistage processes in order to generate integrative syntheses of novel insights. The challenges and specific research potentials of the integrative approach may serve as a positive example for future interdisciplinary research projects.*

**Keywords:** *late Iron Age, interdisciplinary collaboration, project design, integrative synthesis, case study.*

\*The project Approaching the living via the dead: human remains from the Late La Tène site Basel-Gasfabrik and their cultural-historical interpretations was funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation, the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft (FAG) Basel, and the Archäologische Bodenforschung Kanton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland.

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## ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ПРОЕКТ «БАЗЕЛЬ - ГАЗОВЫЙ ЗАВОД»: РЕШЕНИЕ КОМПЛЕКСНЫХ ЗАДАЧ С ПОМОЩЬЮ ИНТЕГРАЦИОННОГО ПОДХОДА

Памятник позднего железного века (эпоха Латена) Базель – Газовый завод исследуется уже более ста лет. За это время раскопки неукрепленного поселения с двумя могильниками принесли огромное количество как рядовых, так и исключительных находок. Начиная с середины 1970-х гг., образцы систематически собирались для научного анализа в ходе ведущихся раскопок, таким образом создавая идеальные предпосылки для последующих междисциплинарных исследований. В 2011–2014 гг. международный научно-исследовательский проект «Постигая живое через мертвое: человеческие останки из позднелатенского памятника Базель – Газовый завод и их историко-культурная интерпретация» был нацелен на рассмотрение многообразных способов обращения с усопшими, бытовавшими в сообществе железного века. Активное сотрудничество объединило исследователей из Бюро археологического почвоведения г. Базеля и университетов Базеля (Швейцария), Майнца и Фрайбурга (Германия) и охватило восемь научных дисциплин: археологию, антропологию, археоботанику, археозоологию, геоархеологию, биогеохимию, молекулярную генетику и статистику. Совместно были выработаны темы исследования и теоретические обоснования, а также соответствующие процедуры, нацеленные на объединение результатов отдельных дисциплин в многоступенчатом процессе создания новых идей путем интеграционного синтеза. Задачи и конкретный исследовательский потенциал данного интегративного подхода могут служить положительным примером для будущих междисциплинарных научных проектов.

Ключевые слова: поздний железный век, междисциплинарное сотрудничество, концепция проекта, интегративный синтез, пример исследования.

### Basel-Gasfabrik: a proto urban center in the Upper Rhine region

The la Tène period site of Basel-Gasfabrik (ca. 150–80 BC) was an important center of

trade and production in the Upper Rhine region. The open settlement on the left bank of the river covered an area of about 150,000 m<sup>2</sup>, three quarters of which have been excavated in over a hundred years of archeological investigations. Inside the

settlement, houses, crafts zones (pottery, smithy, glass and coin production), pits for a range of purposes (storage cellars, grain silos etc.) as well as animal pens and garden plots were arranged along a grid pattern and allowed for the reconstruction of various domestic and economic units. All in all, the site represents the region's first proto urban center, drawing upon an extensive hinterland and being incorporated in trade networks extending as far as the Mediterranean (Blöck et al., 2014; Alltagskultur..., 2011).

Beyond the world of the living, the site provides insights into a world of the dead no less complex. To the north of the settlement, two synchronous cemeteries held over 200 inhumation and cremation burials\*. Inside the settlement, complete skeletons of almost 30 individuals were found in pits and wells, while fetuses and newborns were recovered from diverse settlement features (Fig. 1). More striking still are the numerous isolated human bones mixed in with the settlement material in every conceivable context, such as settlement pits, occupation layers and leveling debris, with a certain proportion bearing traces of carnivore gnawing, cut marks or other post- or perimortem manipulations (Pichler et al., 2013, Rissanen et al., 2013).

### **A wealth of data from a century of exploration**

In more than a century of archeological excavations, huge numbers of finds have been documented at Basel-Gasfabrik: over 700,000 objects, from ceramic and iron tools to imports from the Mediterranean area as well as 1,600,000 animal bones. The records on the complex multi phase features, the more than 500 pits and the graves excavated according to modern archeological standards fill 65 m of shelf space and include 67,000 photos and 46,000 drawings. Furthermore, from the early 1980s onward, samples for scientific analyses were collected on site and geoarcheological, archeozoological, and archeobotanical studies conducted on a regular basis (Jud, 2008; Rentzel, 1995; Stopp, 1999; Schaer, Stopp, 2005). Sampling of human skeletal remains for stable isotope and a(ncient)DNA studies commenced soon after the turn of the millennium and the prerequi-

sites were thus established for yet another class of bioarcheometric analyses (Pichler, 2012). The rare and fortunate fact that both the settlement and the cemeteries are known and the presence of highly complex features in combination with the comprehensive archeological and archeometric data amassed make Basel-Gasfabrik an ideal site for interdisciplinary research.

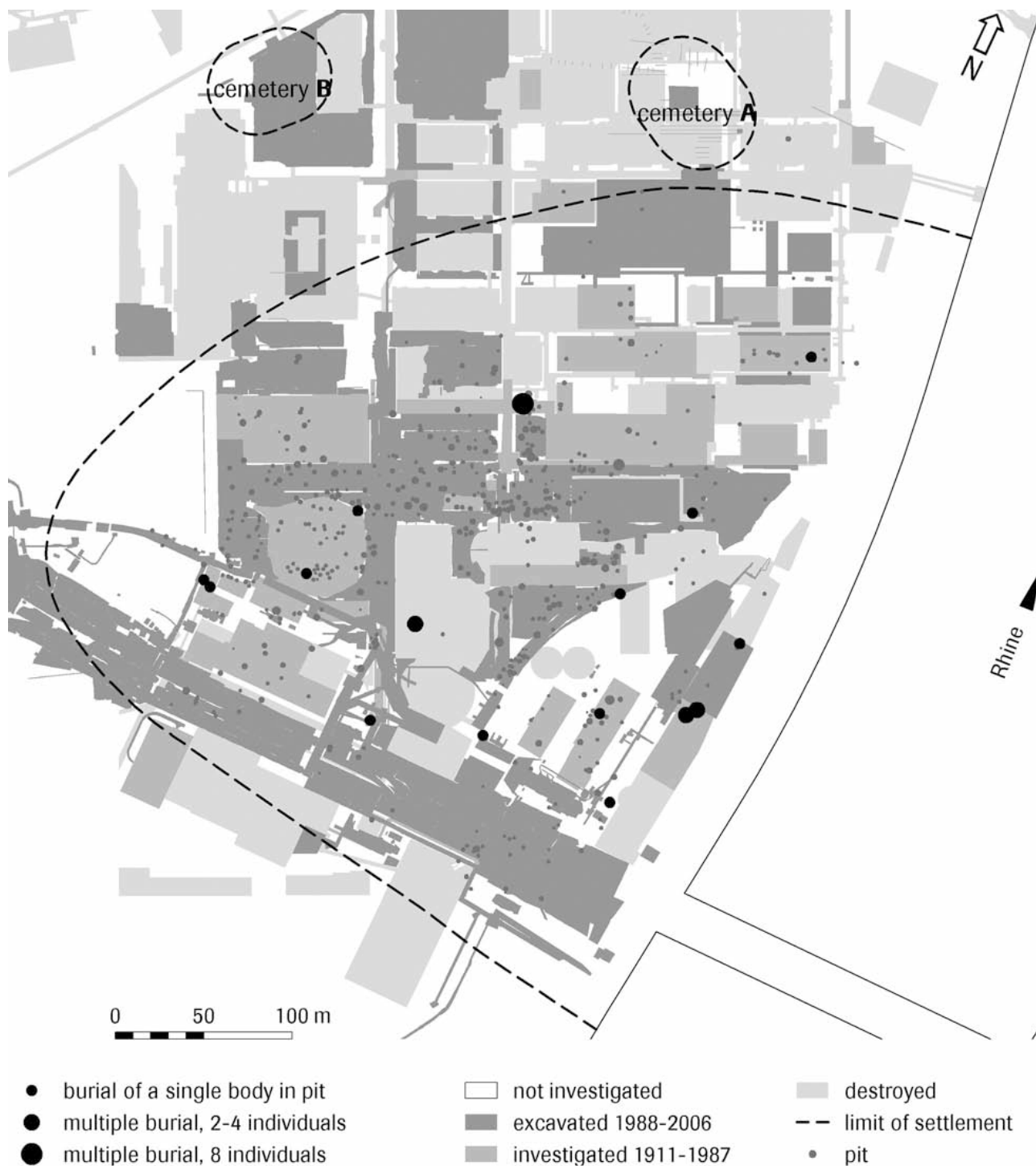
### **Making use of a huge potential – the integrative Basel-Gasfabrik research project**

The site's potential was first exploited from 2011–2014 during a large international project investigating the cultural and social context of the multifarious handling of the dead reflected in the archeological record. The project team comprised 14 researchers representing 8 disciplines: archeology, archeoanthropology, archeobotany, archeozoology, geoarcheology, biogeochemistry, molecular genetics and statistics, involving five research institutions in two nations. From the outset, it was clear that the number and diversity of disciplines, the array of materials analyzed as well as the different disciplinary terminologies, methods and approaches involved would present challenges both in purposefully combining the separate lines of research and in the synthesis of the generated data. At the same time, the situation also provided a unique potential for gaining in-depth information beyond the disciplinary results, especially since most of the researchers involved already had a vast experience in interdisciplinary collaboration. The research was therefore to be designed so as to exploit the multiple potentials given to the best possible degree.

### ***Organizing research in a multi researcher, multi discipline project***

In the past, archeological research projects involving scientific analyses were often planned along solely archeological research trajectories, the collaborating scientists being requested to provide data gained by specific analytical procedures and with feasibility estimates constituting their main contribution during the planning phase prior to project commencement. The results generated

\*The precise dating of the two cemeteries is in the focus of an ongoing PhD thesis (Rissanen, forthcoming).



*Fig. 1.* Plan of the late La Tène period site of Basel-Gasfabrik, Switzerland. The unfortified settlement on the left bank of the Rhine river had two cemeteries, A and B. Different shades of grey mark investigated and destroyed areas; dots denote the location of pits (illustration: Peter von Holzen, ABBS).

in such projects were frequently novel, providing informative answers for the specific questions investigated. They seldom, however, utilized the potential of the disciplines involved in such a way as to initiate further innovative research even in the course of ongoing projects and to bring a comprehensive, “outside” view to bear on the issues under investigation. In the Basel-Gasfabrik project on the other hand, the interdisciplinary\* research design was to be developed jointly by all collaborators from the very beginning, including discipline spanning topics and aims, shared theoretical frameworks, the establishment of routines of data exchange and procedures for ensuring a continual interpretative process and integrative\*\* data synthesis. This was realized in several meetings of all members of the research team, during which a detailed research plan was gradually developed, discussed and finally mutually decided (Fig. 2).

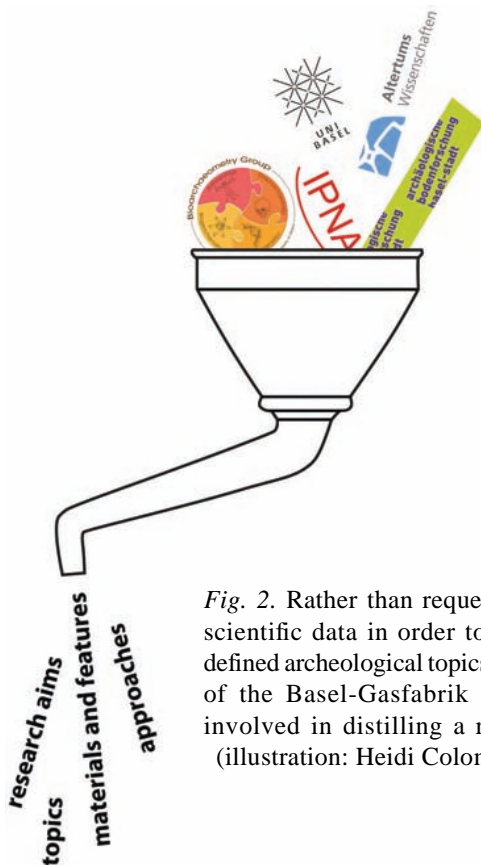


Fig. 2. Rather than requesting specific scientific data in order to answer predefined archeological topics, all members of the Basel-Gasfabrik project were involved in distilling a research plan (illustration: Heidi Colombi, ABBS).

This course of action was crucial as it was realized from the outset that none of the eight participating disciplines was able to address the core problematic by themselves, namely to reconstruct the parallel and multifarious ways dead bodies were treated at the a Tène period site of Basel-Gasfabrik. Further aims centered on assessing the living conditions, diet, economy, land use, mobility and identity of the former population on the basis of the site’s human skeletal remains in their specific contexts.

Prior to the commencement of the project, the principal investigators signed an agreement defining sampling strategies, procedures of data collection and warehousing, routines of internal communication and knowledge transfer as well as guiding principles concerning the communication of project results in oral and written form and the authorship of research papers. The complexity of the project also made it indispensable that two of the participants held the roles of administrative and scientific project coordinators respectively in addition to their scientific tasks in order to ensure a rigid adherence to the research plan, to maintain inter researcher communication on specific subjects and to coordinate the stepwise progress in the multiple disciplinary analyses being carried out along separate but converging lines.

### *Structuring the research process: intra project knowledge production and exchange*

The central topics as well as the nature and extent of the samples to be analyzed being defined, research work in the project commenced along established and predefined disciplinary routines, with the scientific project coordinator ensuring timely realization of specific intermediate or final disciplinary results. At intervals, these results were discussed in meetings either of the complete research team or subgroups thereof set up to investigate specific topics involving two or more disciplines and researchers (Fig. 3). Such

\*“Interdisciplinary research is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice” (Committee..., 2005).

\*\*Integrative Archaeology denotes the Basel research profile in which data and approaches from the sciences and the humanities are inextricably linked in order to produce new insights to past communities integrated in an overall view.



subgroups investigated topics like the pre- and post-sedimentary history and taphonomy of the sediments and artifacts used to fill two large exemplary pits in the settlement (geoarcheology, archeology, archeozoology, archeobotany, archeoanthropology), the diet and health status of individuals from various archeological contexts (biogeochemistry, archeoanthropology, archeozoology, archeobotany, archeology) or the identification of depositions among the randomly distributed infillings of the exemplary pits (statistics, archeology, archeozoology, archeobotany). Discussions in such meetings were both intense and productive, with the exchange resulting in a timely communication of disciplinary findings to all the collaborators. They also sparked new insights as well as suggesting new lines of inquiry to be followed with respect to the specific topics, thus initiating yet another round of investigations, ensuing discussions and integrative synthesis (Fig. 4). Equal participation in the overall progress achieved was also fostered by the use of a common, restricted access workspace on a university webserver. All documents, reports, publications, presentations etc. pertaining to the project were uploaded directly and were thereby open for all project members.

As new knowledge and ideas were being generated, lead roles frequently shifted between the disciplines involved, necessitating flexible approaches and deepening the understanding both of the different disciplinary methodologies and of the research topic under investigation among all members of the project. This process was intensified by daylong workshops during which the results of individual researchers or of sub-groups were presented, the overall progress was discussed and the next steps in the research process were defined.

About halfway through the project, a two-day workshop was held with specifically selected international experts. Seven presentations by project members and four by invited speakers served as a basis to debate specific and overall hypotheses and approaches as well as preliminary results and for placing these in their respective frameworks. In a whole day dedicated solely to discussions, invaluable feedback and suggestions were gained. These advanced the further progress of the scientific work, which afterwards proceeded along even more focused and rigorous lines.



Fig. 3. The thought grinder: disciplinary results are combined in an integrative synthesis (illustration: Heidi Colombi, ABBS).

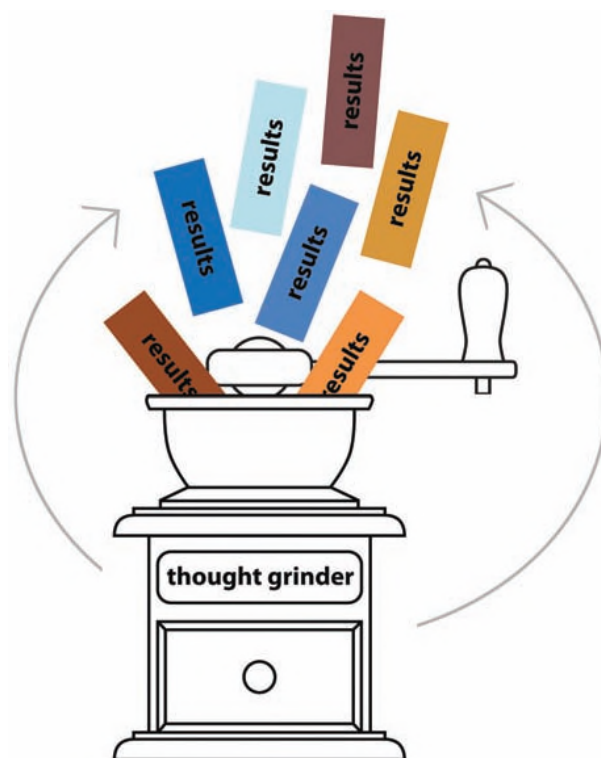


Fig. 4. The thought grinder, stage 2: insights and ideas generated in the integrative synthesis initiate yet another round of inter-/disciplinary investigations and subsequent synthesis (illustration: Heidi Colombi, ABBS).

## Challenges and potentials of an integrative approach

The parallel lines of research followed throughout the project as well as the integration of multifarious disciplinary and interdisciplinary results in a routine of regular exchange among the participating scientists presented both challenges and potentials. Challenges emerged on various levels:

- project management was more demanding
- workpower and money had to be allotted for the administrative and scientific project coordination
- each participant needed to acquire a basic knowledge of all the disciplines involved
- discrepancies in knowledge and methodologies had to be addressed constructively
- a “culture” of discussion and knowledge exchange had to be developed
- everybody was continuously called upon to achieve a synthesis of the multifarious data and results

The points addressed are essential for a successful collaboration in any interdisciplinary project (Brown, Deletic, Wong, 2015), and even more so if an integrative approach is chosen as the inherent principle of research. On the plus side, such an approach equally presents a number of key potentials. These include:

- a better understanding of the complex, multifactorial processes underlying the observed phenomena
- neither the materials on which analyses are based nor the process of knowledge construction need be disrupted or fragmented
- the scientific data is thoroughly contextualized culturally
- a deepened reflection and better error control is ensured by diverse “outside views” provided by members from within the project itself, e.g. by the statistician
- research results of higher quality and greater diversity are obtained
- a research process is instigated which produces results in excess of disciplinary findings

So in spite of the challenges involved, the integrative approach emerged as being highly productive in generating results both on the disciplinary and interdisciplinary levels.

## Integrative archeology – assessing the outcome

From the outset, an interdisciplinary project scheme seemed the only feasible manner in which to address the complex topics presented by the Basel-Gasfabrik site. It was clear that the chosen approach would present challenges on different levels and at different stages of the scientific process; these challenges were, however, actively addressed and resolved. In this, the professional attitudes of all project members played a major role. The research team as a group acquired an understanding of the other disciplines and the dynamics involved in a continuous integrative synthesis of interdisciplinary results. Yet another supporting factor was the dynamic research process intrinsic to the integrative approach as it rapidly became manifest that the potentials far outweighed the challenges encountered. As anticipated, the close collaboration within the team provided insights into the Iron Age community investigated which could not have been achieved by disciplinary analyses\*. In addition, a number of unanticipated and often surprising new data was generated, resulting in the investigation of entirely new topics. The whole research process proved highly productive and might serve as a blueprint for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

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## СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

<b>Предисловие</b> ( <i>В.И. Молодин, С. Хансен</i> ) .....	5
<b>Бородовский А.П.</b> Комплексное изучение костяных наконечников стрел Западной Сибири эпохи палеометалла .....	6
<b>Бужилова А.П.</b> Использование красной охры в погребениях верхнего палеолита: реконструкция в контексте антропологических данных .....	15
<b>Ван Вэй.</b> Центр по применению научно-технических методов в археологии в составе института археологии АОН КНР и нынешнее состояние исследований в данной области в Китае ...	22
<b>Выборнов А.В., Скобелев С.Г.</b> Проблемы междисциплинарных исследований позднесредневековых археологических памятников Среднего Енисея .....	25
<b>Деревянко А.П., Шуньков М.В.</b> К проблеме формирования человека современного физического типа .....	31
<b>Додэ З.В.</b> Монгольские золотые ткани: археологические находки и письменные источники .....	42
<b>Дэвлет Е.Г., Пахунов А.С., Житенев В.С., Зоткина Л.В., Грешников Э.А.</b> Вопросы междисциплинарных исследований технологических особенностей и состояния сохранности объектов изобразительной деятельности .....	44
<b>Дядьков П.Г., Позднякова О.А.</b> Итоги и перспективы применения метода магнитометрии для изучения археологических памятников Западной Сибири .....	60
<b>Кан Ин Ук, Син Дон Хун.</b> Мультидисциплинарное изучение мумий из средневековых памятников Кореи .....	69
<b>Карпухин А.А., Мацковский В.В., Соловьева Л.Н.</b> Дендрохронология средневековых городов центра европейской части России: анализ количественного и хронологического распределения дендродат .....	74
<b>Книппер К.</b> Отбор проб для анализа стабильных изотопов в области археологии: информационный потенциал, стратегии и документация .....	84
<b>Комиссаров С.А., Соловьев А.И.</b> Мультидисциплинарные методы в исследовании мавзолея Цинь Шихуанди (на примере технологического изучения каменных доспехов) .....	95
<b>Корякова Л.Н., Краузе Р.</b> Междисциплинарное исследование синташтинско-петровского комплекса бронзового века в Южном Зауралье .....	105
<b>Краузе Й., Лазаридис И., Паттерсон Н., Хаак В., Миттник А., Райх Д. и Консорциум по изучению древнего генома человека.</b> Изучение древних геномов: три предковые популяции для современных европейцев .....	116
<b>Кузьминых С.В.</b> Металлообработка западносибирских культур бронзового и раннего железного веков .....	117
<b>Лебедева Е.Ю., Антипина Е.Е.</b> Неоднозначность интерпретации археобиологической информации (по материалам городищ железного века) .....	125
<b>Марченко Ж.В., Молодин В.И.</b> Погребальные комплексы эпохи бронзы могильника Тартас-1, их стратиграфическая позиция и радиоуглеродное датирование .....	138
<b>Минасян Р.С.</b> Трасология – основной метод изучения древней металлообработки .....	146
<b>Молодин В.И., Пилипенко А.С., Поздняков Д.В.</b> Этногенетические реконструкции популяций юга Западной Сибири в голоцене (неолит – позднее Средневековье). Комплексный подход .....	148

<b>Мыльников Л.Н., Дураков И.А., Мыльников В.П., Бородовский А.П.</b> Междисциплинарное изучение древних производств .....	169
<b>Наглер А.</b> Курганы Евразии – новый взгляд на памятники и новые задачи их исследования .....	192
<b>Парцингер Г., Гасс А., Фассбиндер Й.</b> Археолого-геофизические исследования могильников ..... раннего железного века на территории Казахстана и Северного Кавказа .....	216
<b>Пихлер С., Рёдер Б., Шпихтиг Н., Брэнниманн Д., Книппер К., Кун М., Ренцель Ф., Риссанен Х., Штопп Б., Фах В., Варнберг О., Альт К., Шиблер Й., Лассау Г.</b> Исследовательский проект «Базель – газовый завод»: решение комплексных задач с помощью интеграционного подхода .....	240
<b>Пицонка Х.</b> Ранняя керамика Евразии: актуальные проблемы и методические положения .....	248
<b>Райнхольд С., Белинский А.Б., Коробов Д.С.</b> Мультидисциплинарные методы исследования доисторических поселений и зоны деятельности на поселениях позднебронзового века на территории Северного Кавказа .....	266
<b>Самашев З.</b> Комплексные методы исследования материалов из Берельских курганов .....	284
<b>Слюсаренко И.Ю., Мыглан В.С.</b> Дендрохронологический анализ погребальных конструкций из курганов хунну в горах Ноин-Ула (Северная Монголия) .....	297
<b>Тан Чун, Тан Мана Хаяси.</b> Сравнительное изучение неолитических технологий по обработке нефрита: Чертовы Ворота и другие памятники Северо-Восточной Азии .....	306
<b>Тимайер Х.</b> Археопочвоведческие исследования в Южном Зауралье .....	318
<b>Трунова В.А., Зверева В.В., Полосьмак Н.В., Кондратьев В.И.</b> Рентгеновские методы исследования археологических находок органического происхождения из ноин-улинских курганов (хунну, Монголия) .....	320
<b>Хансен С., Тодераш М., Вундерлих Ю.</b> Пиетреле – приозерное поселение эпохи неолита и халколита (5200–4250 годы до н.э.) .....	332
<b>Хойсснер К.-У.</b> Дендрохронологические исследования, проводимые на археологических памятниках Северного Кавказа и Центральной Азии .....	356
<b>Хохлова О.С., Хохлов А.А., Наглер А.О.</b> Изучение конструкции курганных сооружений методами почвоведения (на примере кургана Марфа в Ставропольском крае) .....	358
<b>Хохоровски Я., Крапец М.</b> Структура и датировка поморских промысловых поселков в южной части Шпицбергена в свете дендрохронологии .....	368
<b>Черных Е.Н., Орловская Л.Б.</b> Радиоуглеродная хронология культур степного пояса Евразии и ее сюрпризы .....	370
<b>Чикишева Т.А., Кривошапкин А.Л.</b> Комплексное исследование прижизненных трепанаций у древнего населения Южной Сибири .....	382
<b>Шлотцауер У., Журавлев Д.В., Дан А., Герке Х.-Й., Кельтербаум Д., Моммзен Х.</b> Междисциплинарные методы в ландшафтной археологии и другие археометрические исследования на примере греческой колонизации Северного Причерноморья .....	392
<b>Эпов М.И., Молодин В.И., Балков Е.В., Дядьков П.Г., Фирсов А.П., Злыгостев И.Н., Вайсман П.А., Евменов Н.Д., Егоров В.Е., Карин Ю.Г., Колесов А.С., Кулешов Д.А., Манштейн А.К., Манштейн Ю.А., Позднякова О.А., Савлук А.В., Селезнев Д.С., Фадеев Д.И., Цибизов Л.В., Шапаренко И.О., Шеремет А.С.</b> Археогеофизические исследования в СО РАН, 2013–2015 годы .....	405
<b>Яблонский Л.Т.</b> Палеозоологические свидетельства ритуальной охоты у ранних сарматов Южного Приуралья .....	414
<b>Список сокращений</b> .....	424
<b>Фотографии</b> .....	425

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## CONTENTS

<b>Preface (V.I. Molodin, S. Hansen)</b> .....	5
<b>A.P. Borodovsky.</b> Integrated Study of the Paleometal Era Bone Arrowheads from Western Siberia .....	6
<b>A.P. Buzhilova.</b> Red Ochre in Burials of the Upper Paleolithic: Reconstruction in the Context of Anthropological Data .....	15
<b>Wang Wei.</b> The Centre for Scientific Archaeology in the Structure of Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Now-Days' Situation in this Field of Investigations in China .....	22
<b>A.V. Vybornov, S.G. Skobelev.</b> Interdisciplinary Research Problems of Late Medieval Archaeological Monuments of the Middle Yenisei .....	25
<b>A.P. Derevianko, M.V. Shunkov.</b> On Evolvement of Humans of the Modern Physical Type .....	31
<b>Z.V. Dode.</b> Mongolian Golden Fabrics: Archaeological Findings and Written Sources .....	42
<b>E.G. Devlet, A.S. Pakhunov, V.S. Zhitenev, L.V. Zotkina, E.A. Greshnikov.</b> Problems of Interdisciplinary Studies of the Technology Prehistoric Art and State of Preservations .....	44
<b>P.G. Dyadkov, O.A. Pozdnyakova.</b> Results and Prospects of Application of the Magnetometry Method for Investigating Archaeological Sites in Western Siberia .....	60
<b>Kang In Uk, Shin Dong Hoon.</b> Multidisciplinary Studies on The Medieval Mummies of Joseon Dynasty, Korea .....	69
<b>A.A. Karpukhin, V.V. Matskovsky, L.N. Solovieva.</b> Dendrochronology of the Medieval City Center of European Russia: Analysis of Quantitative and Chronological Distribution of Dated Wood-Samples .....	74
<b>C. Knipper.</b> Sampling for Stable Isotope Analyses in Archaeology: Information Potential, Strategies, and Documentation .....	84
<b>S.A. Komissarov, A.I. Soloviev.</b> Multi-Diciplinary Methods in Investigations of Qin Shihuangdi's Mausoleum (by Example of Technological Studies of Stone Armour) .....	95
<b>L.N. Koryakova, R. Krause.</b> Multidisciplinary Research in the Fortified Settlements of the Sintashta-Petrovka Cultural Complex (Bronze Age) in the Southerntans-Urals .....	105
<b>J. Krause, I. Lazaridis, N. Patterson, W. Haak, A. Mittnik, D. Reich and the Ancient Human Genomes Consortium.</b> Ancient Human Genomes Suggest Three Ancestral Populations for Present-Day Europeans .....	115
<b>S.V. Kuzminykh.</b> Main Stages in the Metalworking Development in West Siberia During the Early Metal Period and the Early Iron Age .....	117
<b>E.Yu. Lebedeva, E.E. Antipina.</b> The Ambiguity in Interpretation of Archaeobiological Information (on Materials from Iron Age Fort-Settlements) .....	125
<b>Zh.V. Marchenko, V.I. Molodin.</b> Stratigraphy of Bronze Age Burial Complexes of Tartas-1 Cemetery and Its Radiocarbon Substantiation .....	138
<b>R.S. Minasyan.</b> Traceology As the Key Method of Studying the Ancient Metal Working .....	146
<b>V.I. Molodin, A.S. Pilipenko, D.V. Pozdnyakov.</b> Ethno-Genetic Reconstructions of Human Populations of Western Siberia in the Holocene (Neolithic – Late Medieval Period): Multidisciplinary Approach .....	148

L.N. Mylnikova, I.A. Durakov, V.P. Mylnikov, A.P. Borodovsky. Interdisciplinary Study of Ancient Productions .....	169
A. Nagler. Barrows of Eurasia – a New Look at the Monuments and New Research Challenges .....	192
H. Parzinger, A. Gass, J. Fassbinder. Archaeological and Geophysical Research on Early Iron Age Large Burial Mounds in Kazakhstan and the North-Caucasus .....	216
S. Pichler, B. Röder, N. Spichtig, D. Brönnimann, C. Knipper, M. Kühn, Ph. Rentze, H. Rissanen, B. Stopp, W. Vach, O. Warnberg, K. Alt, J. Schibler, G. Lassau. The Basel-Gasfabrik Research Project: Addressing Complex Topics by an Integrative Approach .....	240
H. Piezonka. Die Frühe Keramik Eurasiens: Aktuelle Forschungsfragen und Methodische Ansätze .....	248
S. Reinhold, A.B. Belinskij, D.S. Korobov. Multidisziplinäre Ansätze Für Prähistorische Siedlungen und Aktivitätszonen in Spätbronzezeitlichen Siedlungen im Nordkaukasus .....	266
Z. Samashev. Complex Methods of Studying Materials on Berel Kurgans .....	284
I.Yu. Slyusarenko, V.S. Myglan. Dendrochronological Analysis of Burial Structures from the Xiongnu Kurgans in the Noin Ula Mountains (Northern Mongolia) .....	297
Tang Chung, Tang Mana Hayashi. Comparative Study of Neolithic Jade Technologies: from Chertovy Vorota to Northeast Asia .....	306
H. Thiemeyer. Archäopedologische Untersuchungen in Der Südlichen Trans-Ural Region .....	318
V.A. Trunova, V.V. Zvereva, N.V. Polosmak, V.I. Kondratyev. X-Ray Investigative Methods of Artifacts of Organic Substances from Noin-Ula Mounds (Xiongnu, Mongolia) .....	320
S. Hansen, M. Toderaş, J. Wunderlich. Pietrele: Lakeside Neolithic and Chalcolithic Settlement of 5200–4250 BC .....	332
K.-U. Heußner. Dendrochronologische Untersuchungen an Archäologischen Fundstätten des Nordkaukasus und in Zentralasien .....	356
O.S. Khokhlova, A.A. Khokhlov, A.O. Nagler. Use of Soil Science Methods for Studying Kurgan Constructions (a Case-study of the Marpha Kurgan, Stavropol Krai, Russia) .....	358
J. Chochorowski, M. Krapiec. Structure and Dating of Pomor Fishingand Hunting Settlements in the Southern Part of Spitsbergen in View of Dendrochronology .....	369
E.N. Chernykh, L.B. Orlovskaya. Radiocarbon Chronology of the Eurasian Steppe Belt' Cultures and its Surprises .....	370
T.A. Chikisheva, A.L. Krivoshepa. The Comprehensive Study of Intravital Trepanations of the Ancient South Siberia's Population .....	382
<b>8</b> <b>6FKOM/KDKHU' ä XUDYON \$ ' DQ + - * HKUNH' . HOWLEDXP + 0 RP P VQ</b> Interdisziplinäre Methoden in der Landschaftsarchäologie und Andere Archäometrische Untersuchungen am Beispiel der Griechischen Kolonisation im Nordpontos .....	392
M.I. Epov, V.I. Molodin, E.V. Balkov, P.G. Dyadkov, A.P. Firsov, I.N. Zligostev, P.A. Vaysman, N.D. Evmenov, V.E. Egorov, Yu.G. Karin, A.S. Kolesov, D.A. Kuleshov, A.K. Manshtein, Y.K. Manshtein, O.A. Pozdnyakova, A.V. Savluk, D.S. Seleznev, D.I. Fadeev, L.V. Tsibizov, I.O. Shaparenko, A.S. Sheremet. Archeogeophysics in Sb Ras, 2013–2015 .....	405
<b>L.T. Yablonsky.</b> Paleozoological Evidence of Ritual Hunting in the Early Sarmatian Time in Southern Urals .....	414
List of abbreviations .....	424
Photos .....	425

Научное издание

**МУЛЬТИДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЕ  
МЕТОДЫ В АРХЕОЛОГИИ:  
НОВЕЙШИЕ ИТОГИ  
И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ**

**Материалы международного симпозиума  
«Мультидисциплинарные методы в археологии:  
новейшие итоги и перспективы»  
(22–26 июня 2015 г., г. Новосибирск)**

Корректоры *Е.В. Кузьминых, В.И. Смирнова, А.В. Коненко*  
Технический редактор *Т.А. Клименкова*  
Дизайнер *А.А. Фурсенко*  
Дизайн обложки *Е.В. Молодин*

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Подписано в печать 12.12.2016 г. Формат 60×84/8.  
Усл.-печ. л. 52,08. Уч.-изд. л. 46,2. Тираж 300 экз. Заказ № 398.

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Издательство ИАЭТ СО РАН  
пр. Академика Лаврентьева, 17, 630090, Новосибирск  
<http://www.archaeology.nsc.ru>