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A Jubilee Volume: About Archaeology and Interdisciplinarity – in the Beginning and Today

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Our journal has crossed the threshold of its first decade. We are still a young journal, founded to make a better link between the mainstream of artefactual archaeology and the natural sciences. On the one hand, ten years in the history of a scientific magazine does not mean so much; on the other, the past decade has shown that the journal can gain approval from an international audience. However, let me ask a question. What did interdisciplinarity mean ten years ago – and what does it mean today? In this regard, just what is actually going on in archaeology today? To demonstrate the recent discourse on this topic is definitely a task for an extensive study, and the question certainly cannot be answered in a short editorial. However, we should at least try to make a simple comparison between the situation at the beginning of this journal and the one now.

We present here some of the differences by comparing three photos: all three of which have been used as heading figures on our web page. The first photo (Figure 1) is from 2011, when we had just started our public activity; it shows palynologist Radka Kozáková in the laboratory investigating her pollen cores. Palynology itself is an old discipline situated between geology, palaeoecology and botany. The data from pollen analysis can be used as a framework for the past human environment, but palynology was regarded as work quite external to the job of archaeologists. It was simply outside of archaeology. With this picture, we demonstrated a strong interest about the past environment – as well as that Radka Kozáková was a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Science in Prague – as she still is today, a palynologist with many respectful publications.

What has moved on in the relationship between palynology and archaeology in the past ten years? Nowadays, at some European universities, dissertations have begun to be created directly in archaeological departments. What is

Figure 1. Cover photo for the IANSA web page in 2011. Palynologist Radka Kozáková investigates her pollen cores. Photo Petr Pokorný.
more, the palynological record in anthropic sediments is increasingly being used as a parallel proxy record, which – unlike that of the more or less random artefactual structures – is a continuous one. It is able to capture human settlement activity even in those periods of the past where artefacts are silent. A specialization called archaeological palynology is slowly emerging.

The second picture from 2014 (Figure 2) is showing a pair of young anthropologists, Veronika Lungová and Jiří Šneberger, studying human skeletal remains at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic. The photo also featured on the journal’s website www.iansa.eu. The activity represents the scientific concept of IANSA from its very beginning, when we, the leaders of the journal – mainly archaeologists – took due note of the then common message that we integrate the discipline of anthropology. The young researchers in the picture are doing basic human skeletal morphometry and other observations as a fundamental method of physical anthropology. Such an approach has been known for more than a century and will definitely still be being used in the centuries to come. We wanted to demonstrate that our archaeological journal is one which emphasizes physical anthropology in first place alongside geoarchaeology, archaeobotany and archaeozoology. Perhaps this can be said even better: human bioarchaeology is a part of common archaeology.

This concept has not been an easy one to adopt and is not so easy even today. In contrast to the Anglo-American concept, the Central European archaeological tradition still separates archaeology from anthropology. This is a consequence of European nationalism, which substantially influenced archaeology at the beginning of the last century and built a discipline diffused with a strong ethnic signature. Anthropological archaeology, as it was constructed in the United States, was almost completely omitted. The meaning of this second picture was clear more than ten years ago; it was part of our effort to welcome back archaeological anthropology into archaeology together – along with such other subdisciplines as archaeobotany and archaeozoology. We regarded them as integral parts of archaeology, and not just as a service from the natural sciences.

The third picture (Figure 3) is a little bit more spectacular and mysterious. It was taken by the young etnoarchaeologist Tereza Majerovičová in Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal, in 2019, during an expedition organised by archaeologists and natural scientists from the University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice. The research in southeast Senegal is concentrated on abandoned traditional villages, relocated after the park was established in the second half of the last century. Remains of the abandoned villages are still visible today under the park’s lush vegetation. The aim of the project has been to document these villages and study their archaeologisation over time in the local environment of woody savannah. The grass in the picture, *Ctenium elegans*, is called *ndyo* in the local Mandinka language, and plant populations still cover some areas of the abandoned fields. This grass is used in the local culture for hut roof covering and basket making.

What is the message of this picture about contemporary interdisciplinarity in archaeology? It is considerable, even though the meaning is metaphorically hidden. Archaeobotany offers us a number of interpretations. It is a view of the abandoned field, where some plants used in their culture persisted in large amounts. The topic of past arable land is a topic in Africa as well as in central Europe, but also in many other locations across the world. A lot of bioarchaeologists and environmental archaeologists are currently studying such common elements in all agricultural landscapes. Living plants in many parts of the world testify to the past states of those landscapes: they are living witnesses of the past. Finally, the interesting spiral shape of the ear seemed to concentrate us metaphorically into an integral view of the landscape. Not only artefacts, but also living plants, testify to the past; the past is entangled not only in artefacts, but is
embedded among living plants, animals and humans. This integral approach is essential – and makes the difference between the interdisciplinarity of ten years ago and today.

This trait is also evident in the content of this jubilee volume. Most of the submissions deal with agricultural landscape. The first paper by Miroslav Kočić and his colleagues reports recent field research in Central Serbia where Early Neolithic occupation related to the Starčevo culture has been found by using a systematic pedestrian survey, artefact spatial analysis, and various kinds of archaeological geophysics. The following paper by Tereza Šálková and collaborators presents some very interesting results from a multidisciplinary study of late prehistoric and early medieval sunken features from South Bohemia. Radiocarbon data show that the plant macroremains are from more time periods than was documented by the artefact typology. The paper draws attention to the need to make several independent dating methods, based on artefacts and bioarchaeological findings, in order to exclude false, or very fragmentary, results. The third paper by Alžběta Danielisová and colleagues deals with archaeometry: presenting the La Tène spoked-wheel amulets in the context of their chemical composition and technology in central Europe. Results of the multiproxy chemistry and isotope study of these artefacts are discussed with regard to their provenance. The interesting study presented by Radoslaw Grabowski brings some extraordinary and important data from the Iron Age in northern Europe. His analysis of longhouses is based on charred botanical material, spatially distributed in the house plans. The paper clearly demonstrates the use of archaeobotanical data to solve a purely archaeological question.

Medieval houses and their floors are the focus of a geoarchaeological study presented by Lenka Lisá and her collaborators. Two groups of buildings excavated in Brno, Czech Republic, in superposition within different parts of a single plot, have revealed that it is possible to track different maintenance practices through time and space. The study from Peťuša Castle, written by Matěj Styk and collaborators from Slovakia, comprises several methods that were used to document the castle hill, archaeological contexts and artefacts. The aim of the paper is to reference the possibilities of 3D visualization, which provides not only for an interesting presentation of archaeological results to the general public, but also serves the work of the archaeologists themselves.

Agrarian landscape transformation of an early modern village hinterland in the Czech part of Silesia is the focus of the paper by Ivana Šitnerová and her team. They use a set of archaeological and environmental methods to enable some exact dating of the field system from the 17th century. Such a transformation was typical for vast areas of central Europe from the high medieval period to early modern times. The agrarian hinterland of the Czech village of Eibental, in the Romanian Banat, close to the River Danube, is debated by the research team headed by Markéta Šantrůčková. They used soil geochemistry to investigate agricultural signals still present in the abandoned part of the village hinterland. The results are compared with a unique historical plan of the proposed colonization village from the 19th century. The jubilee volume is completed with a review of the book “Big Men or Chiefs? Rondel Builders of Neolithic Europe” written by Jakub Novotný, and the backstory by Lenka Lisá is about the geoarchaeological laboratory in the Institute of Geology, Czech Academy of Sciences Prague.