Preface

In March 2010, Berlin’s Freie Universität hosted an international conference on the topic “Migration in Prehistory and Early History: Stable Isotopes and Population Genetics – New Answers to Old Questions?”.

Until well into the nineties, migration was not considered in the fields of ancient studies in Central and Western Europe to be a topic worthy of research. In contrast, in other countries migration began, even before the war, to be almost a standard model for explaining cultural change. In past decades, conventional methods have permitted scholars to achieve only a limited degree of progress in the question of how archaeological cultures and innovations spread over large areas. Even now, models of diffusion and migration are juxtaposed as opposites, though more recently convergence phenomena have also been discussed.

Recent decades have seen the application of methods of analysis involving archaeometry and molecular genetics. Most prominent are approaches using stable isotopes and palaeogenetics, but also computer simulation, all of which are providing new impulses within the discussion of (pre)historical population dynamics. As a result, the state of migration research has undergone rapid change. Thus, we decided to invite to Berlin groups whose research is focussed on migration in prehistoric and early historic times, to create an opportunity to exchange experiences and insights about methodological approaches, research results and prospects for future research. No chronological or geographical restrictions were placed on the invitation, which made it possible to have scholars from widely diverse scientific disciplines comparatively present their approaches, findings and interpretations to an audience far broader than the circles of the individual disciplines.

A total of 32 papers and 6 posters were presented, addressing specific historical questions concerning population dynamics and migration in the light of cutting edge bio-archaeological research. The conference programme was divided into three larger thematic sections: 1) isotope analysis, 2) population genetics and 3) modelling and computer simulation. The same structure has been adopted for this volume.

Over the course of the conference, one aspect that emerged clearly was that archaeologists, modelers, population geneticists and analysts share a common interest in history, and above all the history of the human population (and their domesticated animals). The participants also learned, though, that despite all that they have in common in terms of ideas, by and large the limits of the capacity for mutual understanding have been reached. The high degree of specialization in the separate disciplines and the complexity of modern archaeological research have demolished the utopia of an untroubled transdisciplinary approach – so much for the lessons from this conference. However, the farther the disciplines grow apart from one another in their quest for new insights, the more essential it becomes that rigorous and regular dialogues take place among them – this too was something upon which everyone at the conference could agree. The aim of this volume is to conduct that dialogue at a high level for the purpose of a reconstruction of (pre)historic population history.

The large audience and the extraordinary quality both of the papers presented and of the subsequent discussion bore witness to the great interest in the field of (pre)historical migration research that currently exists. This ultimately led to the decision to publish in printed form as many of the papers presented as possible. In deciding upon the title of this volume, Population Dynamics in Prehistory and Early History. New Approaches Using Stable Isotopes and Genetics, the editors have attempted to do justice to the broad spectrum of research on mobility and migration presented within it.
The monograph series of the Excellence Cluster TOPOI permits this volume to be released in book format and, at the same time, in an electronic edition. The manuscripts included were subjected to a peer-review process. The authors of the more than 20 papers generously took on the chore of preparing the manuscripts themselves, thereby making this important publication possible. We owe great thanks to Gisela Grupe and T. Douglas Price for content-related support in the preparation of these conference proceedings. The conference itself was generously supported by the Excellence Initiative 264 TOPOI and organized by the research group A II of the excellence cluster. That group, under the title “Spatial effects of technological innovations and changing ways of life”, examines large-scale movements and migrations of populations in the North Pontic and Central Asian region in prehistoric times. At the focus in their activities is the parallel application of stable isotope analysis and population genetic analyses on human skeletal material.

Alison Borrowman proof read the English-language texts for linguistic errors. To her as well, we owe our thanks.

Editorial work was performed by Elke Kaiser with assistance from Josephine Schoeneberg and Solveig Semjank.

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