

13-16 June, 2016

**Saint Petersburg
VNIIOkeangeologia**

Joint International Conference MINERALS OF THE OCEAN-8 & DEEP-SEA MINERALS AND MINING-5

ABSTRACTS



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RWTH-AACHEN UNIVERSITY
BERLIN FREE UNIVERSITY**

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CONTENTS

EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF HYDRATE FORMATION IN THE WATER-DECANE TWO-LAYER SYSTEM <i>Adamova T., Stoporev A., Manakov A.</i>	7
THE ASHADZE ULTRAMAFIC HOSTED SEA-FLOOR SULFIDE DEPOSITS (MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE, 12°58'N): MINERALOGY OF ORES AND CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF SULFIDES OF TWO SULFIDE EDIFICES TYPES <i>Amplieva E. E., Koval'chuk E. V.</i>	8
MORPHOSTRUCTURAL AND GEODYNAMIC FEATURES OF HYDROTHERMAL ORE GENESIS IN THE ACTIVATED AXIAL ZONES OF THE MID-OCEANIC RIDGES OF THE OCEAN <i>Andreev S. I., Babaeva S. F., Petukhov S. I., Romanova N. L., Kazakova V. E., Kuznetsov T. V.</i>	12
ASSOCIATED EXTRACTION OF MINOR RARE AND TRACE ELEMENTS AS A BASIS OF MULTI-STAGE DPSP PROCESSING <i>Anufrieva S. I., Lugovskaya I. G., Babaeva S. F., Andreev S. I.</i>	15
SYSTEM STUDY OF SEA FLOOR MASSIVE SULFIDES OF THE RUSSIAN EXPLORATION AREA WITHIN THE MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE <i>Babaeva S. F., Andreev S. I., Sukhanova A. A., Kazakova V. E., Firstova A. V.</i>	21
REE IN THE MINERAL MATERIAL OF HYDROTHERMAL VENT FIELDS: FROM BLACK SMOKER FLUIDS TO SEDIMENTS <i>Babaeva S. F., Sukhanova A. A., Popova E. A.</i>	23
GEOCHEMISTRY OF FE-MN CRUSTS FROM THE BERING SEA <i>Baturin G. N.</i>	27
PHASE DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTS IN FERROMANGANESE NODULES FROM THE KARA SEA <i>Baturin G. N., Dubinchuk V. T.</i>	32
FE-MN CRUSTS FROM THE MENDELEEV RIZE <i>Baturin G. N., Dubinchuk V. T., Ivanov G. I., Siraev A. I.</i>	37
FE-MN NODULES FROM THE EAST-SIBERIAN SEA NEAR BENNETT ISLAND <i>Baturin G. N., Dubinchuk V. T., Ovsianikov A. A., Rashidov A. V.</i>	41
HYDROTHERMAL FROM THE GUAYMAS FIELD (CALIFORNIA BAY) <i>Baturin G. N., Matveenko V. V., Dara O. M.</i>	46
GEOCHEMISTRY OF HYDROTHERMAL TUBE FROM THE GUAYMAS FIELD (GULF OF CALIFORNIA) <i>Baturin G. N., Matveenko V. V., Dara O. M., Murdmaa I. O.</i>	51
INFLUENCE OF NITROGEN ON THE STRUCTURE, GUEST DISTRIBUTION AND HYDRATE FORMATION CONDITIONS OF THE MIXED CO ₂ -N ₂ AND CO ₂ -CH ₄ -N ₂ GAS HYDRATES <i>Belosludov V. R., Subbotin O. S., Bozhko Yu. Yu., Zhdanov R. K., Gets K. V.</i>	55
THE METALLIFEROUS FLUID OF HYDROTHERMAL SULFIDE SYSTEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OCEANIC CORE COMPLEX OF THE MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE (LA-ICP-MS AND FLUID INCLUSIONS) <i>Bortnikov N. S., Amplieva E. E., Simonov V. A., Bel'tenev V. E., Borovikov A. A., Kotlyarov A. V., Bryanskiy N. V.</i>	56
GAS HYDRATE INVESTIGATION IN TAIWAN: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS <i>Char-Shine Liu, Andrew Lin, Saulwood Lin, Tsanyao Yang, Shu-Kun Hsu, Yunshuen Wang and the Taiwan Gas Hydrate Investigation Team</i>	61

THE METHOD OF PRODUCING GAS HYDRATE USING THE EXPLOSIVE BOILING OF A JET OF LIQUID NITROGEN IN THE VOLUME OF WATER WITH BUBBLES OF FREON 134A <i>Chernov A. A., Meleshkin A. V., Mezentsev I. V., Elistratov D. S., Mezentseva N. N., Pilnik A. A.</i>	63
SUBSEA TESTS OF WALKING UNIT MAK-1 <i>Chernyshev V. V., Gavrilov An. E., Arykantsev V. V.</i>	66
FEATURES PYRRHOTITE MINERALIZATION HYDROTHERMAL STRUCTURES OVERLAIN BY SEDIMENTS (GUAYMAS BASIN IN THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA) <i>Dara O. M., Lein A. Yu.</i>	71
DEEP SEA MORPHOLITHODYNAMICS ON HYDROTHERMAL ORE FIELDS IN THE RIFT ZONE OF THE MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE <i>Egorov I. V., Kell D. L.</i>	74
FEATURES OF THE HYDROTHERMAL SULFIDE ORES FROM CLUSTER "POBEDA" (17°07'—17°08'N OF MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE) <i>Gablina I. F., Dobretsova I. G., Beltenev V. E., Maksimov F. E., Kuznetsov V. Yu., Dara O. M.</i>	78
COMPLEX STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF FERROMANGANESE ORES OF THE OCEAN; CONFIDENCE ESTIMATION OF INFERRED RESOURCES AND RESOURCE BASE CALCULATION <i>Goleva R. V.</i>	82
POSSIBILITY OF INCIDENTAL RARE-EARTH METALS EXTRACTION FROM SOLID REFUSE OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL PROCESSING OF THE MAGELLANIC MOUNTAINS CRUSTS <i>Goleva R. V., Lugovskaya I. G., Melnikov M. E.</i>	84
HYDRATE FORMATION IN THE SYSTEM "PARAFFIN DEPOSIT + WATER" <i>Ivanova I. K., Semenov M. E., Koryakina V. V.</i>	88
HYDROTHERMAL MINERALIZATION OF PB-ZN IN THE WESTERN TA25 CALDERA, TONGA ARC <i>Jai-Woon Moon, Sang Joon Pak, Sang-Hoon Choi, Hyun-Sub Kim, Sun Ki Choi.</i>	93
INFLUENCE OF THE STRATUM WATER MINERALIZATION ON THE NATURAL GAS HYDRATES DISSOCIATION <i>Kalacheva L. P., Fedorova A. F.</i>	94
FERROMANGANESE DEPOSITS FROM THE CHUKCHI SEA: MINERALOGY, GEOCHEMISTRY, AND GENESIS <i>Kolesnik A. N., Kolesnik O. N.</i>	97
MICROPARTICLES OF BASE AND NOBLE METALS IN THE VOLCANIC ROCKS FROM THE SEA OF JAPAN: NEW RESULTS (ON THE SOURCE OF METALS IN FERROMANGANESE CRUSTS) <i>Kolesnik O. N., S'edin V. T.</i>	100
COMPARATIFE ANALYSIS OF ZIRCONS IN THE IGNEOUS ROCKS OF THE CENTRAL ATLANTIC AND THE ARCTIC OCEAN BY ISOTOPE GEOCHRONOLOGICAL DATA <i>Kremenetskiy A. A., Shulyatin O. G., Skolotnev S. G., Belousova E. A.</i>	103
NEW DATA OF HYDRATE PRESENCE ON THE CONTINENTAL SLOPE NORTH-EAST OF THE BLACK SEA (ACCORDING TO GEOACOUSTIC AND GAS GEOCHEMICAL DATA) <i>Kruglyakova R., Shevtsova N.</i>	107
THE FIRST DISCOVERY OF AUTHIGENIC RHODOCHROSITE FROM THE GAS-HYDRATE-BEARING MUD VOLCANO IN LAKE BAIKAL <i>Krylov A. A., Khlystov O. M., Minami H., Hachikubo A., Krzhizhanovskaya M. G., Kalmychkov G. V., Kuznetsov A. B., Logvina E. A., Muzafarova L. E., Atanyazov R.</i>	112

GAS MIGRATION PATHWAYS AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE BOTTOM SEDIMENTS OF LAKE BAIKAL AS OBSERVED ON X-RAY TOMOGRAPHY IMAGERY <i>Kudaev A. A., Korost D. V., Akhmanov G. G., Khlystov O. M. and Class@Baikal Team</i>	114
SOME RESULTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE STUDIES IN THE PART OF THE EXPLORATION AREA OF YUZHMOREGEOLOGIYA (RUSSIAN FEDERATION) <i>Lygina T., Kacidi I., Melnik V.</i>	117
SURFACE AND SUBSURFACE EXPRESSION OF COLD SEEPS IN GAS HYDRATE POTENTIAL AREA WITHIN PHU KHANH, NAM CON SON, AND TU CHINH-VUNG MAY BASINS OFFSHORE VIETNAM <i>Matveeva T., Portnov A., Vanshtein B., Semenov P., Vu Troung Son</i>	121
ENRICHMENT OF COVELLITE FROM THE SEMENOV-2 HYDROTHERMAL FIELD (13°31.13' N, MAR) IN TRACE ELEMENTS: INFLUENCE OF SEAWATER <i>Melekestseva I. Yu., Maslennikov V. V., Nimis Paolo, Maslennikova S. P., Danyushevsky L., Large Ross</i>	124
FEATURES OF EARLY STAGES OF FERROMANGANESE ORE GENESIS AT THE MAGELLAN SEAMOUNTS AS A RESULT OF THE STUDY OF RELIC CRUST LAYERS <i>Melnikov M. Ye., Pletnev S. P., Sedysheva T. E., Anokhin V. M.</i>	129
SPECIFICITY OF THE ORGANIC MATTER DISTRIBUTION IN BOTTOM SEDIMENTS OF THE MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE AS A RESULT OF HYDROTHERMAL ACTIVITY <i>Morgunova I. P., Petrova V. I., Litvinenko I. V., Kursheva A. V., Cherkashev G. A., Narkevsky E. V.</i>	133
LABORATORY FACILITIES FOR STUDYING PHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF HYDRATE-BEARING SAMPLES <i>Permyakov M. E., Duchkov A. D., Manakov A. Yu., Duchkov A. A., Golikov N. A., Drobchik A. N., Manchenko N. A.</i>	137
ON CALCULATING THE INFERRED RESOURCES OF HYDROTHERMAL FIELDS OF SEAFLOOR MASSIVE SULFIDE (SMS) <i>Petukhov S., Kolchina N., Popova E., Seleznev A.</i>	142
ORIGIN AND COMPOSITION OF GAS HYDRATE-BOUND GAS IN DIFFERENT FLUID DISCHARGE AREAS <i>Ponomarenko E. P., Matveeva T. V., Semenova A. A.</i>	146
RARE EARTH ELEMENTS IN ORE SEDIMENTS, CRUSTS AND SULFIDES FROM THE HYDROTHERMAL FIELDS ASHADZE 1 AND ASHADZE 2 <i>Popova E. A.</i>	149
BUILDING SAND AND SANDY-GRAVEL MIXTURES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GULF OF FINLAND (HISTORY PRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS OF MINERAL RESOURCES BASE) <i>Rybalko A. E., Korneev O. Yu.</i>	152
MORPHOTECTONIC AND HYDROTHERMAL ACTIVITY OF CENTRAL INDIAN RIDGE <i>Sang Joon Pak, Jai-Woon Moon, Hyun-Sub Kim, Sang-Hoon Choi, Sun Ki Choi</i>	156
INFLUENCE OF THE BOTTOM WATERS ON LOCAL VARIABILITY OF FERROMANGANESE CRUST ORE PARAMETERS - GOVOROV GUYOT, MAGELLAN SEAMOUNTS, THE PACIFIC OCEAN — CASE STUDY <i>Sedysheva T. Ye., Melnikov M. Ye., Puzankov K. L.</i>	157
STUDY OF DUAL GAS HYDRATE INHIBITORS <i>Semenov A. P., Medvedev V. I., Gushchin P. A., Yakushev V. S., Vinokurov V. A.</i>	161
GAS-GEOCHEMICAL FEATURES OF SEDIMENTS OF THE GULF OF TONKIN (BACBO, SOUTH CHINA SEA) <i>Shakirov R. B., Sorochinskaja A. V., Syrbu N. S., Obzhistrov A. I.</i>	165

LONG ENDURANCE POWER SYSTEM FOR DEEP-SEA AUV BASED ON THERMAL STORAGE AND EXTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE <i>Smirnov D., Dvorcov V., Saychenko A., Kukolev M.</i>	169
INFLUENCE OF PHASE BOUNDARIES ON NUCLEATION AND GROWTH OF METHANE HYDRATE PARTICLES IN WATER-IN-OIL EMULSIONS <i>Stoporev A. S., Manakov A. Yu., Kosyakov V. I., Shestakov V. A., Altunina L. K., Strelets L. A.</i>	173
AQUEOUS SPECIES OF ORE METALS IN HYDROTHERMAL SOLUTIONS ACCORDING TO THERMODYNAMIC CALCULATIONS <i>Sudarikov S. M., Zmievsii M. V.</i>	177
ON THE HYDROTHERMAL NATURE OF OPTICAL ANOMALIES ON THE MAR ACCORDING TO THE LAST CRUISES OF RV "PROFESSOR LOGACHEV" <i>Sudarikov S. M., Narkevsky E. V.</i>	180
ANALYSIS OF EVOLUTION OF GAS HYDRATE ACCUMULATION IN VISINITY OF SUBMARINE MUD VOLCANOES <i>Suetnova E. I., Zhostkov R. A.</i>	184
DISTRIBUTION PATTERN OF POTENTIAL GAS HYDRATE ACCUMULATIONS ON OFFSHORE EXTENSION OF THE TIMAN-PECHORA PROVINCE <i>Vakhnin M. G.</i>	185
GAS HYDRATES AND PROCESSES OF DEEP DEGASSING (GEOCHEMICAL AND ISOTOPIC-GEOCHEMICAL ASPECTS) <i>Valyaev B. M., Dremine I. S., Chudetsky M. Y.</i>	188
MULTI-PURPOSE SUPPORT VESSEL OPERATING A SUBSEA CRAWLER: AN OPERATOR'S EXPERIENCE <i>Verichev S., Broda B.</i>	190
PIONEERING SPIRIT: DREAM WITH A HEART OF STEEL <i>Verichev S., Broda B.</i>	200
GEOCHEMISTRY OF BASALT AND GABBRO-PERIDOTITE COMPLEX OBTAINED DURING 37 CRUISE OF "PROFESSOR LOGACHEV" <i>Vokueva O.</i>	208
HYDROTHERMAL ALTERATION AND SULFIDE MINERALIZATION OF SILICIC VOLCANOGENIC ROCKS FROM IHEYA NORTH KNOLL, MIDDLE OKINAWA TROUGH <i>Yamasaki T.</i>	211
MODEL OF CCZ GEOLOGICAL-GEOMORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE AND NODULES POTENTIAL FORMATION <i>Yubko V. M.</i>	213
GEOLOGICAL AND GEOPHYSICAL STUDIES OF THE ROLE OF ENDOGENOUS COMPONENT IN THE FORMATION OF HYDROCARBONS IN THE CONTINENT-OCEAN TRANSITION ZONE OF SPITSBERGEN — BARENTS CONTINENTAL MARGIN <i>Zakharenko V. S., Shlykova V. A., Radchenko M. S.</i>	217

GAS MIGRATION PATHWAYS AND DISTRIBUTION IN THE BOTTOM SEDIMENTS OF LAKE BAIKAL AS OBSERVED ON X-RAY TOMOGRAPHY IMAGERY

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Two International expeditions of the Class@Baikal project were organized by the Moscow State University and the Limnological Institution (Irkutsk) of Russian Academy of Sciences (LIN RAS) in 2014 and 2015 (<http://www.baikal.festivalnauki.ru/>). The R/V «G.Yu. Vereshchagin» owned by LIN RAS represented the fleet of the Floating University, a long-lasting international research and training program, which has been initiated by the Moscow State University and executed with the UNESCO support since 1991. The main educational activity of the Floating University is “Training-through-Research” (TTR). Its experience served as a solid foundation of the Class@Baikal project. In addition to its particular significance, the Class@Baikal project also has a goal to prepare a team for organization and execution of a potential, already the 19th, oceanic expedition of the parent “Training-through-Research (Floating University)” Program (<http://floatinguniversity.ru/>)

Lake Baikal is one of the best places for studying gas hydrates and features of their distribution in sediments. This is the largest and the most ancient fresh-water basin on the Earth and also the only lake where gas hydrate accumulations have been found. Natural gas hydrates and submarine fluid escape features were among the principal research topics of the Floating University since the very beginning. Thus, the investigations related to gas seepage sites on the bottom of Lake Baikal, on the one hand, are supported by some experience from the previous studies and, on the other hand, open a new, Baikalian, page in the Floating University history.

Most standard methods were applied to study samples of sediments and gases collected during the Class@Baikal cruises: detailed core description and logging; grain size analyses, microscopy and X-ray diffraction for particular intervals; gas chromatography and carbon isotope analysis for sampled gases. Besides, for the first time ever, the sediments sampled on Lake Baikal were scanned, on a massive scale, with full-core-size X-ray computer tomography machine to study their internal structure. This has led to opening some features which can be hardly seen and recognized and, thus, were missed when the cores were described visually on the deck and in laboratories. For instance, in such a way, within visually very homogeneous sediment cores one was able to identify gradual lamination, slump structures, mud volcanic breccia structures and many unusual vertical structural

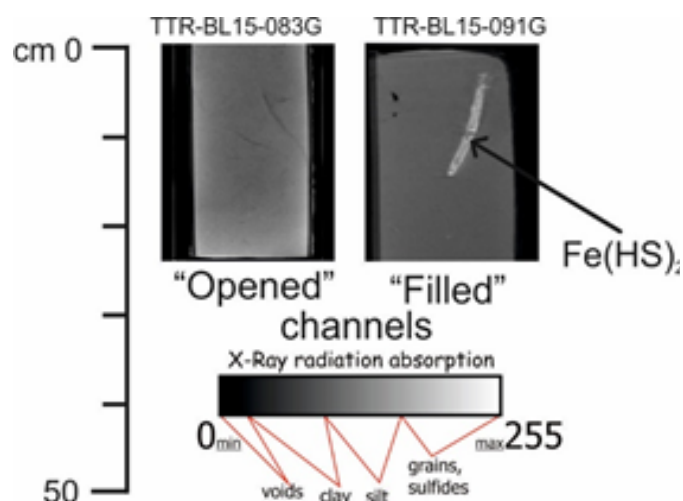


Fig. 1. Digital images of vertical structure elements determined in stations TTR-BL-083G and TTR-BL15-091G

elements. Most features observed on tomographic images are depositional in their origin and they were interpreted complementing to sedimentological analysis of the cores. The observed vertical elements (Fig. 1) cut the sedimentary structures and are clearly post-depositional in the sediment column. Their nature is very debatable and it is believed that a careful study of tomography imagery and a precise analysis of their spatial distribution over the lake deposits will bring us to better understanding of these elements.

First of all, it was found that the vertical structural elements are present only in the cores recovered from or very close to the sites of presumed gas seepages or gas hydrate accumulations, implying some genetic relationship/association between these natural phenomena. Then, two major types of the vertical elements were described: (1) "opened channels" and (2) "filled channels". Although the channels appeared to be morphologically identical or very similar, a study of granulometric and mineral composition of the infills was carried out and revealed some differences between the vertical elements. The most interesting finding is that, unlike the open channels, the filled channels contain a significant portion of ferrous sulfide (table 1). This can be an indicator of specific authigenic mineralization which the filled channels have undergone. It is possible that the channel infills were transformed due to bacteria vital activity in the bottom sediments, for example, by association of methane-oxidizing and sulphate-reducing bacteria. Such transformations imply distinctive gas concentrations in the studied sediments nowadays or in the past.

The "open channels" were identified only in the cores from the areas of active gas discharge (e.g. the Novosibirsk mud volcano, the Bolshoy mud volcano, the Elovskiy Area and the Krasniy Yar area). The active seepage is confirmed by the data of geophysical surveys and by the results of analysis of gas concentration in the sampled sediments. The channels of this type can be existing pathways of discharging gases, which migrate in the very sub-bottom sedimentary column. The "filled channels" are more abundant in the studied cores and they were observed not only in the sediments from the areas of well-defined gas seepages. However, it is

believed that the “filled channels” may be considered as a kind of fossil analogues of the channels of the type (1). Thus, they can mark the areas where gas seepage was active some time ago.

Table 1

The comparison of two types of channels: “opened” and “filled”

	Type I	Type II
Length	3—40 cm	3—40 cm
X-Ray absorption	Lower than host oozes	Higher than host sediments
Infill	Host sediments	Ferrous sulphides
Compaction	Undercompacted	Compacted (clumpy)
Number of stations with element	6	40

To conclude, X-ray tomography has been for the first time applied to the routine study of the sediment cores from Lake Baikal. Tomography imagery helps in recognition of inner structural elements which are not visible at ordinary visual description of cores. Some feature possibly related to intensive gas discharge on the bottom have been identified and primarily interpreted. A model of their formation has been proposed. Further investigation of the Baikal lake sediments with an use of X-ray tomography seems to be very perspective.