Seminar: Wednesday 13 November 2024, 15.00 – 17.00
Wallenberglaboratoriet room 334 / Zoom

Materializing the social relationships of hunter-gatherers: archaeological and geochemical analyses of 4th millennium BC 'slate ring ornaments' and ochres from Finland

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In the 4th millennium BC, an extensive exchange network operated among the hunter-fisher-gatherer societies of northeastern Europe. This network facilitated the circulation of various goods, including flint, amber, copper, and distinctively, ring-shaped ornaments crafted primarily from slates and tuffites. Although commonly referred to as "slate rings," these artifacts largely comprise ring fragments. This presentation proposes that these "slate rings" were never intended to be whole; rather, they were purposefully fragmented and used as tokens of social relationships within a gift-giving system that reinforced social bonds. Through the refitting of fragments, as well as geochemical, microscopic, and use-wear analyses, my colleagues and I demonstrate that these items were both intentionally fragmented and likely worn as personal ornaments. Our comparative analysis also reveals that many of these objects—or at least their raw materials—originated in the Lake Onega region, traveling hundreds of kilometers to modern-day Finland.

Intriguingly, our recent research indicates that ochre was also exchanged within this system. In addition to the "slate rings," I will present preliminary findings from non-invasive energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence (ED-XRF) analysis of ochre samples from burial and domestic contexts across eight early 4th millennium BC sites in Finland. Our findings reveal compositional groupings in the ochre samples that correlate with specific site clusters or archaeological contexts, suggesting a pattern of regionalized ochre procurement and, in some instances, inter-regional, two-way transport of ochre, potentially with specific, cross-regionally desired characteristics.