



Paper

Chemical composition of decayed soft tissue

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Abstract

Human bone tissue from archaeological excavations has been subjected to chemical analysis for many decades. Only in very rare cases are soft tissue preserved and even then the state of preservation often makes sampling difficult and leaves the analyses much wanting.

At the Archaeometry Group at SDU we have developed a novel method where we sample the soil surrounding the skeleton in situ. The novel sampling strategy allows revealing the exposure to mercury in various organs and, together with bone analyses, as a function of time in the life of the individual. Mercury from the decayed soft tissue has been retained in the soil which was once soft tissue and measurements of mercury on such soil samples reveals the exposure while the individual was still alive.

In this talk I will show results of mercury analyses of past soft tissues of muscles, kidney, liver, and lung of 12 individuals from 3 medieval cemeteries.

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