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Provenance Studies of Ancient Textiles, a New Method Based on the Strontium Isotopic System

In the last two decades, measurements of strontium isotopes in archaeological bone tissue/skeletons have shown to be an effective technique for the characterisation of human and animal mobility in prehistory. Recently a new method, also based on the strontium isotopic system, has been developed in order to address questions regarding the provenance of ancient textiles. Presently, this method is being applied to Danish Iron Age garments, which represent one of the best preserved prehistoric textile collections from European prehistory. Moreover, the method is being further developed to remove possible dyestuffs, as these could act as potential contaminants to the primary nutritional wool fiber's strontium isotopic signature. Furthermore the growing interest in the study of ancient textiles and their potential to elucidate not only historic and prehistoric textile technology, but also socio-economic and even religious purposes, makes this method an important new tool within archaeology. This paper aims at delineating the present potential of the novel method as well as presenting its limitations.

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