

Postdoctoral positions (2)

Applications are invited for 2 post-doctoral positions in social anthropology, to be based at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo. The positions will be part of the project “Amber Worlds: A Geological Anthropology for the Anthropocene (AMBER)” led by Associate Professor Alessandro Ripa, and funded by the European Research Council. The contracts will commence in spring 2024, run for 3-to-4 years (see below), and the location of employment is Oslo, Norway.

The project

Amber is a fossil resin secreted by plants between 300 and 16 million years ago, mostly during phases of climate breakdown and ecological crises. Today, geologists and palaeontologists believe that the study of amber specimens can help us answering key questions about the planet’s climatic history, and understanding how and why species adapted, or failed to adapt, during previous phases of mass extinction. Amber is also a well-known and sought-after organic gemstone, fuelling violent mining economies from Myanmar to Russia, Ukraine, and Mexico, and constitutes a global market increasingly driven by Chinese demand. Amber thus offers a privileged entry point to interrogate the current moment characterised by growing extractivism, trade, environmental crises, and conflict. And it is a compelling lens through which we can address some of the key empirical and theoretical challenges posed by the Anthropocene.

The AMBER project, funded for 5 years by an ERC Starting Grant, builds on recent literature (variously referred to as the “vertical” or “geological” turn) arguing that anthropological engagements with the nonhuman must pay closer ethnographic attention to a study of the geological, and to how scientific knowledge production is tangled up with broader socioeconomic processes of resource exploitation and circulation. As a violently extracted, organic gemstone with great scientific value for the (extinct) lifeforms it often contains, amber offers a unique ethnographic entry point to study such dynamics and the relations between them. This project’s main objective is to explore the nexus of extraction, exchanges, and extinctions through the global entanglements of amber and thus lay the groundwork for a geological anthropology for the Anthropocene that moves beyond the divisions between human and nonhuman, life and nonlife, and the biological and the geological. In doing so, AMBER will contribute a more effective toolbox to both the study and the communication of current planetary crises.

The position

The successful applicant will form part of a larger research environment comprising at least 4 researchers. Each researcher will carry out fieldwork and analyse material collected in (or near) one geographical area of amber extraction, commerce, and/or scientific research. In each location, amber should offer a further lens to investigate broader questions related to 1) processes of circulation and exchange; 2) extractivism and the role of geological knowledge in processes of capitalist accumulation; and 3) scientific knowledge production. Ultimately, the applicant’s project will contribute, in its own way, to the project’s overall questions, namely:

- How can we merge in a common frame of analysis the human, the nonhuman, and the geological?
- What role do geological and paleontological knowledge and experts play in shaping extractive economies?
- How can anthropological methods and writing address and include geological processes?
- How can we think (and write) beyond the division of geos and bios?

The successful applicant will independently design and pursue their own research project (a 4-page research idea outline is part of the application, see below). Some examples of possible case-studies are:

- The Kachin amber mines and amber market: the Kachin case is particularly interesting for the project as it ties together issues of violent extraction, nature conservation, ethnic conflict, and global circulations, and opens up important questions over the ethics and responsibility of scientific (in this case, largely palaeontological) research.
- The amber market in China: China is the largest market for amber products, and has in recent years become a major centre for the scientific investigation of amber inclusions. Possible areas of interest include a study of specific amber markets (such as Tengchong, or the online amber market), and an investigation of paleontological and geological research in China from an anthropological perspective.
- Baltic amber: the world's largest company for the mining and processing of amber is the Kaliningrad Amber Combine, a Russian state-owned corporation. Nearby Gdansk (Poland) is a major centre of amber trade and jewellery-making. Possible lines of inquiry include an investigation of amber extraction, but also jewelry-making and global circulations in a longer historical perspective, as well as issues of legality, illegality, and labour related to the local amber industry.
- Dominican amber: mining in the Dominican Republic is largely carried out through artisanal processes. Possible studies might address the economic, social, and cultural implications of amber extraction for local communities, the role of dealers and middlemen, and how Dominican amber is branded, sold, and studies across the island and beyond.
- Additional relevant fieldsites include: north-west Ukraine (so-called Rovno amber); Chiapas in southern Mexico, where amber mines are largely owned and exploited by indigenous communities; the little-studied Bitterfeld amber, in the former German Democratic Republic, excavated in the Goitzsche coal mines now turned into recreational and conservation areas; and Lebanon, which features some of the world's oldest amber containing biological inclusions.

These represent just a few potential suitable fieldsite topics; applicants are welcome and encouraged to propose other ideas that speak to the project's core concepts.

More about the position

The appointment is a fulltime position and is made for a period of up to three years.

The successful applicant might be offered an option of up to 12 months of teaching duty (in addition to the 36 months).

Postdoctoral fellows who are appointed for a period of four years are expected to acquire basic pedagogical competency in the course of their fellowship period within the duty component of 25 %. The main purpose of the fellowship is to qualify researchers for work in higher academic positions within their disciplines.

During their appointment, the researchers will spend 6-9 months conducting ethnographic fieldwork in their preferred fieldsite. They will work closely with the other project researchers and will jointly pursue workshops, publications and other more creative forms of dissemination. Enthusiasm for group work and commitment to shared efforts, including fieldwork and outcomes, is thus a precondition for this post.

Qualification requirements

- Applicants must hold a degree equivalent to a Norwegian doctoral degree in Social Anthropology or a closely related discipline. A solid grounding in social anthropology and familiarity with neighbouring disciplines like STS, political ecology, and material culture studies would be useful.
- Applicants should have prior research experience including ethnographic fieldwork. A focus on extractivism, and/or global circulations and scientific knowledge production will be an advantage.
- Doctoral dissertation must be submitted for evaluation by the closing date. Appointment is dependent on the public defence of the doctoral thesis being approved.
- Fluent oral and written communication skills in English.

What we offer

- Salary according to “SKO 1352 Postdoctoral Fellow “, payrate NOK 543 500 - 615 800 per annum depending on qualifications
- Funds for research, travel, conference participation and dissemination, books and equipment
- A stimulating and international research environment
- A friendly and inclusive workplace allowing for a good work-life balance
- Access to [Norway’s excellent public services and welfare schemes, including generous parental leave provisions](#) and affordable and accessible childcare (including the [university’s kindergartens](#))
- Norway’s capital with its [rich cultural life and easy access to beautiful nature](#)
- Practical support for international staff moving to Norway (international staff [may also benefit from tax cuts in their first years](#))

How to apply

The application must include:

- A cover letter (statement of motivation and research interests, 1-2 pages)
- CV (including a complete list of education with grades, positions, pedagogical and administrative experience, publications and other qualifying activities)
- Research plan (maximum 4 pages) outlining how the candidate envisages completing the work to be undertaken during the course of the term of appointment.
- One writing sample (a published article or a dissertation chapter, ideally)
- list of reference persons: 2 references (name, relation to candidate, e-mail and phone number)
- copies of educational certificates (academic transcripts only).

Formal regulations

Please see the [guidelines and regulations](#) for appointments to Research Fellowships at the University of Oslo.

No one can be appointed for more than one Postdoctoral Research Fellowship period at the University of Oslo.

According to the Norwegian Freedom of Information Act (Offentleglova) information about the applicant may be included in the public applicant list, also in cases where the applicant has requested non-disclosure.

The appointment may be shortened/given a more limited scope within the framework of the applicable guidelines on account of any previous employment in academic positions.

The University of Oslo has an [agreement](#) for all employees, aiming to secure rights to research results etc.

Inclusion and diversity are a strength. The University of Oslo has a personnel policy objective of achieving a balanced gender composition. Furthermore, we want employees with diverse professional expertise, life experience and perspectives.

Contact information

Alessandro Rippa, project leader, alessandro.rippa@sai.uio.no

Hilde Spjelkavik Kveseth, Senior advisor, h.s.kveseth@sai.uio.no

Rune Flikke, Head of department, rune.flikke@sai.uio.no