



# Critical Mineral Histories

Centre for Anthropocene History  
KTH Royal Institute of Technology  
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This workshop invites scholars to discuss “critical minerals” in new and broad historical contexts. Today, critical minerals are a common shorthand for the anticipated raw materials of clean energy technologies. However, policy makers have applied the label to any mineral with an imagined supply risk deemed vital to national security or geopolitical stature – from the raw materials of batteries and magnets to fighter jets and precision guided munitions. Recent scholarship has focused on how the supply chains of decarbonization are folded into Cold War military-industrial and security frameworks – with dire consequences for frontline communities, ecosystems, and our collective futures (e.g., Riofrancos, 2025; Howe, 2023; Sanders et al., 2019; Klinger, 2018; Black, 2018). In doing so, they have underlined not just the continued influence and impact of postwar strategic planning on our contemporary political and planetary climates, but also the conceptual fluidity and contingencies of “criticality” itself.

Proceeding from this key insight, this workshop takes special interest in contributions looking beyond familiar critical mineral narratives, contexts, or source materials. Crucially, it asks: what does it mean to write critical mineral histories in the Anthropocene? If critical mineral supply chains are physical markers of the Great Acceleration – the postwar exponential growth of anthropogenic impacts on the Earth System – then they are also artifacts with historical roots in the “Long Acceleration” of capitalism and empire since 1500 (Jonsson and Brescius, 2025). Early modern and 19<sup>th</sup> century historians have illuminated not only key precedents, but also productively unsettled key vocabulary used by critical minerals scholarship – e.g., ‘economic growth,’ ‘environment,’ ‘sustainability’ – pointing to a plurality of conceptual frameworks guiding historical actors’ relationship to their material worlds (e.g., Felten and Raphael, 2023; Seijas and Murillo, 2021; Benson, 2020). By bringing together scholars working on the political economies and geopolitics of mineral resources in distinct geographies and temporalities – from the early modern to the contemporary – this workshop aims to foster surprising connections, comparative analyses, and an expanded understanding of what it means to write critical mineral histories in the Anthropocene.

**Submission Guidelines:** Interested participants should submit a proposal (200–250 words) and a short biography (approx. 150 words) by 10 January 2026 to Gustave Lester at [glester@kth.se](mailto:glester@kth.se). Applicants will be notified in late January. Costs of travel and accommodations will be covered for accepted applicants. For further questions, please contact [glester@kth.se](mailto:glester@kth.se).



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