

Call for papers: “Dynamics of Inequality in the Ancient Mediterranean” workshop
22-23 October 2026, Helsinki

The study of past inequality has gained significant new interest in recent years, generating new methodologies and building innovative theoretical frameworks. The conventional view of Greek and Roman social stratigraphy has often focused on a person's legal and family status. Although this was certainly important for ancient societies, other factors influencing the structure of social hierarchy were often crucial for movement between various social groups and for reshaping social systems into new forms. The key focus of this workshop is to examine the aspects beyond legal and family status that shaped the ancient Mediterranean world – though without neglecting those traditional factors.

Recent studies of gender, ethnicity, economics, and health have highlighted the diverse aspects that influenced ancient inequality. Ancient literature has been reinterpreted through new theoretical lenses, often drawing from the social sciences. Economic historians and archaeologists have applied modern quantitative methods, such as the Gini coefficient, to various ancient sources. Analyses of human, animal, and plant remains have produced new datasets that contribute to the study of past health. Several studies have built comparisons between different eras and regions, and have aimed to trace long-term developments in inequality that reach beyond the typical boundaries of Greco-Roman antiquity in order to better understand the modern world – and perhaps to shed light on our own problems related to inequality. All of this research has created a much richer and more nuanced picture of the ancient past.

This workshop aims to build on this growing body of work and to map more clearly the many nuances of ancient inequality. Yet it also poses a question: how can we better interpret the broader patterns of ancient societies amidst an ever-increasing surge of new information that so easily fragments our view of the past?

Themes (suggested, but not limited to):

- Health inequality
- Economic inequality and its various forms (wealth, income, etc.)
- Spatial dimensions of inequality (e.g. segregation, urban vs. rural)
- The role of pottery in studying inequality in the Ancient Mediterranean
- New methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of ancient inequality

Although the main focus of the workshop is the Ancient Mediterranean, scholars of other periods and regions are encouraged to submit proposals, especially on issues related to methodology and theory.

Keynote speakers: Miko Flohr and Anna Karligkioti.

The workshop is organized by the project Roman Urban Inequality (*Urbaani eriarvoisuus antiikin Roomassa*), funded by the Kone Foundation and based at the University of Helsinki. There is no participation fee. Unfortunately, the organizer is unable to assist with travel or accommodation arrangements or cover associated costs.

Abstracts (maximum 300 words) are invited for 20-minute papers to be delivered in English. Abstracts and any questions should be sent to samuli.simelius@helsinki.fi. The deadline for submissions is 15 February 2026.