

Theorising Networks: Relational Frameworks in Archaeology and History

HCAS, University of Helsinki, 18-19 March 2027

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Scope: Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean and their wider connections from Prehistory to Late Antiquity

This workshop builds on a previous meeting held in Helsinki in 2021,¹ which highlighted the diversity of network applications and their potential for explaining interaction and connectivity. It moves further by addressing a critical need to rethink the theoretical foundations and directions of network analysis, reshaping how the past is conceptualised and interpreted through its application to the archaeological and historical record. Over the past two decades, network thinking has become a central framework for investigating cultural interaction in the ancient world. However, its rapid adoption has often been “overly method-driven”.² This workshop addresses this gap by foregrounding the theoretical and epistemological implications of network approaches. It moves beyond treating networks as purely analytical tools and positions them instead as a framework for rethinking the ancient world as fundamentally relational: an interconnected web of people, objects, animals, places, practices, and ideas.³ In particular, the workshop seeks to:

1. Explore the implications of the “relational turn” in archaeology and history through the lens of networks
2. Re-evaluate network analysis as a conceptual framework, rather than solely as a methodological tool
3. Encourage interdisciplinary engagement across network science, archaeology, history, and related fields, and identify future research directions in the study of cultural interaction.

Please **submit a 300-word abstract to theorisingnetworks@gmail.com by 16th November 2026**. The abstract should explain how your proposed paper addresses one of the three key points outlined above. We envisage a small workshop with a maximum of fifteen speakers.

The workshop is supported by the [ANEE+](#) Interdisciplinary Research Network, with funding from the University of Helsinki’s Faculty of Humanities. Limited support for travel and accommodation in Helsinki will be provided to selected speakers who cannot cover these costs themselves. Please indicate in your email if you would like to be considered for financial support. Acceptance notifications are expected by 15th December 2026.

¹ Lahelma, A., Dawson, H., and Micalé, M.G. 2025. “Network Perspectives in the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean.” *Open Archaeology*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 20250069.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2025-0069>

² Brughmans, T. and Peeples, M.A. 2023. *Network Science in Archaeology*. Cambridge University Press, p. 264

³ Terrell, J., Golitko, M., Dawson, H., and Kissel, M. 2023. *Modeling the Past: Archaeology, History, and Dynamic Networks* (1st ed.). Berghahn Books.