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## **CfP: Bridging History, Archaeology, and Natural Sciences: New Perspectives on Identity, Mobility, and Social Organization in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages**

**Doctoral and Postdoctoral Workshop – Ljubljana, 13–14 November 2025**

Keynote speakers:

**prof. dr. Walter Pohl**, Institute for Medieval Research, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Principal Investigator of the ERC Synergy Grant project HistoGenes

**dr. Susanne Hakenbeck**, University of Cambridge

Over the past decades, early medieval studies have undergone a remarkable transformation. Historians working on the period between c. 300 and 900 increasingly collaborate not only with archaeologists and linguists, but also with researchers from paleogenomics, bioarchaeology, and the natural sciences more broadly. This growing interdisciplinarity reflects the exciting new possibilities offered by aDNA, stable isotope analyses, and bioarchaeological methods. Deeply intertwined with archaeological expertise, these approaches are shedding new light on genetic ancestry, biological kinship within and across burial communities, mobility, diet, and social differentiation in subsistence practices — precisely in a period where written sources are often scarce or biased. At the same time, advances in pathogen aDNA along with collaborations with environmental historians studying land-use changes and climate proxies, are opening new dimensions for understanding historical crises and societal resilience.

Yet while these natural-scientific approaches offer powerful tools for studying early medieval history, they also raise deep methodological and epistemological challenges. They produce new data: but no data, whether written, material, genetic, or isotopic, speaks for itself. All must be critically interpreted and contextualized to acquire historical meaning. Disciplines rooted in the humanistic tradition, particularly history and archaeology, therefore play a crucial role in shaping interpretation.

This workshop thus seeks to bring together doctoral students, postdocs, and recent PhDs from history, archaeology, bioarchaeology, paleogenomics, and related disciplines to critically explore both the potential and the limits of interdisciplinary research. Rather than simply juxtaposing different types of evidence, we aim to engage with the theoretical, methodological, and semantic differences that shape our interpretations of the past. At the same time, the growing role of bioscientific data invites us to revisit long-standing tensions between history and archaeology — especially concerning ethnicity, migration, and cultural change — from a fresh, up-to-date perspective, as new methods are making these debates more complex, not simpler. This raises important questions: How can written, material, genetic, and isotopic data be combined without falling into circular reasoning or disciplinary hierarchies? And how can we rethink key concepts — such as migration, ethnicity, and population — across disciplinary boundaries while assessing the interpretive limits of each source?

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We invite contributions that may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- The promises and pitfalls of interdisciplinary research.
- Navigating epistemological differences between humanities and natural sciences.
- Avoiding circular reasoning when combining textual, archaeological, and genetic evidence.
- Disciplinary hierarchies in interdisciplinary research.
- Semantic traps: "migration", "identity", "ethnicity", "ancestry", "population" across disciplines.
- Beyond "raw data" and superficial contextualization: the interpretive role of history and archaeology in genetic research.
- Rethinking early medieval ethnicity and the dynamics of identity formation.
- Intellectual, cultural, and political frameworks behind ethnonyms and early medieval perceptions of *gentes*.
- Kinship in early medieval societies: between social kinship, biological relatedness, legal norms, and social structures.
- Gendered power dynamics and their relation to identity and social organization.
- Archaeology of identity: new approaches to material culture, technocomplexes, and social groups, and gender.
- Migration between narrative and phenomenon: written sources, archaeological evidence, and the methodological challenges of proving mobility.
- Potential and limits of aDNA ancestry and genetic diversity research and its methods (e. g. IBD, qpAdm, PCA) for historical interpretations.
- Cultural change: between contact, migration, and acculturation models.
- Aligning mobility signals from stable isotopes (Sr/O) and aDNA with historical and archaeological narratives: potentials and limitations.
- C/N stable isotopes and social stratification: reconstructing diet and inequality.
- Pathogen aDNA and the social and cultural impact of disease and crisis.

### **Practical Information:**

The workshop will be held in person at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and will consist of 20-minute presentations followed by discussion, along with two keynote lectures and two roundtable sessions designed to foster interdisciplinary exchange. Lunch and dinner will be provided for participants. Attendees without institutional funding may apply for partial travel support. The language of the workshop will be English.

### **Abstract Submissions:**

Please send an abstract of max. 300 words to [aljaz.sekne@ff.uni-lj.si](mailto:aljaz.sekne@ff.uni-lj.si) by **6 July 2025**. Accepted participants will be notified within two weeks after the deadline.