



SHADES

Settlements, Networks, and Change in Bronze Age Western Asia

17-18 December 2026

CALL FOR PAPERS AND POSTERS

The Doctoral School in Archaeology of Sapienza University of Rome – *Curriculum Orientale* is pleased to invite submissions for SHADES: *Settlements, Networks, and Change in Bronze Age Western Asia*, an international conference dedicated to exploring the cultural, social, political, and economic transformations that shaped Western Asia during the Bronze Age.

Scheduled to take place on 17-18 December 2026, the conference will bring together scholars working across Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and comparative perspectives on the diverse trajectories of Bronze Age societies and their interactions with the built and inhabited landscape.

Thanks to the support of the American Center of Research (ACOR), the conference will also include a venue in Amman, creating an additional space for discussion and exchange that strengthens the sense of scholarly community and reinforces connections between researchers working across the region.

Conference Themes

The Bronze Age witnessed the emergence of complex coexisting societies, which inhabited the landscape in diverse ways, developed specific forms of organization and economic systems, and interacted over great distances. By adopting an archaeological, theoretical, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach, SHADES aims to explore the different ways communities occupied and shaped the landscape, how settlement systems formed and evolved, the development of regional and interregional exchange networks, and the circulation of raw materials, technologies, and ideas.

Particular attention will be devoted to the sociopolitical and ideological transformations associated with these processes, as well as to cultic, ritual, and funerary practices that shed light on local identities, community organization, and the interconnectedness of people across Western Asia.

The conference also seeks to highlight the plurality of historical trajectories that characterized Bronze Age Western Asia, emphasizing the coexistence of different social, economic, and cultural pathways rather than the inevitability of a single developmental model. The conference seeks to challenge linear and deterministic narratives of historical change, while also investigating the connections, continuities, and transformations linking different chronological phases, regions, and communities.

The five thematic sessions welcome contributions employing a wide range of scientific approaches, including material culture studies, landscape archaeology, archaeometry, GIS-based spatial analysis, architectural studies, and the investigation of funerary contexts.

As Western Asia continues to face profound political instability and humanitarian crises, SHADES seeks to strengthen scholarly dialogue across geographical and disciplinary boundaries while fostering critical reflection on the role of archaeology in contemporary society. The conference aims to create a forum for critical discussion of the production, interpretation, and dissemination of archaeological knowledge in contexts of conflict and uncertainty. Within this broader framework, a dedicated session will examine the



conservation, protection, management, and public engagement of cultural heritage, emphasizing their significance for collective memory, cultural identity, and community resilience.

SHADES is grounded in the belief that archaeological research must be collaborative, reflexive, and ethically responsible. Our collective endeavour therefore seeks to foster forms of knowledge production that move beyond extractive and colonial legacies, recognizing the central role of local scholars, institutions, and communities who study, preserve, and live alongside the archaeological landscapes of Western Asia.

Thematic Sessions

We invite papers and posters related to the following sessions:

1. Landscape, Networks and Change

The session examines Bronze Age Western Asia as a dynamic arena of human-environment interaction, where settlements, networks, and social transformations unfolded across diverse landscapes. We invite contributions that explore how communities organized and reshaped their territories through patterns of mobility, resource management, and connectivity. With an expanding array of tools - from remote sensing and geophysical survey to GIS analysis and palaeoenvironmental proxies - the field faces an increasing need to refine its interpretive frameworks. This session encourages papers and posters that critically engage with the practical challenges of data acquisition, processing, and integration, prioritizing workflow, calibration, and multi-scalar analysis to develop robust, reproducible strategies for understanding long-term societal change.

2. Public Spaces: Dynamics of Ritual and Power

Public spaces played a central role in shaping the political, social, and ideological landscapes of Bronze Age Western Asia. From palaces and administrative complexes to temples, sacred precincts, and other multifunctional buildings, these spaces, both inside and outside cities, actively constructed and negotiated authority, collective identities, and community life. This session explores how public architecture mediated the relationship between cult, power, and society, asking how it functioned not only as an expression of authority but also as a catalyst for settlement development, institutional organisation, interregional connectivity, and long-term social change. At its core lies a central research question: how do public spaces reflect and stimulate social transformation and changes in community life? Interdisciplinary approaches addressing how the built environment not only reflected authority but also actively created and sustained it are especially encouraged.

3. Imagining Trade and Exchange

Trade and exchange - in all their forms - played a central role in ancient Western Asia, yet their definition and archaeological visibility remain far from straightforward. This session invites contributions that explore how forms of trade and exchange can be identified through material culture and textual evidence, and the markers that distinguish them. We welcome papers and posters addressing their role in the development of ancient complex societies, the reconstruction of production and distribution networks, the roles of institutions, private actors and intermediaries, and the function of mobility as a system shaped by interactions between people, animals, routes, and places. We also encourage critical reflections on interpretative models, and on the applicability of modern concepts such as value, price, and globalisation to ancient Western Asia.

4. Nexuses and Cultural Trajectories

The word *nexus* derives from the Latin *nexus*, the past participle of *nectere*, meaning to bind, weave together, or connect. Its etymology conveys the idea of a bond or interweaving.

In archaeology and the social sciences, nexuses refer not simply to connections between elements, but to points of convergence where multiple relations, processes, people, objects, and practices intersect, interact, and generate change. A nexus is thus best understood as a dynamic node of interaction rather than a linear or static link.

This session encourages the discussion from the point of view of periodization, material culture, ideas, technologies, settlements and cultural trajectories. Overall, the session aims to foster a critical dialogue on how innovation arises from the process of interaction and entanglement.

5. Documenting the Past, Protecting the Future

In a time marked by conflict, displacement, and the political instrumentalization of the past, cultural heritage is not only a fragile legacy to be protected, but also a space for ethical responsibility, dialogue, and shared knowledge. This session explores the role of heritage studies in documenting, preserving, and communicating the past of Western Asia. We welcome papers and posters on tangible and intangible heritage, from settlements, landscapes, and museum collections, to archives, digital records, and community memories. Contributions may discuss conservation, site monitoring, risk assessment, conflict-related damage, looting, museum narratives, repatriation, public engagement, or the use of digital tools, remote sensing, 3D documentation, and open-access data. The session encourages critical reflections on ethics, accessibility, sustainability, and collaborative approaches that connect academic research with local communities and wider audiences.

Submission Guidelines

We welcome proposals from scholars at all career stages, including doctoral candidates and early-career researchers.

Abstracts should:

- be written in English;
- not exceed 2000 characters;
- include the paper title, author's name, institutional affiliation, and email address;
- indicate the thematic session for which the paper is intended.

Posters should:

- be written in English;
- accepted poster format is A0 (Portrait);
- posters of early career scholars are encouraged.

Further information regarding submission procedures, deadlines, registration, conference format (in-person or hybrid) and possible grants will be announced in due course on the following link:

<https://shades-conference.netlify.app/>



Venue

The conference is planned to be held at Sapienza University of Rome and in Amman on 17-18 December 2026. Depending on logistical considerations, the event may take place either in person or in a hybrid format.

Organizing Committee

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