

# S.M.A.R.T.

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SCIENCE MEDICINE ART RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY

## Genetics and History: How to Explore the Past Together

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Walter Pohl

### INVITATION

Wednesday, 26 March 2025, 6:00 pm  
CeMM, Large Seminar Room, level 8  
Lazarettgasse 14, AKH BT 25.3  
1090 Vienna

Welcome by Giulio Superti-Furga, CeMM Scientific Director  
Lecture by Walter Pohl  
Reception

**RSVP latest by 16 March 2025**

**Registration at:** <https://cemm.at/14th-smart-lecture>

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# Walter Pohl

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## Abstract

The dynamic development of archaeogenetics has created spectacular new opportunities to learn more about the human past. For some time, geneticists' efforts have concentrated on human evolution and prehistory. Only a few years ago, attention also shifted to historical periods. This poses a challenge to all disciplines involved: for the Humanities, to open up to the potential of new scientific and bioinformatic methods; and for Genetics, to collaborate with historians and archaeologists in order to get the most out of their data. Translating genetic models into historical narratives requires adopting historical method, not simply relating genetic results to main-stream historical knowledge. This is an interdisciplinary task that needs collaboration from beginning to end, from devising the questions and selecting the material to be tested, to interpreting the results and drawing historical conclusions.

This S.M.A.R.T. lecture builds on the experience of the ERC Synergy Grant project HistoGenes (2020-26), coordinated at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and uniting research teams from the MPI for Human Evolution Leipzig, the ELTE/University of Budapest and the Institute for Advanced Study Princeton. This is not only the first large project addressing the archaeogenetics of a historical period, the early Middle Ages (c. 400-900) in Eastern Central Europe; it is also the first truly interdisciplinary genetic history project. The lecture will address the potential and the problems of a cooperation between Life Sciences and Humanities, and sketch some of the results and their significance for further research.

## CV

Walter Pohl retired as Professor for Medieval History at the University of Vienna and as director of the Institute for Medieval Research at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2022. He is currently project leader of the ERC Synergy Grant 'HistoGenes' (2020-26), and member of the Board of Directors of the Austrian Cluster of Excellence 'Eurasian Transformations'. He was awarded the Wittgenstein Prize of the FWF in 2004, an ERC Advanced Grant in 2011, and was speaker of the SFB 'Visions of Community' (2011-19). Among others, he works on the transformation of the Roman world and on the post-Roman kingdoms, on medieval ethnicity and identities, on the 'Global Middle Ages', on steppe peoples, on early medieval Italy and on the historical interpretation of archaeogenetic results. His books include 'The Avars' (2018), and monographs about the early Germans, the migration period and on the early medieval monastery of Montecassino. His current research focus is on the historical interpretation of archaeogenetic results.

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