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Editors' Introduction

Journal of Historical Network Research
1 (2017) i-vii.



1 ***The Journal of Historical Network Research***

As the editors, we are very pleased to present the first volume of the *Journal of Historical Network Research*, a new publication dedicated to historical research based on the theories and methodologies developed in social network analysis and network science. In the broadest sense, the historical network research featured in this journal is concerned with the adaptation of theories and methods of social network analysis to historical disciplines—in other words, (social) network research based on historical sources and the relational data extracted from them. From this methodological point of view, historical network research is open to all historical and neighbouring disciplines that aim to explore past social relations or to develop and refine appropriate methods and theories for this vast field of study.¹ More specifically however, researchers in historical networks still have a number of practical questions to answer, not least how to encode historical sources in machine-readable formats. Epistemological questions also need to be considered, such as the potential surplus of knowledge generated by network visualisations and the appropriateness and benefits of quantitative measures such as centrality calculations within a historical narrative.

2 **History and complexity: towards a relational history**

The exploration of social relationships, whose complexities exceed the capacities of human imagination and hand-written notebooks, is one of the most frequently encountered challenges in the historical disciplines. Over the past decades, historians have developed a variety of strategies to reduce this complexity, for example by selecting a manageable set of interactions or by quantifying the objects of investigation and/or grouping them into categories with the aim of providing a statistical description of the investigated phenomena. The collection and evaluation of network data is another such strategy of complexity reduction. The principle of systematically investigating relationships between actors is applicable wherever these relationships are relevant and can be obtained from the sources in sufficient quality. As early as 1979, the German historian Wolfgang Reinhard proposed a new methodological approach to history which he called “entanglement analysis” (Verflechtungsanalyse).² He adopted his concept from a series of ideas on social

1 Cf. Bonnie Erickson, *Social Networks and History. A Review Essay*, in: *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 30 (1997) 149–157; Roger V. Gould, *Uses of Network Tools in Comparative Research*, in: *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney & Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Cambridge 2003, 241–269.

2 Wolfgang Reinhard, *Freunde und Kreaturen. "Verflechtung" als Konzept zur Erforschung historischer Führungsgruppen. Römische Oligarchie um 1600*, Augsburg 1979.

relationships and structures developed mostly in the social sciences, especially in English-speaking countries from the mid-20th century onwards. However, the limited possibilities of data processing for larger networks in his time, as well as an unfavourable and fragmentary source situation in his chosen research subjects, meant that the approach could never be fully implemented and was ultimately abandoned by Reinhard and his students.³ In a sense, historical network research is the second incarnation of this idea of taking social relationships seriously in historical research. We are confident that the idea of historical network research is here to stay this time. In the last few years, a number of interdisciplinary research initiatives in the field of historical network research have been developed, especially in the European context, so that the research field is now much broader in institutional and thematic terms.⁴

Whereas the last half-century has seen the emergence of a new relational paradigm in the social sciences, viewing social relationships and their patterns as the core features of social structures, historians have until recently continued to abide by relatively vague notions of “networks” in a metaphorical sense, as a convenient image for the sum of social interactions or as an expression of a rather diffuse notion of underlying social structures.⁵ But in the course of the past two decades, network analysis has begun to develop from a fringe theory into an established methodology in historical research that goes beyond this purely metaphorical use of the concept of networks.⁶ A substantial number of studies on different topics and periods have shown that network theories and formal network methods derived from other disciplines (e.g. sociology, economics and physics) can be effectively applied to select bodies of historical data.⁷ Since historical research is limited to the extraction of relational data from

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- 3 Matthias Bixler, Die Wurzeln der Historischen Netzwerkforschung, in: *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung. Grundlagen und Anwendungen*, eds. Marten Düring et al., Münster 2016, 47-54.
 - 4 Relevant research initiatives in the field of historical network research are: *Historical Network Research* (<http://historicalnetworkresearch.org>); *The Connected Past* (<http://connectedpast.net>), *Topographies of Entanglement* (<https://oeaw.academia.edu/Topographies-ofEntanglements>); *Réseaux et Histoire* (<http://reshist.hypotheses.org>, all last accessed 11.10.2017).
 - 5 Linton C. Freeman, *The Development of Social Network Analysis. A Study in the Sociology of Science*, Vancouver 2004.
 - 6 In this sense, relational historical research is now on its way from metaphor to substance; cf. Barry Wellman, Structural analysis. From method and metaphor to theory and substance, in: *Social Structures. A Network Approach*, eds. Barry Wellman & Scott D. Berkowitz, Cambridge 1988, 19-61.
 - 7 For instance Roger V. Gould, Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871, in: *American Sociological Review* 56 (1991) 716-729; John F. Padgett & Christopher K.

mostly fragmentary and often contradictory sources, these initial studies tended to be strongly influenced by concerns of data processing standards and epistemological paradigms. The paucity and difficulty of the source material, particularly when compared with the social sciences (which have a vast array of additional empirical tools such as interviews and questionnaires at their disposal), have long hampered the wholesale adoption and meaningful application of methods drawn from social network analysis. But despite these obstacles, the relational perspective of network analysis has enabled historical research to acquire an entirely new methodological and theoretical perspective, albeit one still beset with challenges. Furthermore, in many of these initial studies important methodological concerns regarding the underlying sources, the perennial problem of missing data, data standardisation and representation of networks in space and time were not adequately acknowledged and were sometimes even completely neglected. In recent years, though, historians, often in collaboration with scholars from other disciplines, have taken on these challenges and begun to address these methodological concerns, to adapt and refine formal network methods and network theory for historical research and thus to define a new and dynamic field of study within the historical disciplines: historical network research.⁸ The ongoing digitisation of large amounts of archival and cultural heritage data represents an additional current and future challenge. While 'traditional' historians may be more or less unaffected by this phenomenon (if they are affected, it is generally in a mostly positive fashion as a result of the new ease of access to vast amounts of information), in view of this proliferation of data it is necessary for scholars of historical networks to strengthen their own technical expertise and to enhance their efforts to foster interdisciplinary cooperation with other fields such as computer science, information studies and digital humanities.⁹

3 Why a new journal?

As a result of all these complexities, the emerging domain of historical network research is still in its formative phase and is consequently hard to view as a whole.¹⁰ While interdisciplinary research into the relational paradigm has

Ansell, Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400–1434, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1993) 1259–1319.

8 *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung. Grundlagen und Anwendungen*, eds. Marten Düring et al., Münster 2016; Claire Lemerrier, Formal network methods in history: why and how? in: *Social Networks, Political Institutions, and Rural Societies*, ed. Georg Fertig, Turnhout 2015, 281–310.

9 Peter Bearman, Big Data and historical social science, in: *Big Data & Society* 2 (2015) 2.

10 For an attempt to give such an overview under methodological considerations, see Matthias Bixler, Historical Network Research – Taking Stock, in: *Debtors, Creditors, and their Networks*.

produced an impressive body of work across the social and political sciences and also, increasingly, among historians, there is currently no international publication medium devoted to the study of networks in their historical contexts. This has put scholars with an interest in historical network research—historians, historical sociologists and others—at a great disadvantage, and has meant that they have long been accustomed to publishing research papers in non-historical journals, thus hampering scholarly discussion of their ideas and hypotheses among historians. The situation for European historians interested in network research is further complicated by academic and cultural idiosyncrasies, since much of the groundbreaking and more recent research into historical networks in the English-speaking world has been undertaken by historical sociologists rather than social historians and has thus remained mostly outside the sphere of traditional academic history departments. This has naturally also influenced the way research is published in this area; preferred journals such as *Social Networks* and the *American Journal of Sociology* focus heavily on methodological and theoretical aspects. In the course of the years, a few special journal issues on historical networks have been published. This indicates a at least steady if not increasing need for a centralized possibility to publish such research.¹¹ In short, there are no international publications solely devoted to the study of networks (social or otherwise) from a specifically historical perspective.

This is the gap that the *Journal of Historical Network Research* is keen to fill. As the first periodical within the historical sciences dedicated to this area of research, it can make a useful contribution by consolidating the considerable progress that has been made in historical network research, showcasing cutting-edge research at international level, featuring reviews of recent publications within the field, and generally helping to expand this promising new field of interdisciplinary historical research. Its aim is to publish outstanding original contributions which apply the theories and methodologies of social network analysis to historical research, help advance the epistemological and theoretical understanding of social network analysis in the historical sciences and promote empirical research on historical social interactions. The journal will promote exchanges between different areas of historical research (in the broadest sense),

Social Dimensions of Monetary Dependence from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century, eds. Andreas Gestrich & Martin Stark, London 2015, 43-67.

- 11 For recent examples of such special issues, see *Análisis de redes e historia: herramientas, aproximaciones, problemas*, eds. Claire Lemerrier et al. (= *REDES - Revista hispana para el análisis de redes sociales* 21 [2011]); *Historische Netzwerkanalysen*, eds. Albert Müller & Wolfgang Neurath (= *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 23 [2012]); *The Connected Past: critical and innovative approaches to networks in archaeology*, eds. Anna Collar et al. (= *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 22 [2015]).

the (digital) humanities, social and computer sciences, and different research traditions and disciplines, as well as strengthening the dialogue between network research and traditional historical research. It will serve as a meeting place for the traditional hermeneutics of historical research and its concomitant emphasis on contextualisation and historical source criticism (as present in traditional academic historical journals) on the one hand, and the theory-heavy and/or sometimes overly technical discussion of methodological and technological issues (which predominates in publications focused on “pure” or sociological network research) on the other.

4 The inaugural issue

This first issue of the *Journal of Historical Network Research* comprises five original research articles spanning the period from the 16th to the 20th century. The thematic focus of the volume is knowledge networks. Tom Brughmans and Matthew Peeples present an overview of major trends in archaeological network research through a bibliometric analysis of a large corpus of publications on the topic between 1965 and 2016. Ingeborg van Vugt demonstrates the importance of books as dynamic actors within the “Republic of Letters” in the 17th and 18th centuries by means of multi-layered visualisations of epistolary networks. Termeh Shafie et al. perform a centrality analysis of a directed hypergraph representing attacks by indigenous peoples from the Lesser Antilles on European colonial settlements between 1509 and 1700. Aline Deicke analyses the culture of intra-Protestant controversies that fundamentally advanced the formation of Lutheran identity and its central doctrine in the late 16th century from a network theoretical perspective. Finally, Ruedi Epple investigates and theorises about the escape of Austrian socialists after the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938, the support given to refugees by the Zurich Refugee Centre and the shifting network relationships of refugees and supporters.

With a total of 150 pages, this first issue will act as the journal’s introduction to scholarly discourse. Future issues will see additional content and features introduced gradually, including review articles and summaries of recent scholarship, as well as other formats that will depart slightly from the traditional categories of articles and reviews traditionally associated with scientific journals. There is much to look forward to.

Acknowledgments

The idea for this journal was first developed and discussed by the editors in autumn 2015. The intervening years between inception and publication saw much work being undertaken by both the editorial team and a number of colleagues and friends, who acted in a variety of capacities and contributed to making this project possible. Thanks are due, then, to those who volunteered to act as part of our advisory board or as anonymous reviewers, and naturally also to the authors who submitted papers for the first issue of what, at the time of their writing, must have seemed a slightly risky proposition at best. Without the contributions, commitment and patience of these people, it would have been impossible to transform what sounded like a good idea at the time into a functioning, funded and—hopefully—intellectually stimulating venture. Now that the day of publication has finally come, we are grateful to be able to present this inaugural issue to them and to the online public at large, in the hope that it may prove to be as rewarding an experience for them as it has been for us.

The Editors

Trier, Luxembourg, Aachen & Jena

11 October 2017