Dear Funding Committee,

My name is Chana Algarvio, and I am a first-year PhD student in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations studying the Achaemenid Empire and ancient Egypt. I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Graduate Scholarship. I have been accepted to present part of my doctoral research at an international conference, [The Connected Past 2025](#), taking place at the University of Coimbra in Portugal this September. This scholarship would assist with covering travel and lodging expenses for my trip, which is higher than usual due to the conference taking place at a time that is still peak tourist season. As a student who exhibits academic excellence, conducts original research that significantly impacts my fields of research, and contributes to the academic community through publications, presentations, and volunteer work, I believe I am an excellent candidate to receive this scholarship.

My doctoral research focuses on Egyptian iconographic influence in the material culture of the Achaemenid Empire. It aims to establish a new understanding of the Persian practice of adapting foreign iconography, created first by Achaemenid kings, and that the Persians possessed a conscious and deep comprehension of Egyptian ideologies, advantageously reconstructed for imperial needs. Sitting at the intersection of the material history of Egyptian culture in foreign lands, Persian imperialism and art history, and the semiotics of ancient luxury and administrative interregional objects, my work will contribute to deepening the understanding of acculturation influenced by foreign policy, artistic and artisanal networks and connectivity, and ancient identities in bi-/multicultural settings. Though Egypt has generally been considered a contributor to the imperial visual narrative of the Achaemenids, my research is a major intervention into the received history of the Persian adaptation of Egyptian symbols by examining non-royal contexts and the role of Egyptian and non-Egyptian artists, artisans, and scribes within it.

My conference presentation seeks to apply network science—a relatively new field used within archaeology and history, let alone in Achaemenid Studies more specifically—to my doctoral research by employing a material culture network approach and creating a network visualization. It derives from a final paper I wrote for an art history course I took this past Fall that introduced me to network analysis. My presentation will demonstrate the vast potential Achaemenid Studies brings to network science and will hopefully bridge a gap between the two fields as there are few examples of their overlap in scholarship. I therefore seek to encourage new perspectives in Achaemenid Studies by visually demonstrating the ways in which network science can be applied, while also advocating for the importance of the Achaemenid Empire in conversations on network science to people who engage in network studies across a variety of disciplines.

Receiving the EOM Graduate Scholarship would help me financially to participate in this international conference, allowing me to further my doctoral research through invaluable feedback from the community and establish academic/professional networks in a field that I am new to. I am very grateful for this opportunity and I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Chana Algarvio

Project Description

I have been accepted to present part of my doctoral research at the 2025 Connected Past Conference which will be held at the University of Coimbra in Portugal from September 16–19. My conference presentation will look at how the Achaemenid practice of adapting foreign motifs transposed to other classes of imperial society by applying computational network methods (using R Studio) and network analysis to my doctoral research on Egyptian iconography in the material culture (specifically luxury and administrative objects made of clay or metal) of the Achaemenid Empire. By gathering non-Egyptian objects with Egyptian symbols found in West and Central Asia dated to the Achaemenid Period (525–332 BCE), the network will aggregate the frequency of symbols across sites to understand where Egyptian cultural influence occurred, how it appeared more regularly in certain locations and less frequently in others, and why it occurred by subsequently engaging in semiotic analysis of the symbols. This framework aims to provide new insights on the Persian—rather than strictly Achaemenid—practice of adapting foreign motifs to fit imperial and local contexts, a practice which exhibits a fundamental understanding of Egyptian royal and religious beliefs unseen with any other ancient Near Eastern civilization. Advancing research on this topic is crucial as it moreover deepens our knowledge of Egypto-Persian relations and the multicultural artistic/artisanal networks that flourished during the Achaemenid Empire.

By attending the conference, I seek to act as a representative of Achaemenid Studies in network science and introduce scholars of the latter field to the former to ensure its establishment. I hope to build my academic/professional networks in the field of network science to further my dissertation research and professional development. This will be facilitated not only by attending other scholars' presentations and participating in subsequent discussions to learn further about the various theories, methods, and practices of network science in ancient studies, but also by accompanying other scholars during lunches and attending the conference receptions to build my connections and knowledge of the field. Since very few professors (whether archaeologists or historians) at the University of Toronto engage in network science, I am hoping that I will get personal and detailed feedback on my presentation from a variety of people more familiar with this field to strengthen the section of my dissertation that will focus on network science. By attending the scheduled day and a half of pre-conference workshops offered by The Connected Past on the theory and practice of network science, and taught by one of the foremost scholars in the field and who additionally is the author of the textbook I used for my art history course this past Fall, I look to acquire the necessary skills to one day teach about network science, and more specifically in courses on Achaemenid Studies.

Budget

Description	Expenditure	Amount
Travel	Flight from Toronto to Porto (round trip)	$932
	Train from Porto to Coimbra (round trip)	$29
	Coimbra transit pass	$22
Lodging	5 nights in Coimbra	$500

As detailed by the table of expenses above, financial support is needed because travel to Portugal from Canada is costly—especially since the month of September is still part of Portugal's peak season for tourists—and I do not possess the financial means to cover the entire trip by myself. My travel expenses are not only met by the cost of my flight, which is the largest expenditure in the table, but also the train ticket from the Porto airport to Coimbra and travel around Coimbra. With the conference running for 3.5 days, plus 1.5 days for pre-conference workshops, I will also require lodging for almost a week in the city, therefore becoming my second largest expenditure of the trip. Because Coimbra is a historic city known for its rich cultural heritage, it is also exceedingly difficult to find rooms for less than $100 per night.