

CALL FOR CANDIDATES: TWO  
GRANTS FOR PHD STUDENTS IN  
CULTURAL EVOLUTION (MINDS AND  
TRADITIONS RESEARCH GROUP).



### Summary

The Minds and Traditions research group (“the Mint”), an Independent Max Planck Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Jena (Germany) is offering two grants for two doctoral projects focusing on “cognitive science and cultural evolution of visual culture and graphic codes“. Funding is available for four years (three years renewable twice for six months), starting in September 2016. The PhD students will be expected to take part in a research project devoted to the cognitive science and cultural evolution of graphic codes. If interested, please send a motivation letter (maximum two pages) to the group’s principal investigator, Olivier Morin (morin@shh.mpg.de) by **March the 21st, 2016**.

**Topic:** The cognitive science and cultural evolution of visual culture and graphic codes

**Duration:** 3+1 years (3 years renewable twice for 6 months)

**Starting date:** September 2016

**Place:** Max Planck institute for the Science of Human History, Jena, Germany.

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Inaugurated in February 2016, the **Minds and Traditions Research Group** (“the Mint”) is an Independent Max Planck Research Group working within the **Jena Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History**. You can read more about the group [here](#).

**Minimum qualifications:** A master's degree, preferably in cognitive science, psychology, anthropology, or linguistics (although students from other disciplines may apply as well).

### Profile 1

The graduate student will lead a series of experimental studies aiming to reveal the conditions that make possible the transmission of information at a distance (as opposed to face-to-face conversation). S/he will observe, in laboratory conditions, the formation of entirely novel graphic codes, and use their study to shed light on the genesis of historical writing systems. This research will capitalise on previous research in the field of experimental language evolution and experimental semiotics, and will take advantage of the laboratory's facilities. This experimental side will be coupled with a theoretical investigation of the pragmatics of non-verbal communication as it relates to the development of writing.

**Selection criteria:** Familiarity with experimental methods and statistical analysis; interest in pragmatics and the psychology of communication.

## Profile 2

The graduate student will work at the junction of two fields of research: visual cognition and quantitative cultural history. S/he will analyse (and possibly create) databases for various traditions of visual culture (writing systems, heraldry, decorative arts), which s/he will use to test hypotheses from cognitive science. Possible avenues of inquiry may include: Developing, for images, measures of informational density (by analogy with phonology); showing how well-known psychophysical biases, like the cardinality bias or the vertical symmetry bias, affect visual culture; exploring the appeal of animal imagery in various visual cultures. The overall goal is to determine how images encode information, attract attention, and capture the imagination.

**Selection criteria:** Beside a strong interest for quantitative and/or psychological approaches in social science, some background in a discipline concerned with a form of visual culture (e.g. epigraphy, visual anthropology, or art history) is a plus.

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**Scientific environment:** The newly opened **Minds and Traditions Research Group** is lead by Olivier Morin, a theoretician of cognitive anthropology who studies the life and death of traditions with quantified historical data. It will be joined (in the Spring of 2016) by two post-docs: Piers Kelly, a linguistic anthropologist whose work focuses on the creation of novel writing systems in the Asia-Pacific area; and James Winters, an empirical linguist who creates artificial languages in laboratory settings and also studies how real language behaves, with quantitative tools.

The **MPI for the Science of Human History** is an interdisciplinary research institute gathering researchers from a wide variety of disciplines, with a common interest in the biological and cultural history of the human species. Our team will work closely with the Linguistic and Cultural Evolution department headed by Russell Gray, a pioneer in the application of computational evolutionary methods to the study of language evolution. His department is already among the most important global centres for the study of cultural evolution. The MPI for the Science of Human History is also home to a thriving department of archaeogenetics (lead by Johannes Krause).

**Terms of salary and employment:** The successful applicants will receive a salary according to the funding guidelines for young researchers of the Max Planck Society. In addition to the salary, travel and research expenses are covered.

**Doctoral program:** The Max Planck Institute does not deliver degrees, but has ties with local universities, Jena's Friedrich Schiller University among others. Doctoral degrees will be granted by the affiliated university.

**Knowledge of German is not a prerequisite.**

**Application:** Please send a letter of interest of no more than two pages to Olivier Morin ([morin@shh.mpg.de](mailto:morin@shh.mpg.de)), along with a CV, and one recommendation letter (one page maximum).

**Equal opportunity:** The Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History promotes women and encourages especially women to apply. Handicapped candidates will be given priority in case of the same professional qualification.

**Deadline for application: March the 21st, 2016.** A short list will be announced on the 1st of April. Interviews will be held in the end of April / beginning of May, with final decisions announced by May the 15th.