

## CALL FOR TWO POST- DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS IN CULTURAL EVOLUTION



**Summary.** The Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Jena (Germany) are seeking to employ two full-time postdoctoral researchers in the field of cultural evolution. The positions are tied to the Minds and Traditions research group (“the Mint”), an Independent Max Planck Research Group that will open in 2016. They are for 2 years, renewable for a total of 5 years maximum, starting in the first half of 2016. Candidates need to have completed a PhD, and to be familiar with the field of cultural evolution. They 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 October the 1st, 2015.

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

**Duration:** 2 years, renewable, for a maximum total of 5 years.

**Starting date:** First half of 2016 (February at the earliest).

**Place:** Jena, Germany.

Opening in February 2016, the **Minds and Traditions Research Group** (“the Mint”) will be an Independent Max Planck Research Group working within the [Jena Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History](#). This team of 5 researchers will be headed by Olivier Morin, a specialist of cultural evolution. **You can read more about the group [here](#).**

**Minimum qualifications:** A PhD completed before the position’s start; familiarity with the field of cultural evolution.

**Preferred qualifications:** Two post-doc positions are advertised, and selection criteria vary depending on the profiles (see below).

### Profile 1

The researcher will organize the creation of two databases, one devoted to the comparative analysis of graphic codes and pictographies, the other to writing systems. They will differ from extant databases in that they will include phylogenetic information, allowing the team to control for various confounds linked with cultural descent (“Galton’s problem”). They will serve to test a variety of hypotheses coming from various fields, from visual cognition to cognitive anthropology. The researcher will develop measures and coding schemes that meet these tests’ requirements; work with coders to get good inter-rater reliability; manage research assistants and liaise with domain experts, who will assist with coding data sources.

**Selection criteria:** Experience in the quantitative analysis of cultural change; proficiency with the standard tools of data analysis (R or Matlab); interest in cultural phylogenies, or direct experience working with them.

## **Profile 2**

The researcher will work to elaborate and test a theory of the use of graphic codes, rooted in cognitive approaches to communication. Outside writing, most documented graphic codes were used in close connection with oral communication or with mnemonics; only some users of writing have managed to go beyond the boundaries of oral communication. Why is graphic communication constrained in this way? And how can literate cultures sometimes escape these constraints? The researcher will bring her or his expertise to bear on the issue of the relationship between literacy and orality. Together with the rest of the team, s/he will engage in extensive cross-cultural research, using the team's databases to answer questions such as: Under what conditions do graphic codes need to encode natural language? How well does economic specialisation predict the appearance of writing?

**Selection criteria:** Published empirical work in archaeology or anthropology, preferably on one of the following topics: writing, pictography, mnemonic tools, literacy, economic specialisation; Familiarity with cognitive anthropology, interest in pragmatic linguistics.

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**Scientific environment:** The MPI Centre 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 Centre for the Science of Human History is also home to a thriving department of archaeogenetics (lead by Johannes Krause). Other collaborators of the Minds and Traditions Research Group will include prominent cognitive anthropologists such as Nicolas Baumard or Dan Sperber. There is no teaching obligation, but researchers will have opportunities to teach at the Friedrich Schiller university of Jena.

**Terms of salary and employment:** The remuneration is based on the German collective wage agreement for the public sector (TVöD, Tarifvertrag für den öffentlichen Dienst) depending on qualification and experience. Social benefits are granted according to the regulations for public service. In addition to the salary, travel and research expenses are covered.

**Application:** Please send a letter of interest of no more than two pages to Olivier Morin (morin@shh.mpg.de). The subject line of the message should include the mention "[Mint postdoc]".

**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:** October the 1st, 2015. Final decision given by December the 15th, 2015.