Applications are invited for an ESRC-funded 3-year DPhil studentship based in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography to begin in October 2012. The student will be supervised by Professor Harvey Whitehouse (Oxford) and Dr Quentin Atkinson (University of Auckland).

This studentship examines the broad question: what is the relationship between ritual and social organization in the human past? The aim will be to build on recent research suggesting that the intensity of emotional (especially dysphoric) arousal experienced by ritual participants correlates inversely with frequency of performance (Atkinson and Whitehouse, 2010). Whereas low-frequency/high arousal ("imagistic") rituals are associated with small, localized, and intensely cohesive communities, high-frequency/low-arousal ("doctrinal") rituals are found in large-scale, fast-spreading, and diffusely cohesive communities (Whitehouse,1995, 2000, 2004). Temporal and spatial distributions of data may also be used to evaluate predictions generated under a range of models of cultural transmission and evolution (Richerson and Boyd, 2005; Henrich, 2009; Pagel, Atkinson, and Meade, 2007; Turchin, 2009). By matching model predictions to observed data under a variety of simulated conditions this DPhil project will seek to identify likely drivers of the cultural shifts as well as to test the performance of competing models of ritual transmission.

A strong background in statistics and computational modelling is desirable, as is proficiency in MS Access and SQL and in the use of GIS and other spatial analysis software to organize and analyze the data. Although the project is based in Oxford, preparedness to spend extended periods at overseas universities and research sites is essential. The studentship will form part of a larger project entitled 'Ritual, Community, and Conflict' funded by the ESRC under the direction of Professor Whitehouse and involving the collaboration of an international network of anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, psychologists, political scientists, and evolutionary theorists.

Candidates can read the application guidelines and submit an application online at: http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/apply/index.html

Primary funding source should be identified as ESRC. Please quote job reference 12AE65JOB. Please note, applicants are bound by ESRC eligibility criteria: only UK and EU citizens can be given awards and for a full award UK residency is required. Please see the ESRC's postgraduate funding guide for accredited Doctoral Training Centres at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/PFG_DTC_%28June_2011%29_tcm8-14766.pdf.

The deadline for applications will be 20 January 2012. It is expected that the successful candidate will take up the position in October 2012.

Bibliography

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Richerson, P. J. & Boyd, R. (2005). Not by genes alone: How culture transformed human evolution. Chicago, IL, US: University of Chicago Press.

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Any enquiries should be directed to Professor Harvey Whitehouse (please see: http://www.anthro.ox.ac.uk/about-us/staff/professor-harvey-whitehouse/