

## **08: Eurasian Corridors of Communication: Fruits, Crops, and Words**

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**Involved disciplines/subjects:** Historical Comparative Reconstruction; Contact Linguistics; Linguistic Paleontology; Archaeobotany; Isotope Analysis

**Number of positions requested:** 1

### **Abstract**

The plants on your kitchen table often have a poorly understood history, and an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to study their origin and spread. Taking advantage of the diverse research of scholars from the MPI-SHH and FSU, a graduate student would be uniquely situated for answering previously unexplored questions. Few institutes in the world house as many highly published scholars working on the spread of agriculture. As examples: Dr. Robbeets is tracing out the spread of crops using Transeurasian linguistic data, while Dr. Kümmel's focus of expertise lies in Indo-European; Dr. Spengler is analyzing the preserved

remains of these plants in archaeological sites; and Dr. Ventresca is following the path of specific grain crops using isotopes in human bone collagen.

While many of the plants on your kitchen table originated in southwest or East Asia, these crops dispersed along the Silk Road several millennia ago. Building on continuing research in our institute, this student would explore the role these trade routes played in shaping ancient cuisines across Eurasia. The proposed research will open a linguistic window into these issues by studying the early contact history for various words for fruits and grains as well as cultivation technologies, such as tree grafting. It will involve three language families, which coexisted over three millennia ago: Indo-European; Sino-Tibetan; and Transeurasian. The researcher will identify ancient borrowings by building a dataset of cognate botanical terms in these language families and by searching for correlations between them. Special attention will be paid to the direction of borrowing, detecting patterns in the routes of diffusion, identifying different languages involved in the contact chain, estimating the time when a certain word was transmitted from one language into the other and, delimiting where the ancestral speech communities involved were located at the time of the borrowing. The linguistic information will be integrated with archaeobotanical research conducted at our institute, helping to unravel the complex network of cultural interactions that shaped what we all eat.

The candidates should have studied historical comparative linguistics and have a background in one or more Transeurasian, Indo-European or Sino-Tibetan languages.