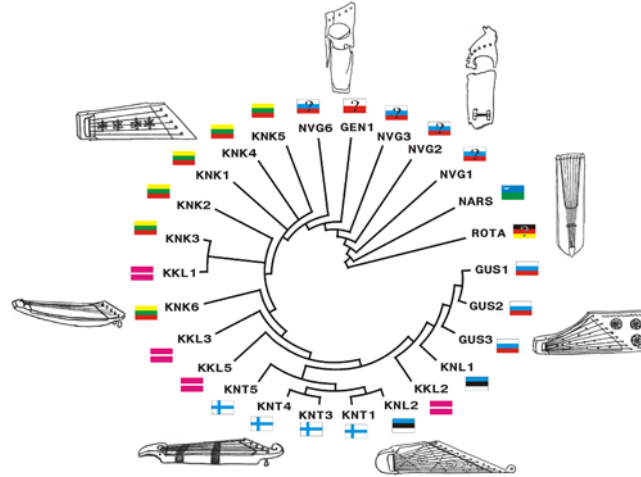


Research Programme on “The diffusion of cultural traits”

cultural.traits@gmail.com - <http://dipeco.economia.unimib.it/ciseps/index.asp?page=ce>



Perils and promises of cultural phylogenies: evolution of the Baltic Psaltery

Ilya Tëmkin

National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution)
and NOVA (Northern Virginia Community College)

Tuesday, December 17, 12:00pm

Room U6/3061 (aula seminari)

The new millennium has brought a new impetus for **rigorous historical reconstruction into the field of material cultural evolution by applying phylogenetic analysis** (originally developed for discerning evolutionary relationships among living organisms). A detailed study of **the Baltic psaltery, a plucked stringed instrument** that has enjoyed popularity in Northeastern Europe since the Middle Ages, reveals perils and promises of these methods, particularly of novel network-based approaches. Every group of people that has preserved the instrument, regards it as an essential symbol of their ethnic identity with its presumed origin and significance deeply rooted in traditional culture, as evidenced through mythology, epic poetry, songs, and ritual. Despite its cultural significance, the history of the Baltic psaltery has been **a controversial subject** for over a century. The patterns of historical relationships revealed by phylogenetics-inspired approaches may help settling the controversy and link disparate data on the iconography, archaeology, and cultural anthropology of the Baltic psaltery.