



MUSÉE
DE L'HOMME



SORBONNE
UNIVERSITÉ
CRÉATEURS DE FUTURS
DEPUIS 1257



AFALULA
AGENCE FRANÇAISE
POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT
D'AL-ULA

الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العلا
Royal Commission for AlUla



Functioning of an oasis community in Saudi Arabia and its relationship to the environment: *al-'Ulā oasis*

KEY INFORMATION

Affiliations Muséum national d'histoire naturelle

Doctorate school ED227 Sciences de la nature et de l'Homme : évolution et écologie (co-accredited Muséum national d'histoire naturelle and Sorbonne Université)

Research unit UMR 7206 Éco-anthropologie (Musée de l'Homme, Paris)

PhD advisors Pr. Serge Bahuchet (MNHN) & Dr. Vincent Battesti (CNRS)

Funding CNRS with AFALULA agency (see booklet attached)

Start November 1st 2019

Duration Four (4) years

Application deadline October 9th 2019 - <http://bit.ly/2V3U2jQ>

INFORMATIONS CLÉFS

Affiliations Muséum national d'histoire naturelle

École doctorale ED227 Sciences de la nature et de l'Homme : évolution et écologie (co-accréditée Muséum national d'histoire naturelle et Sorbonne Université)

Unité de recherche UMR 7206 Éco-anthropologie (Musée de l'Homme, Paris)

Encadrants de thèse Pr. Serge Bahuchet (MNHN) & Dr. Vincent Battesti (CNRS)

Financement CNRS avec l'agence AFALULA (voir la brochure ci-jointe)

Début 1^{er} novembre 2019

Durée Quatre (4) ans

Date limite de candidature 9 octobre 2019 -

Keywords

Anthropology, ethnography, ethnoecology, oasis, Saudi Arabia, agriculture, agrobiodiversity

Profile and skills required

The candidate must have a master's degree (or equivalent) in social or cultural anthropology, a good command of Arabic language, and a strong interest in issues related to the relationship of societies to their environment (anthropology of nature, anthropology of the environment, ethnoecology). Skills and/or knowledge in biology or ecology, or agrarian systems are desirable. The candidate must have an interest in multidisciplinary, especially in ethnobiology or ethnosciences. The candidate has to show qualities of independence/ autonomy, especially on the fieldwork, although supervised of course by her/his PhD advisors and the Doctoral school of the Muséum/Sorbonne Université.

The candidate should be mobile, as she/he will primarily be asked to do a long ethnographical fieldwork in al-'Ulā in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (two years planned). She/he be based in Paris (Musée de l'Homme, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle). Several trips for conferences abroad are also planned.

Excellent knowledge of English is desirable. Yearly research progress reports will have to be written in English for the project.

Project description

Located in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the oasis of al-'Ulā, considered a remote and isolated territory, is the recent focus of an ambitious development project by the Saudi government.

Prior to any ambitious project, an in-depth study must obviously be carried out to determine the nature of al-'Ulā oasis and its social and ecological functioning. The challenge is to rely on other oasis cases without overlooking the local anthropological and ecological specificities and to highlight its social and economic functioning. As al-'Ulā is mainly an agricultural terroir, oasis agriculture deserves special attention (Battesti, 2005), and in particular, the date palm tree (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.), the engineering plant of this complex system created by man (Battesti & Gros-Balthazard *et al.*, 2018). But even beyond the date palm: an oasis is a full socio-ecosystem, and a precious heritage. It is the combination of a complex multilayered agriculture system, cultivated species, and local knowledge and practices. A first focus should aim to understand how this socioecological system is working and how it has recently evolved. From a scholarly standpoint, little is known about the current state of the oasis. We are unaware of any sociological or ethnological analysis of the oasis (but a book published in Saudi Arabia by Naseef, 1995), just as there is no evaluation of the richness of the local agrobiodiversity of oasis plants and animal.

The PhD is part of this project (*Anthropological survey of al-'Ulā community and its oasis system*). The following are issues that will be addressed by the candidate's research during her or his doctorate in connection with research conducted in this same project by other social anthropologists (such as Dr. Vincent Battesti and others), but also research in other disciplines conducted by the other projects of AFALULA's general project on al-'Ulā. The choice of priority and other secondary research issues for the thesis among the following issues will be discussed with the PhD's advisors.

Issue 1. Demographic & population survey: Structures for social reproduction

Who inhabits the oasis? What is the recent demographic evolution and the place of migrants? How is organized and structured the population (by families, clans, tribes, etc.)? With which identities? What are the consequences (including land-related consequences) of recent sedentarization of pastoral groups?

Issue 2. Land structure and organization

What oasis agricultural system is in place? What system(s) of ownership (private property, collective property, tree rights, etc.)? How is the space is locally conceived? A mapping of ethnotoponyms, which are a memory of spatialities, should be established.

Issue 3. Oasis agriculture survey

What efficient typology of farms in the oasis can be established? What are the agricultural architectures implemented locally (multi-strata, mixed-farming, picking palm groves, etc.)? What are the links between agriculture and livestock farming (stabling, livestock entrusted to a shepherd, cooperation with Bedouin pastoral groups)? What are the recent transformations of agrarian systems? What is the relationship between old palm groves and new irrigated perimeters?

Issue 4. Water and water social systems survey

Water is always the subject of social management, especially in these desert environments. Which were the recent evolution of the local systems and with which consequences? What is their sustainability and what are the local perception of its future?

Issue 5. Organization of the urban economy and habitat

What is the recent evolution of the habitat and its consequences? Which articulation between old and new settlements of the urban/village areas and the agriculture areas (palm groves, mainly)?

Issue 6. Local knowledge and conditions of transmission

What are the agricultural knowledge, farming techniques and practices? What are the “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK: indigenous and other forms of traditional knowledge regarding sustainability of local resources)? Which assessment of TEK-loss? How work the transmission of these knowledge, prerequisite for maintaining oasis agrosystems?

Issue 7. Social and organization/division of labor

What social organization of work? Who works (presence of immigrant workers) and what are the modalities for transmitting know-how? This will mainly be done for agricultural sector, but for the craft industry too.

Issue 8. Heritage: local architecture and craft industries

What is perceived locally as being part of the local al-'Ulā heritage? What is the status of the old housing? of the different materials? Is there a local heritage process different from that proposed by the development projects? Does “natural heritage” makes locally sense?

Issue 9. Locate the oasis between its past and its future

Oases as nodes of networks: what places do these oases have in their old (incense route, pilgrimage route) and new exchange networks? What are the local perceptions of the future

of agriculture, technological developments and lifestyles? Which scenarios accepted? What social organization of local political decision-making?

Duration of the thesis

The PhD candidate will work under a four (4) years PhD contract with the CNRS and will have to complete her/his PhD thesis in these four years. Research schedule will be discussed with the PhD advisors.

Research thematic

Anthropology, Ethnoecology.

Mentoring

The PhD student will be mentored by two researchers having a great experience in social anthropology and ethnoecology: Serge Bahuchet (MNHN: professor in ethnobiology, environmental anthropology), Vincent Battesti (CNRS at MNHN, Musée de l'Homme, Paris: social anthropologist and ethnoecologist, specialist of oasis systems). He/she will benefit from the unique interdisciplinary environment of the *Éco-anthropologie* laboratory at the Musée de l'Homme and the multidisciplinary environment of the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris.

Material and scientific environment (specific safety conditions)

The human and technical resources required to complete the thesis are planned and budgeted for, in particular the means to carry out field research (air tickets, *per diem*, etc.).

This unique opportunity to conduct a two-years fieldwork research in Saudi Arabia will take place in a secure region of the kingdom, in the northwest, a region that is opening up to tourism.

Objectives of valorization

- Publications,
- International meetings,
- Possibly contributing to decision-making tools for the development of large projects that will affect the oasis.

Collaborations

The PhD provides an unique framework for the establishment of a broad and solid collaboration network.

International openness

Essence of the PhD

How to apply?

Applications must be sent via the CNRS job website (<https://emploi.cnrs.fr>) before October 9th 2019: <http://bit.ly/2V3U2jQ> (ref.: UMR7206-VINBAT-001)

Any auditions will take place in Paris within one or two weeks after the closing date for applications.



Photography 1: working with local people in al-'Ulā oasis (KSA), April 14th, 2019, by V. Battesti

Links

- RCU (Royal Commission for al-Ula): <https://rcu.gov.sa>
- AFALULA: <https://www.afalula.com>
- CNRS: <https://cnrs.fr/en>
- Muséum national d'histoire naturelle: <http://mnhn.fr/en>
- Musée de l'Homme: <http://museedelhomme.fr/en>
- Lab. Éco-anthropologie (UMR 7206): <https://www.ecoanthropologie.fr>

References

Battesti, Vincent, 2005 — *Jardins au désert, Évolution des pratiques et savoirs oasiens. Jérid tunisien*, Paris, Éditions IRD, À travers champs, 440 p. — en ligne: <http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00004609>

Battesti, Vincent & Muriel Gros-Balthazard *et al.*, 2018 — « Date palm agrobiodiversity (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) in Siwa oasis, Egypt : combining ethnography, morphometry, and genetics ». *Human Ecology*, 46 (4), p. 529–546 — en ligne: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01716788>

Naseef, Abdullah bin Adam Saleh, 1995 — *al-'Ulā, A study of Cultural and Social Heritage*, Riyadh, unpublished translation from Arabic to English of « Naṣīf, 'Abdallāh bin Adām Ṣāliḥ, 1995 — *al-'Ulā: Dirāsa fī l-thurāth ḥadārī wa-l-ijtimā'ī*, Riyadh, 'Abdallāh Naṣīf », 249 p.