

: the Musée de l'Homme ▶ The scientific project

Récolte de dattes, près de la source de Jubba, oasis de Siwa, Égypte, le 2 novembre 2014 © MNHN - Vincent Battesti

## THE SCIENTIFIC PROJECT

Researchers at the museum have chosen humans as their field of study, from complementary standpoints: the biological study of humans and our evolution, the study of technical, cultural and symbolic behaviours and the interactions between societies and the environment. The disciplines corresponding to this vast field of study have been structured and developed within the very core of the institution.

## A SINGLE SUBJECT OF STUDY, AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

While observational and analytical methods vary, they complement one another when applied to a common subject. The interdisciplinary nature of the research at the Musée de l'Homme could not exist without the collaboration of other scientific departments in the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, in particular, the ecologists, geologists and archaeologists, and of other laboratories in France and worldwide.

## FIELDS OF INVESTIGATION

### The biological study of humans and our evolution

It is a matter of better understanding the biological characteristics specific to the various species of humans discovered up to now, and of acquiring data on the milestones of our past: the rise of the Homo genus roughly 2.8 million years ago and the rise of modern humans about 300,000 years ago; the causes of early migrations out of Africa; the coexistence of several species; and the extinction of the Neanderthals. From our shared and relatively recent African origins, the physical and cultural adaptations of *Homo sapiens* to highly diverse environments and regions over the last 200,000 years are one of the key themes under study in light of recent genetic contributions. The biological study of human beings (bones and genes) informs us about our history, the conditions under which we populated the whole world, the reasons for our migrations and our biological diversity today.

### Human technical, cultural and symbolic behaviours

Humans are social animals: the study of evolution and the biological diversity of our species can only be envisaged if we take into account the interactions between the biological and the cultural. The goal is to characterise, analyse and reconstruct technical behaviours, subsistence behaviours and artistic and symbolic behaviours, as well as to pinpoint cultural traditions and identify their spatial and temporal distribution. Material and artistic productions, from the most ancient (carved flint, cave art and furniture) to the present day, are markers of humans' cognitive and adaptive capacities, and evidence of our close ties to the mineral, animal and plant worlds. Genetics enables us to trace our behaviour in the past.

### Interactions between societies and the environment

The issue is to grasp societies' behaviour with regard to natural resources, to understand how and why the profound changes that have occurred in the human species happened, how nomadic hunter-gatherers shifted to a sedentary lifestyle, and how increasingly complex societies have adapted, in a wide range of situations, to environmental changes that they themselves have often brought about. Climate change, the increase or reduction in available resources and the spread to new territories are all causes of "environmental stresses" to which humans respond both biologically and culturally (for instance changes in diet). Such changes are often behind major technological and behavioural innovations. Close observation of present-day peoples offers models for understanding the phenomena of the past.



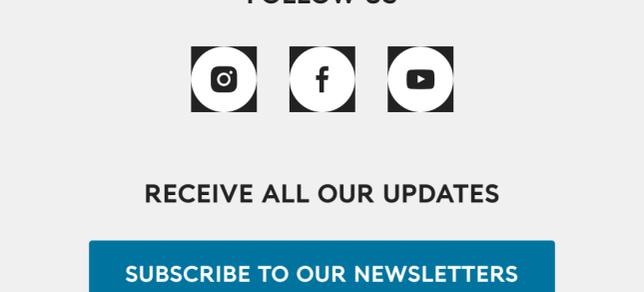
Désherbage à la faucille d'un jardin dans la palmeraie de Qofta, oasis de Siwa. Égypte, le 20

## RESEARCH IN TUNE WITH CURRENT EVENTS

The work of scientists at the Musée de l'Homme and at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle more widely focuses on human diversity and on our relationships with nature, themes that find powerful resonance with current events. Our current landscape, largely anthropised (shaped by humans), is the result of centuries and even millennia of human activities. Today we are experiencing the consequences of both the actions of our ancestors and of the development of our contemporary societies.

Having become accelerators of evolution, we as human beings must now confront these environmental changes, their repercussions on the climate, and the decline of biodiversity... all occurrences for which our species is largely responsible. From this standpoint, studying adaptive strategies used in the past reveals several strategies that societies could in the future develop to mitigate these changes.

Thanks to the complementary nature of approaches and competencies, the researchers' work aims to cover cross-cutting subjects, across the ages, from prehistoric times to our contemporary period, in direct relation to the most burning issues we face today including the human ability to adapt behaviour in the face of rapid changes, the persistence of techniques and cultural traditions in societies, gender differences and migrations.



Les mariés de la noce dans le quartier populaire de Darb el-Ahmar, centre historique. Le Caire. Égypte.

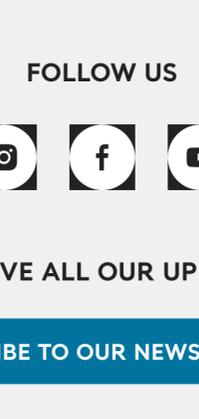


### RESEARCH AT THE MUSÉE DE L'HOMME

Scientific collaboration

Technological platforms

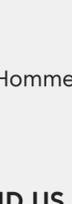
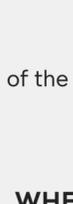
**The scientific project**



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