



VILLA HEGRA  
فيلد الحجر



Moyen-Orient et  
Mondes Musulmans  
Groupement d'Intérêt Scientifique



**Villa Hegra**  
**In partnership with**  
**Institute for the Study of Islam and Societies of the Muslim World (IISMM)**  
**and the French Research Center for the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA)**

**Call for seed projects**

***"AlUla: transformations and social dynamics of a development project"***

During the visit of the President of the French Republic to Saudi Arabia in December 2021, the two countries signed an agreement for the creation of a cultural institution in AlUla: Villa Hegra. The Villa will draw on the expertise of the French Agency for the Development of AlUla ("the Agency").

Villa Hegra, scheduled to open in 2026, aims to promote artistic creation and dialogue between French and Saudi cultures. A place of design and inclusion with the ambition of radiating throughout the region, it draws on the example of its prestigious predecessors: the Villa Médicis first and foremost, the Casa de Velázquez and the Villa Kujoyama.

Villa Hegra is located on a ten-hectare plot in the center of the main town of AlUla, in northwest Saudi Arabia, in an oasis combining a human settlement and a cultivated area. The surface area of AlUla is equivalent to that of the Hauts-de-France or PACA regions. AlUla currently has some 50,000 inhabitants and expects to see its population triple by 2030, as part of the destination promotion program set up by the RCU (Royal Commission for AlUla).

As part of the prefiguration of its Research Center, Villa Hegra, in partnership with IISMM (CNRS/EHESS) and CEFREPA (CNRS and MAE), is launching a call for seed projects for research into the dynamics induced by the development of the city and the oasis, the effects of this development on the inhabitants of the site and its region, and social and economic transformations.

The aim of this call is to encourage research in the humanities and social sciences on the transformations brought about by the development of the AlUla site, by sparking several research projects scheduled over a one-year period in 2024-2025.

This first call, for a one-year project, should enable the selected projects to respond, at the end of the seed phase, to a second call for the selection of a multi-year research project (3 years) financed by the Agency, which will be broader and more structured, and which could cover, in particular, a doctoral contract.

## 1. Project guidelines

The call for projects is part of the Villa Hegra Research Center's "*Public policies and local development in the AIUla oasis*" initiative. It echoes several academic research projects already carried out in the region over the last five years by various French and European research teams, on the Agency's initiative (see list of current research projects in Appendix I).

The aim of the project is to assess the social impact of the public policies promoted by the Royal Commission for AIUla, which are currently being developed.

It could incorporate a comparative dimension to bring the development of the AIUla site into line with other examples of past and contemporary development projects in similar spaces and environments, in order to cross-fertilize experiences and draw useful hypotheses and lessons.

A multi-disciplinary approach is highly desirable, whether interdisciplinary from the outset of the seed project, or in preparation for the second call after one year.

## 2. Identified research themes

The project's lines of research may incorporate the following three themes, identified by the Agency as being particularly important to those involved in AIUla's current development. They may be supplemented by complementary research themes whose relevance to AIUla will be explained by the project leader(s).

### Economic and environmental dynamics

- traditional agricultural economic structures and their transformations ;
- investment and business diversification ;
- new ways of participating in globalization ;
- regional and global networks in which current transformations are taking place;
- players involved in tourism development at local and national level.

### Transformations of the rural and urban landscape

- daily practices of Bedouin and sedentary populations ;
- legacies and new perspectives of agricultural practices ;
- investment in urban development ;
- new forms of housing and residential development ;
- development of cultural, entertainment, hotel and restaurant infrastructures.

### Social perspectives

- presence or development of a collective memory around the history of AIUla ;
- changes in demographic and social structures in the oasis ;
- training issues for the inhabitants of the AIUla site and surrounding area (foreign language skills, heritage knowledge, tourist guide skills);
- entrepreneurial development and prospects ;
- interactions with populations from other parts of Saudi Arabia;
- consequences of the long-term presence of foreign visitors and residents.

### 3. Recipients, duration and location

The project is intended for a team of at least two researchers, including a project leader (hereinafter referred to as "**project leader**") who must be a permanent scientific staff member, belonging to a unit attached to an Etablissement Public à Caractère Scientifique et Technologique (EPST) (or European equivalent).

The project will run for one year from the date the project is awarded to the applicant. Up to 5 one-year projects with a maximum budget of 20,000 euros may be selected during this seed phase.

As part of the field research, the project leader and his/her team will be required to stay in AIUla for several weeks or even months at a time. At the end of this year, the selected project teams will be able to apply for a second call for projects, with the aim of developing more extensive, multi-year research, with increased funding provided by the Agency.

### 4. Project eligibility and assessment criteria

Projects must be carried out by at least one permanent scientific staff member, belonging to a unit attached to an Etablissement Public à Caractère Scientifique et Technologique (EPST) (or European equivalent).

Successful projects will be required to program a one-year research project and present their results in the form of a report and a study day at the end of the first half of 2025. The duration of the seed project is one year maximum, and should enable the preparation of a larger multi-year project for which a call for projects will be organized in the second half of 2025.

Projects will be selected by a scientific committee convened by IISMM and CEFREPA management. The composition of this committee will be made public.

The committee will make its selection according to various criteria, including :

- Explanation of the project's scientific relevance in terms of advancing knowledge, methodology (field data collection and analysis) and possible scientific cooperation with other ongoing research projects;
- the value of the project and its potential impact for the various players involved in AIUla's ongoing development;
- interdisciplinary nature;
- the project's ability to integrate foreign researchers, particularly Saudi ones, either immediately or at the end of the seed phase;
- the participation of young researchers;
- precise justification of the amount of funding requested.

### 5. Funding and support

Each sponsor of a selected project will receive a maximum grant of 20,000 euros, which will be allocated to the sponsors of the selected projects and paid to CEFREPA. The funds must be used within one year of payment. Expenditure may cover mission expenses, operating costs, equipment (excluding standard IT and office equipment) and project-related services.

The parties to the research project contract will be the Agency, CEFREPA and the selected project sponsors.

The IISMM team will be on hand to support the selected project leaders at the start of the project, followed by the CEFREPA team, as well as the Villa Hegra, Agence and RCU teams for the work at AIUla.

## 6. Deliverables

The project leader undertakes to communicate the results of his work in French and English, and possibly in Arabic if the team's capabilities allow, in two forms:

- a report including a scientific assessment of the research year (approx. 100 pages or 150 to 200,000 characters, including an assessment of the activities carried out, an explanation of the research hypotheses and the state of knowledge at the end of the year, scientific prospects for the project team and possible collaborations and comparisons to be envisaged), a financial statement, and prospects that may motivate the submission of a multi-year project in a second call for projects.
- a presentation workshop or study day organized by the Agency and CEFREPA in 2025 in Saudi Arabia and France (at IISMM).

This report and study day should be organized before the end of the 1<sup>er</sup> semester 2025 for projects whose promoters wish to apply for phase 2 (1 project selected for 3 years). For other projects, they should be organized during the second half of 2025.

The report may be the subject of a scientific publication if the project sponsors wish to publish part of their work in a French, Saudi or international scientific journal. In the light of the analysis resulting from the report, the project leader may be asked to formulate recommendations for the governance of Villa Hegra, the Agency and the RCU.

## 7. Ethics

The selection of candidate projects and the conduct of funded projects will respect the ethical principles promoted by the CNRS (fairness, freedom of research, freedom of publication).

Successful project sponsors undertake to mention the funding obtained ("This project has received financial support from Afalula and Villa Hegra") in any scientific production related to the funded project.

## 8. Calendar

The call for "seed" projects opens on April 9, 2024.

First stage: submission of files by June 16, 2024 in the form of a single PDF file (or equivalent) sent to <aap.iismm@ehess.fr>.

Second stage: those responsible for the selected projects will be informed of the jury's selection before July 14, 2024.

## 9. How to submit

Candidate teams should send their application file in PDF format to the email address <aap.iismm@ehess.fr>.

The deadline for applications is **midnight (Paris time) on June 16, 2024**.

To be accepted, applications must include the following documents in French or English:

1. Nominative CVs of project team members, indicating team leader, area of specialization and institution of affiliation;
2. Summary description (max. 2000 words) of the research proposal, including the identification of precise objectives for the duration of the start-up phase (one year) and the prospect of a multi-year project following on from it, the formulation of exploratory hypotheses, and a description of the potential impacts and spin-offs for the development of the AIUla site;
3. provisional timetable ;
4. provisional budget allocation schedule.

## 10. Useful links

- Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" project: <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/>
- Villa Hegra: <https://vimeo.com/842859380/bf6f1386ec?share=copy>
- Agence française pour le développement d'AlUla (AfAlula) <https://www.afalula.com/>
- The Royal Commission of AlUla: <https://www.rcu.gov.sa/>
- [AlUla](https://www.afalula.com/) Oasis: <https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/monde/fr/habiter-oasis-al-ula>
- [IISMM](http://iismm.ehess.fr) <http://iismm.ehess.fr>
- BATTESTI V., MARTY L. "Bedouins and Sedentaries today in al-'Ulâ (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia): al-diyâr and al-Dîra in the rear-view mirror". *Arabian Humanities* [Online]. January 7, 2023. Vol. 17. Available at: < <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.10103> >
- BATTESTI V., MARTY L. " Bédouins et Sédentaires aujourd'hui à al-'Ulâ (Royaume d'Arabie saoudite), al-diyâr et al-Dîra dans le rétroviseur ". *Arabian Humanities* [Online]. January 7, 2023. Vol. 17. Available at: < <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.10112> >

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### Scientific Committee convened by the IISMM and CEFREPA for the Villa Hegra call for projects:

- **Makram ABBÈS**, Professor of political philosophy and Arabic philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, director of the French Research Centre for the Arabian Peninsula (CEFREPA);
- **Frédéric ABÉCASSIS**, Associate Professor in Modern History at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, director of the GIS MOMM ;
- **Sandra AUBE**, Research Fellow in Art history at the CNRS, deputy director of the GIS MOMM;
- **Nora DERBAL**, Postdoctoral Researcher and Associate Professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Hamburg University;
- **Philippe PÉTRIAT**, Associate Professor in Modern History at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, director of the IISMM.

The Scientific Committee may call on additional scientific experts depending on the content of the projects to be assessed.

## Appendices

### I. Current research projects

Project name	Objectives	Institutes/organizations	Start/end date	Advancement	Communications & publications
<b>Knowing Soil for a better understanding of its Functioning to improve LAND uses and preservation in AIUla (SoFunLand)</b>	<p>Produce knowledge on biodiversity and soil functioning in arid environments in order to propose innovative solutions for soil management, enabling sustainable agricultural use and the preservation of natural ecosystems in the AIUla region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- AIUla soil atlas</li> <li>- identifying microbial markers as a tool for understanding past human activities</li> <li>- operational tools and recommendations for each soil</li> </ul>	CIRAD MNHN Valorhiz (SME)	November 2019 - September 2023 (before extension)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finalized (or near-finalized) field phases and laboratory analyses for : characterization of the biodiversity of soil microorganisms in relation to the physico-chemical characteristics of the soil and its use; identification of microbial markers of past human activities; study of the contributions of microorganisms to ecosystem functioning.</li> <li>- Interpretation of results, modelling and valorisation in progress.</li> <li>- Collaborations with Saudi partners: KSU (King Saud University), KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology)</li> </ul>	<p>6 communications</p> <p><i>Coming soon: 4 items 2 communications</i></p>
<b>Anthropological survey of AIUla community and its oasis system (AS)</b>	<p>Anthropological study to understand the functioning of the socio-ecosystem of the AIUla oasis and its recent evolution in a development context, to enable a relevant choice of agrobiodiversity conservation strategies and possibilities of intervention on agricultural practices, particularly in irrigated agriculture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- defining AIUla's originality as an oasis</li> <li>- assessment of local agrobiodiversity and its origins</li> <li>- combined anthropological, ethnobotanical and agronomic approach</li> </ul>	CNRS MNHN	September 2019 - September 2023 (before extension)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross-sectional survey of the oasis: obtaining a description of social organization and analysis of oasis spaces.</li> <li>- Agronomic frame of reference and ethnoecology: initial field data obtained, further studies to come.</li> </ul>	<p>2 articles published 5 communications</p> <p><i>Coming soon: 3 items 1 communication</i></p>

<b>Ethnographic, genetic and morphometric analyses of the date palm agrobiodiversity in AIUla oasis (DPA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluation of the present and past diversity of date palms in AIUla, from ethnological, morphological and genetic points of view.</li> <li>- Understanding its origins and evolution over time</li> <li>- Generate knowledge about local germplasm and its history, as a source of information for oasis conservation, improvement and sustainable development programs.</li> </ul>	CNRS MNHN NYU Abu-Dhabi	September 2019 - October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- finalized field sampling</li> <li>- sample sequencing in progress</li> <li>- phase 1 (field) of the finalized ethnobotanical survey, production of a framework for interpreting genetic analyses</li> <li>- genetic analyses completed for the "barni" date variety</li> <li>- morphometric analysis of date palm seeds in progress</li> <li>- Collaborations with Saudi partners: KAUST (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology)</li> </ul>	1 article published 6 communications  <i>Coming soon:            6 items</i>
<b>High Value Citrus For AIUla (HVCA)</b>	Support for the development of a quality citrus industry in AIUla, by helping to understand the phenomena influencing quality (sanitary, varietal, good agricultural and irrigation practices) and building the capacity of citrus growers in these areas.	CIRAD INRAE ANSES MAS Bachès (nursery) AgroProspective (SME)	September 2020 - September 2023 (before extension)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete sanitary diagnosis of AIUla orchards ;</li> <li>- Understanding local varietal diversity (including genetic analysis) ;</li> <li>- Introducing new varieties and monitoring their performance;</li> <li>- Reception of Saudi trainees (RCU scholarship program) every year at the CRB San Giuliano center (Corsica);</li> <li>- Collaboration with KAUST</li> </ul>	1 communication  <i>Coming soon:            1 item            2 communications</i>
<b>WAO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diagnosis and complete assessment (piezometric and physico-chemical quality) of water resources available for future development of the AIUla oasis.</li> <li>- Reconstruction of the region's environment and climate during the Holocene</li> <li>- To provide a complete picture of the hydrological functioning of this oasis, not only today but also in the past.</li> </ul>	CEREGE (Centre européen de recherche et d'enseignement des géosciences de l'environnement) : IRD CNRS AMU (University of Aix-Marseille)	September 2019 - November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multiple water sampling campaigns for piezometric monitoring and water quality analysis;</li> <li>- AIUla groundwater modeling in collaboration with BRGM ;</li> <li>- Exploration of possible paleo-lakes in certain areas of AIUla and geological sampling.</li> </ul>	1 article published 3 communications