



Commission 04.02 on

## Arid Lands, Humankind and Environment (AHE)

<http://ahe.uni-koeln.de>

### Report 2004 - 2008

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The members of the steering committee are members of their national Geographical Societies or their national Associations of Geographers and use these networks for communication (Egypt, Germany, United States of America, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, China, United Kingdom, Oman, and Sweden).

## ***Meetings and field trips of the commission with brief summary (Plans for the Tunis International Congress: see Riyadh Meeting 2007)***

### **Meeting in Muscat, April 2005**

Professors Nabil S. Embabi and Mahmoud M. Ashour participated in a meeting organized and hosted by the Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman. The main theme of the meeting was desertification and sand encroachment. Coordinator of the meeting was Dr. Ahmed Abdul Salam, AHE-steering committee member.

### **Meeting and field trip, April 2-6, 2006: Cairo, Alexandria, Egypt**

Jointly sponsored by the International Geographical Union (IGU) and the Egyptian Geographical Society (EGS), the meeting was held together with the commissions for "Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development (CCHD)" and the "Mediterranean Renaissance Program (MRP)" at the quarters of the Egyptian Geographical Society. About 60 participants attended the meeting, including the EGS President, Professor Mohammed Abulezz, Egyptian colleagues from Universities of Alexandria, Zagazig, Masara, Cairo and Ain Shams, and a number of students from Ain Shams University (comp. report on the AHE-Homepage (<http://ahe.uni-koeln.de>)). Professor Mahmoud Ashour outlined the agenda for the two-day event and Professor Anne Buttiner, representative and Past President of the IGU, reported that special efforts have been taken to re-establish better interactions with colleagues in the Arab world, e.g., by choosing Tunis as site for the next IGC 2008. Other recent schemes include Corresponding Membership for individuals and institutions, the Promotion and Solidarity Scheme, the Country Partnership program, the Home of Geography in Rome and the re-vitalisation of regional networks. With respect to the arid regions she argued that in the long historical sweep of human civilizations throughout the arid zones of the Mediterranean World, issues of water availability, access and use have been acute. Among the many potential common denominators of shared concern, surely those of water, aridity and sustainable ways of life are among the most urgent.

Papers were presented by Professor Nabil S. Embabi, author of the volume, *Geomorphology of Egypt* (s. Publications), Dr Olaf Bubenzer, newly appointed Secretary for the Commission, and Professor Mahmoud Ashour, chair of the commission.

Before the dispersal of participants, a brief meeting was arranged for members of the Commission. This included Professor Mahmoud Ashour, Chair, Secretary Dr. Olaf Bubenzer, Dr. Ulrik Mårtensson and Professor Nabil S. Embabi. Questions on Commission procedure were raised and co-ordinates of IGU website and Secretariat were supplied. Professor Anne Buttiner raised questions on the substantive content of Commission agenda, particularly on the "humankind" element. It was generally acknowledged that insights from the Cairo workshop, particularly those relating to indigenous geographical knowledge of livelihood practices which could be sustainable in arid environments should be highlighted in Commission reports to the Tunis IGC 2008.

The subsequent field trip (4-5 April 2006) with about 20 participants started and ended in Cairo. Sites were visited at Rosetta, Alexandria and El-Alamein. Topics were agriculture, traditional and modern Egyptian settlements, coast protection an integrated coastal zone management, Alexandria Library, military cemetery of the European soldiers of World War II, and land reclamation projects.

### **Field trip, May 2006, Utah, Nevada, USA**

During a seven-day field trip in Utah, Nevada, California and Arizona, the magnificent landforms of this arid zone were visited by AHE members George Brook, Nabil Embabi and Mahmoud Ashour. A detailed illustrative report is in preparation.

### **Meeting and field trip, April 24-26, 2007, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

The meeting and the field trip were organized by the Saudi Geographical Society. The following members of the AHE-steering committee attended the meeting: A. Abdel Salam, A. Alwelaie, M. Ashour, G. Brook, O. Bubenzer, and N. Embabi. It was attended by about 60 participants, including colleagues and students from different ministries, organizations, and universities. It was cordially chaired by the chairman of the Saudi Geographical Society, Prof. Mohammad Shawqi bin Ibrahim Makki. He opened the meeting and expressed the importance of further research in arid regions and a closer cooperation of researchers from different countries. The meeting saw eleven lectures with different facets of protection and sustainability in Saudi Arabia (including wildlife/nature conservation, desertification protection, water harvesting) and new research technologies in other arid regions (including mapping, dating). With respect to urgent problems in most arid regions such as water crises, urbanization, desertification and other hazards, the importance of joint research projects, the use of traditional and new research and mapping techniques, fieldwork, and capacity building became obvious. With regard to future work, especially with regard to the forthcoming IGC in Tunis (2008), the importance and the particular role of the Arab countries was pointed out. On April 25 the Saudi Geographical Society organized an excellent field trip attended by students to the surroundings of Riyadh. Firstly, AHE member Prof. Alwelaie introduced the famous landscape of the Central Plateau to the 22 participants. Then, two representatives of the Ar-Riyadh Development Authority (ADA) took the group to the Wadi Hanifah recreation project, a long-term programme for the preservation and proper utilization of a 75 km stretch of the valley near Riyadh. Following an invitation of the Supreme Council Commission for the Development of Riyadh City, field trip participants had lunch at the Tuwaiq Palace in the diplomatic quarter. The group used the pleasant atmosphere for a stimulating scientific and intercultural exchange of experiences. In the evening there was a meeting of the AHE members and guests from the Saudi Geographical Society in the Ramada Shrouq Hotel. The group concluded that the combination of a scientific conference and field trips is ideal and that the exchange of knowledge between colleagues from different countries is extremely fruitful. It was noted that field trips are especially valuable as they provide an insight into the characteristic geographical features of a country and improve scientific and intercultural understanding. Concerning the main topics of this meeting, the group reasoned that countries with arid lands have adopted many approaches to achieve a better understanding of the scientific basis, impacts, vulnerability, adaptation and mitigation of environmental change and desertification. However, these experiences need a synopsis.

Therefore, the AHE commission planned the following activities for the next years:

#### **1. Next AHE meeting**

If possible, the next meeting will be held in Oman in spring 2008. AHE member Dr. Ahmed Abdel Salam will look for a location and appropriate field trips. AHE member Prof. Brook will examine the possibility of sponsorship by an oil company.

#### **2. IGC Tunis 2008**

In coordination with the Saudi Geographic Society, which is planning two paper sessions dealing with aspects of the physical geography of Saudi Arabia, the AHE commission decided to propose the following sessions for the IGU congress in Tunis:

- a. Environmental problems in arid regions and possible solutions;
- b. Preserving the natural and cultural landscapes in arid regions;
- c. Social, urban and regional development in arid lands;
- d. Application of remotely sensed data in arid regions;
- e. Human adaptation to past climate changes in presently arid lands.

All AHE members will look for representative chairs for these sessions. It is planned to bring together colleagues from Arab countries and colleagues from other countries who work in arid regions anywhere in the world. It is hoped that the results of the sessions will be published in international journals (e.g. *J. of Arid Environments*), as special volumes, or in a book edited by the commission members.

### **3. Electronic Atlas of Arid Lands**

The AHE group decided to build up an electronic photo atlas of arid lands by the use of the AHE – homepage. For this reason Dr. Bubenzer will create an online form.

On April 26 the group attended a field trip to the National Museum and the gardens of the King Abdul Aziz Historic Center, Riyadh. The extraordinary museum was established to become a national landmark Kingdom-wide and to contribute in enriching the course of education, cultural enlightenment, development of belongingness and to become an eternal message. Accompanied by I. A. Aljutaili, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Riyadh, the group then visit a traditional Suq, the Al-Masmak Palace and the Kingdom Tower. Finally, the group visited the Old Dir'aiyah at Riyadh, a magnificent historical site that is presently under restoration.

## ***Networking***

Regarding the aims of the commission (see Homepage: <http://ahe.uni-koeln.de/aims.html>), the members did the following relevant activities (see also publications):

### **11th International Conference on Luminescence and Electron Spin Resonance Dating, 24-29 July 2005, Cologne, Germany**

During the conference it became obvious that the demonstrated dating techniques provide excellent opportunities to get better stratigraphic information of Quaternary sediments, especially in arid regions where organic material is normally very scarce. AHE member Olaf Bubenzer contribute with a poster on "Luminescence dating and archaeology of Holocene fluvio-lacustrine sediments of Abu Tartur, Eastern Sahara" (see publication Bubenzer, Hilgers & Riemer 2007).

### **6th International Conference on Geomorphology, 7-11 September 2005, Zaragoza, Spain**

The conference offered interesting plenary lectures, scientific sessions and field trips dealing with arid lands. AHE member Xiaoping Yang gave a plenary lecture on "Desert and Earth system" - with a special reference to China. In the Session "Geomorphology of arid Regions", the following AHE members presented papers: Olaf Bubenzer: "Investigation of Pleistocene Megadunes (Draa) of the Eastern Sahara and the Southern Namib Using New Elevation Data (SRTM/ASTER)", Nabil Embabi: "Ghard Abu Moharik Sand Sea, the Western Desert, Egypt: Geomorphology, movement and age". In the session 9 "Costal Geomorphology", AHE chairman Mahmoud Ashour discussed "Geomorphic features on the surfaces of sabkhas, Qatar Peninsula". AHE member Xiaoping Yang presided the working group "Interaction between fluvial, eolian and lacustrine processes" and gave a lecture "Geomorphological processes forming the Taklamakan Desert, western China".

Most of the results of this meeting were published in a special issue of *Quaternary International* (vol. 175, edited by AHE member Xiaoping Yang) and will be published in a special issue of *Geomorphology* (see publications).

### **International workshop "Cultures and Civilisations for Human Development", 12-14 December, Rom, Italy**

Mahmoud Ashour participated this workshop and the meeting of the IGU Commission "Cultural and Civilisations for Human Development".

**International Workshop "Mapping the Arid lands for combating desertification", December 2006, Tunis, Tunisia.**

Mahmoud Ashour attended this workshop.

**IGU Regional Conference, 3-7 July, Brisbane 2006, Australia**

Mahmoud Ashour arranged two sessions. The theme of the first session discussed papers about desertification and the second dealt with papers about water crises in arid regions.

**28th INQUA Congress, 28 July-3 August 2007, Cairns, Australia**

AHE members Olaf Bubenzer, George Brook, Kevin White and Xiaoping Yang contributed to the congress of the International Union for Quaternary Research (INQUA) by talks and poster. For details see *Quaternary International*, 167-168, Supplement. Some of the results were published in a special issue of *Quaternary International* (vol. 175, edited by AHE member Xiaoping Yang, see publications).

**COMLAND-Workshop and field trip, 7-17 September 2007, Alashan Left Banner, Inner Mongolia, China**

AHE member Xiaoping Yang organized an International workshop "Environmental Change and Sustainable Development in Arid and Semi-arid Regions" of the IGU commission on land degradation and desertification (COMLAND), for details see:

[https://webspace.utexas.edu/hudsonpf/comland/past\\_meetings/alashan\\_2007.pdf](https://webspace.utexas.edu/hudsonpf/comland/past_meetings/alashan_2007.pdf)

**AHE member Xiaoping Yang got the COMLAND Award 2007.**

**Workshop "Conservation of the Western Desert of Egypt", 10-11 September 2007, Bahariya, Egypt**

In cooperation with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), the Egyptian Desert Research Center (DRC) and the Cologne Collaborative Research Centre "Arid Climate, Adaptation and Cultural Innovation in Africa" (ACACIA) AHE member Olaf Bubenzer contributed together with ACACIA colleagues to this workshop for tour operators to support ecological sustainable desert tourism.

**6th International Conference "Earth Observation & Geoinformation Sciences in Support of Africa's Development", AARSE, 30 October-2 November 2007, Cairo, Egypt**

AHE member Ulrik Martensson and colleagues from the Lund University contributed with "GIS and Remote Sensing for Water Management Studies and Development of Water Management Decision Support Systems in Rwanda", "Definition of landscape erosion units using a structural classification OASIS of Landsat TM satellite imageries, Case study Lebanon", and "Vocational training in GIS using Internet and eLearning: A smart way to keep up with technology development".

**International Workshop "Desert Animals in the Eastern Sahara - Their Position, Significance and Cultural Reflexion in Antiquity", 14-15 December 2007, Cologne, Germany**

AHE member Olaf Bubenzer contributed with the lecture "The Eastern Sahara – Facets of the Natural Landscape and Climate since 5,000 B.C".

AHE chair Mahmoud Ashour and AHE member Nabil Embabi pursued their work in the Western Desert of Egypt with Professor Donner of Helsinki University (Finland). A paper about Dating of lacustrine deposits will be published soon.

## **Publications**

The newsletter of 2006 and a flyer is available on the AHE homepage: <http://ahe.uni-koeln.de>

Relevant publication:

**Ashour, M.M.** (accepted). Sabkhas in Qatar. *Geomorphology*, in press.

**Ashour, M.M. Embabi, N.S., Donner, J., AbuZeid, K.A.** (2005). Geomorphology and Quaternary Geology of Abu El-Egl Playa, Western Desert of Egypt. *Bull. of the Egyptian Geographical Society*, 78, 1-26.

Bingqi, Z., **Yang X.** (2007). The ion chemistry of surface and ground waters in the Taklimakan Desert of Tarim Basin, western China. *Chinese Science Bulletin*, 52/12, 2123-2129.

**Brook, G.A.** (2008). Radiocarbon ages for coatings in cupules ground in quartzite bedrock at Rhino Cave in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana, and their paleoclimatic significance. *Geoarchaeology: An International Journal* (accepted with revisions).

**Brook, G.A., Marais, E., Srivastava, P., Jordan, T.** (2007). Timing of lake-level changes in Etosha Pan, Namibia, since the middle Holocene from OSL ages of relict shorelines in the Okondeka region. *Quaternary International*, 175/1, 29-40.

**Brook, G.A., Srivastava, P. Marais, E.** (2006). Characteristics and OSL minimum ages of relict fluvial deposits near Sossus Vlei, Tsauchab River, Namibia, and a regional climate record for the last 30 ka. *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 21/4, 347-362.

**Brook, G.A., Srivastava, P., Brook, F.Z., Robbins, L.H., Campbell, A.C., Murphy, M.L.** (2008). OSL chronology from sediments and MSA artefacts at the Toteng quarry, Kalahari Desert, Botswana. *South African Archaeological Bulletin* (accepted with revisions; date set for publication).

**Bubenzer, O. & Bolten, A.** (accepted). The use of new elevation data (SRTM/ASTER) for the detection and morphometric quantification of Pleistocene megadunes (draa) in the eastern Sahara and the southern Namib. *Geomorphology*, in press.

**Bubenzer, O., Bolten, A., Ritter, M.** (2007). Scale-specific geomorphometry of arid regions - examples from the Eastern Sahara. - In: Bollig, M, **Bubenzer, O., Vogelsang, R. & Wotzka, A.-P.** [eds.]. Aridity, Change and Conflict in Africa. Proceedings of an International ACACIA Conference held at Königswinter, Germany, October 1-3, 2003. *Colloquium Africanum*, 2, 17-34, Heinrich-Barth-Institut; Cologne.

**Bubenzer, O., Bolten, A., Darius, F.** [eds.](2007). Atlas of Cultural and Environmental Change in Arid Africa. *Africa Praehistorica*, 21, 240 p.; Cologne.

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**Bubenzer, O., Hilgers, A., Riemer, H.** (2007). Luminescence dating and archaeology of Holocene fluvio-lacustrine sediments of Abu Tartur, Eastern Sahara. *Quaternary Geochronology*, 2, 314-321.

**Bubenzer, O., Riemer, H.** (2007). Holocene Climatic Change and Human Settlement between the Central Sahara and the Nile Valley – Archaeological and Geomorphological Results. *Geoarchaeology*, 22(6), 607-620.

**Bubenzer, O. & Besler, H.** (2005). Human Occupation of Sand Seas during the Early and mid-Holocene – Examples from Egypt. *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie*, Suppl.-Bd., N.F., 138, 153-165.

Kindermann, K., **Bubenzer, O.** (2007). Djara – humans and their environment on the Egyptian limestone plateau around 8,000 years ago. – In: **Bubenzer, O., Bolten, A., Darius, F.,** [eds.]: Atlas of Cultural and Environmental Change in Arid Africa. *Africa Praehistorica*, 21, 26-29.; Cologne.

- Kindermann, K., **Bubbenzer**, O., Darius, F., Nussbaum, S., Pöllath, N., Riemer, H. & Smettan, U. (2006). Palaeoenvironment and Holocene land use of Djara, Western Desert of Egypt. *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 25, 1619-1637.
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- Moyes, H., Awe, J., **Brook**, G.A., Webster, J. (2008). The ancient Maya drought cult: Late Classic cave use in Belize. *Latin American Antiquity* (accepted with revisions).
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- Robbins, L.H., Campbell, A.C., **Brook**, G.A., Murphy, M.L. (2007). World's oldest ritual site? The "Python Cave" at Tsodilo Hills World Heritage site, Botswana. *Nyame Akuma*, 67, 2-6.
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- Yang**, X., Goudie, A., Catto, N. [eds.] (2007). Geomorphic processes and palaeoclimatology in deserts. *Quaternary International*, 175 (special issue).
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## **Continuation**

Regarding the fact that the commission was successful in the re-establishment of interactions with colleagues in the Arab world and that particularly these colleagues have insights in the indigenous geographical knowledge of livelihood practices which could be sustainable in arid environments, we want to continue our work by with the following aims:

- Promote the study of geographical and geoarchaeological problems in arid lands;
- Monitor human and environmental changes and interactions in arid lands;
- Build a database for these works related to the arid lands to facilitate and promote future research;
- Support capacity building in new technologies and comprehensive fieldwork in arid regions;
- Develop academic and research networks;
- Promote standardisation and compatibility of methods, nomenclature and symbols employed by geographers and other interrelated disciplines;
- Organize meetings to bring together geographers especially to expand the interactions with colleagues in the Arab world since these have still not participated much in the IGU.

During the 2008-2012 period we plan further meetings and field trips in: Muscat (Oman), Athens (Georgia, USA), Heidelberg (Germany), and in Cologne (Germany, IGU Conference 2012).

AHE member George Brook has just established a research project “A multi-proxy approach to understanding late Pleistocene climate change in Namibia, Botswana, and NW South Africa” funded by the American National Science Foundation for the period 2007-2010.

After the completion of the interdisciplinary Cologne Collaborative Research Centre “Arid Climate, Adaptation and Cultural Innovation in Africa” at the end of 2007 in which he participated in two projects, AHE member Olaf Bubenzer is involved in a new CCR-Initiative “Our Way to Europe – Culture-Environment Interaction and Human Mobility in the Late Quaternary” (applied for funding, German Research Foundation).

AHE chairman Mahmoud Ashour is planning a five year joint research Project “Sand Accumulations in Egypt” with a participation of the AHE members G. Brook, O. Bubenzer and N. Embabi.

Report: Olaf Bubenzer, Heidelberg, Germany.