

Archaeology and Palaeontology

The first half of 1993 saw one of the most active seasons of archaeology in the Emirates for several years, as both local teams and foreign expeditions undertook work throughout the country.

On the palaeontological front, the team of specialists sponsored by our Corporate members the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC, completed another winter season of work in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi on the Miocene rocks of the Bainuna Formation, summarised in the last issue.

Some of the results were explained in a specially-commissioned film, 'Abu Dhabi - The Missing Link,' which compared the supposed environment of the Western Region in late Miocene times with the East African savannah of today.

On the archaeological front, activity covered virtually the whole of the country.

As reported elsewhere in this issue of **TRIBULUS**, a team from the Swiss-Liechtenstein Foundation for Archaeological Research began excavation of an Iron Age fort at Ain Al Madhab in Fujairah, (see Page 17), while a French team began excavation of a fort dating from around the beginning of the Christian era near Mileiha in Sharjah, (see Page 15).

In Ras al Khaimah, major work on the site of the old Islamic port-city of Julfar came to an end with the completion of last winter's season, with French, German and Japanese teams carrying out work in the early part of the year, following the British dig at the end of 1992.

In Umm al Qaiwain, attention focussed on two expeditions. A team led by Professor Dan Potts, a former speaker to the Group, continued work early in the year at Tell Abraç, site of a Third Millenium fortress that was in continuous use by succeeding civilisations until the early centuries of the Christian era. One major result of this year's work was the partial excavation of a typical mid-Third Millenium 'Umm an Nar' tomb, adjacent to the walls of the fortress, in which a substantial number of burials were found. Also found were a number of artefacts suggesting a possible trading link with the early 'Bactrian' civilisations of northern Afghanistan. Further work will be undertaken next season.

On the coast north of Umm al Qaiwain, Carl Phillips of London University's Institute of Archaeology excavated a fourth or fifth millenium shell mound, discovering several dozen burials from the 'Ubaid period, the first time that such a well-preserved and substantial cemetery from the period has ever been found in the Lower Gulf, and adding very substantially to our understanding of this formerly obscure period.

Excavations were also carried out on another extensive 'Ubaid site on the island of Dalma by a team from the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project, directed by Dr. Geoffrey King, (see Page 16).

Carl Phillips also carried out excavations under the auspices of the Sharjah Department of Archaeology on a

Fourth Millenium shell-mound near Khatmat Milaha, in the East Coast Sharjah enclave of Kalba.

In Dubai, a team under Dr. Hussein Kandil of the Dubai Museum continued work on the excavation of late Iron Age cemeteries in the Qusais area, and began planning future work on the Omayyad settlement in Jumeirah, while in the Al Ain area, work over the 1992-1993 season included preliminary studies on a suspected early First Millenium 'falaj' near Shwaib and rescue excavations on Islamic sites in and around Al Ain itself.

Besides the excavations on Dalma and Sir Bani Yas carried out by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, extensive surveying work was done on the islands of North and South Yasat, Ghaghah and Kafai, as well as on parts of the Sila'a Peninsula, during which over a hundred sites were located, ranging in age from recent Islamic to Neolithic. Although much further work remains to be done, the two seasons so far of the Survey have proved the continuing importance of this area over a period of several thousand years, something that was previously completely unsuspected.

Archaeological activity by Group members was relatively limited, although brief surface surveys were carried out on the island of Thumayriyah and in the Sheleala area of the Abu Dhabi coastline. A number of possible pre-Islamic burials were located on Thumayriyah with evidence of Islamic occupation, probably by fishermen, both there and at Sheleala. The sites will be examined later by members of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey.

Group members Kate Bonner and Carolyn Lehmann also joined the excavations on Sir Bani Yas, with the former also assisting in the French excavations at Mileiha.

Archaeology in the United Arab Emirates is receiving an increasing amount of international attention, with several papers on recent work being delivered at the annual Seminar for Arabian Studies in London, which was attended by the Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed al Qassimi.

Activities by Group members continue to show that there is a role for amateurs to become involved, either in locating sites for the experts to study, or in assisting in actual excavations.

As usual, a number of our Corporate members helped to sponsor local archaeology in a variety of ways, of whom ADNOC and ADCO deserve special mention.

Finally, work began during the year on the drafting of a new Federal Antiquities and Heritage Law, designed among other things to enhance the preservation of archaeological sites. Initial indications are that the new Law will continue to place the prime responsibility for this upon the individual member Emirates of the UAE.

PETER HELLYER
Recorder

* * *