PRESS RELEASE on recent archaeological excavations by a Joint Project of the Sharjah Directorate of Antiquities (Sharjah, UAE) and the Institute of Pre- and Protohistory of Tübingen University (Germany).

Two months of joint archaeological excavations near Jebel al-Faya in the Central Region of Sharjah Emirate yielded new important information on the very early history of SE-Arabia reaching back more than 100.000 years into the Palaeolithic Period. The newly found evidence is also of world-wide interest with regard to the spread of early mankind from its centres of evolution in East Africa towards South Asia and beyond. It confirms the hypothesis of a Southern Route "Out of Africa" along the eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula and across the Straits of Hormuz into what is now Iran. Apart from the general confirmation of this hypothesis the recent research adds a lot of details to the knowledge about when this route was actually used by early humans.

The Joint Project is directed by Dr. Sabah A. Jasim from the side of the Directorate of Antiquities of the Department of Culture & Information of the Government of Sharjah and by Profs. Hans-Peter and Margarethe Uerpmann from side of the University of Tübingen in Germany. This project conducts Stone Age research in the Emirate of Sharjah since 1996. The present season of excavations was concentrated at three sites near Maleiha in the Central Region. Two of them – called Faya NE10 and 15 are from the Neolithic period. They yielded new evidence about life and death during the 6^{th} and the 5^{th} millennium BCE. At this time people already had domestic animals: sheep, goats and cattle. They lived as nomadic herders, moving between the coast, the sands and the mountains.

The most important site – Faya NE1 – was also used in the Neolithic period, but its main occupation reaches much farther back into the Palaeolithic period. The oldest confirmed date, obtained with the so-called OSL-method (Optically Stimulated Luminescence) is older than 100.000 years, measured at the labs of the Royal Holloway University in London. However, below the level of this date there are further levels of Palaeolithic occupation. The assumed age of these lower levels may go down to around 150.000 years – which is close to the time when "Anatomically Modern Humans" (AMH) originated in East Africa. AMH reached Australia some 50.000 years ago, Europe about 10.000 years later, and North America only about 15.000 years before the present.

The early appearance of AMH in Australia indicates that the spread of these early people took a route from East Africa into South Arabia and along the coastal area of the Arabian Sea towards what are now Oman and the Emirates. From here they may have moved into the Gulf Area and via Mesopotamia towards the Levant and Europe, but they also must have crossed the Straits of Hormuz into Southern Iran, from where they could spread along the coast of the Indian Ocean towards South Asia, and across what is now Indonesia towards Australia. Other branches of this movement will have reached Southeast- and East-Asia, from where they finally crossed over to America. The new evidence from Jebel Faya indicates that the first movements of Modern Humans out of Africa should not be imagined as a constant flow of people, but rather as a process intermitted several times by periods of drought in Arabia. These periods coincided with glacial periods in more northerly areas of the earth. This is also evidence of major importance for the climatic history of Arabia. The end of the Palaeolithic period at Jebel Faya is marked by a thick layer of desert sand which developed some 35.000 years ago.

On top of this sand the first stone tools of Neolithic people are found, who – at least partly – may have moved into the area from the "Fertile Crescent", bordering Arabia around its north-western margins. This movement happened about 10.000 years ago and indicates a change of directions in the early routes of peoples across the Arabian Peninsula.

Further results of the Joint Excavations are to be expected once special examinations at laboratories in Germany and Britain will have been conducted. Age-determinations of sam-

ples excavated in 2010 will be carried out at Laboratories of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and of the Max-Planck-Institute for Evolutionary Studies in Leipzig, both in Germany, and again at the Royal Holloway University in London. With regard to the history of climatic developments in SE-Arabia the Joint Project collaborates with a team of researchers from Oxford Brookes University, Great Britain, directed by Prof. Adrian Parker. An ancient lake-bed near Maleiha in the Central Region was in the focus of their research during this season of excavations. This lake existed during parts of the Neolithic period, but may also have influenced the local environment during the early historic periods when Maleiha was an important pre-Islamic settlement. This settlement is currently studied by archaeological teams of the Directorate of Antiquities in Sharjah, the University of Ghent in Belgium, and of the CNRS in Paris, France.

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