

ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

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A description of Islamic archaeology at the Oriental Institute was first published in *The Oriental Institute Annual Report 2002–2003*. The subject has now grown throughout the academic world, as well as here; not that one might claim a five-year plan, but a review of this progress in a relatively new discipline reveals some accomplishments during these years.

The Oriental Institute describes itself as being devoted to the art and archaeology of the ancient Near East, and yet field projects as early as the 1930s included Islamic subjects, tangential to work at Alishar Tepe, the Amuq, Nippur, Khirbat Karak, and Medinat Habu (Jeme), and the special focus of projects such as Schmidt's work at Rayy and Istakhr; Adams' work in the Diyala, Abu Sarifa, and Jundi Shapur; and my efforts at Quseir al-Qadim, Luxor, Aqaba (Ayla), and Hadir Qinnasrin. These projects contributed Islamic artifacts to the Museum's large holdings of Arabic papyri, bookbindings, and tombstones, originally on display in Breasted's "Persian

and Islamic Hall." Gradually, the collections within the Oriental Institute Museum are being tabulated through the help of its registrars, Helen McDonald and Susan Allison. This museum holds an impressive range of excavated Islamic materials from the entire "Fertile Crescent," a collection that may well surpass any other museum in the United States. The case may be easily advanced that the Oriental Institute stands as unique as a center for Islamic Archaeology.

The Oriental Institute has played an increasing role in the rapidly growing body of evidence and theory in this discipline. There is a growing awareness of the necessity for studying medieval archaeology in the Near East. On the one hand, Islamic materials provide a connector to the past, showing the continuation of most ancient accomplishments unique to the Near East (fig. 1). On the other, the Islamic era provides a connector to the present, making archaeology relevant and important to modern Middle Eastern studies. Perhaps no one has better exemplified this potential at the Oriental Institute than Robert McC. Adams; I have attempted to recognize the accomplishments of his research in an article, "Islamic Archaeology and the 'Land Behind Baghdad,'" for his festschrift presented in 2007.



Figure 1. A stucco caryatid from the early Islamic bath at Khirbat al-Mafjar

A statement on Islamic studies in the University of Chicago listed as one of its prime aspects the field of Islamic Archaeology. Within the organization of NELC, the discipline of Archaeology is defined as having two separate tracks, the ancient Near East and Islamic, the latter with its own degree requirements as demanding, if not more so, than its ancient counterpart. Four students have received their doctorates in Islamic Archaeology, the most recent two with honors. The current group of students plays an active role in the Museum, publications, and workshops within the Oriental Institute.

ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY

The growth of Islamic activities in the Oriental Institute may be seen in a few highlights during the last five years:

- The first Oriental Institute Seminar (actually a proto-seminar of the now-annual event) on Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives (2004)
- The first permanent display of Islamic archaeology (artifacts from the city of Istakhr) in the reorganized Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery, and Islamic artifacts in the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery and the Robert F. Picken Family Nubia Gallery
- The accession of a substantial teaching collection from the excavations at Fustat, the site of early Islamic Cairo (2007)
- The accession of a fine collection of Middle Islamic ceramics from southern Iran donated by the ethnographers Reingold and Erika Loeffler (2007; fig. 2)
- A temporary exhibit on the nature of Islamic archaeology, featuring impressive glazed ceramics, *Daily Life Ornamented: The Medieval Persian City of Rayy* (2007, with Tanya Treptow; fig. 3)
- A temporary exhibit *European Cartographers and the Ottoman World, 1500–1750: Maps from the Collection of O. J. Sopranos* (2007)
- And, finally, an Oriental Institute Travel Program of Islamic Spain and Syria led by Clemens Reichel (2008)

Ancient and Islamic

This changing nature of the Oriental Institute means that the time seems appropriate to consider an explicit association within Near Eastern studies of the “Ancient and Islamic.” There is a natural attraction and correlation between study of the ancient Near East and the Islamic Middle East. One sees a common pattern in serious centers of Near Eastern studies: where programs include archaeological projects, there are always Islamic excavations alongside the more usual ancient fieldwork. This pattern of research activity may be recognized as a new paradigm, the study of the ancient Near East and the Islamic Middle East as natural correlates within the discipline of archaeology.

There is an important difference in the two disciplines. As I explored in a plenary paper at the latest International Congress for the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE), there is an evident lack of definition of Islamic Archaeology in the minds of almost all historians, many other archaeologists, and not a few of those claiming to belong to this field. The forging of an archaeological identity is enhanced by acceptance in that congress, which is the premier focus where national directors of archaeology, archaeologists from each country,

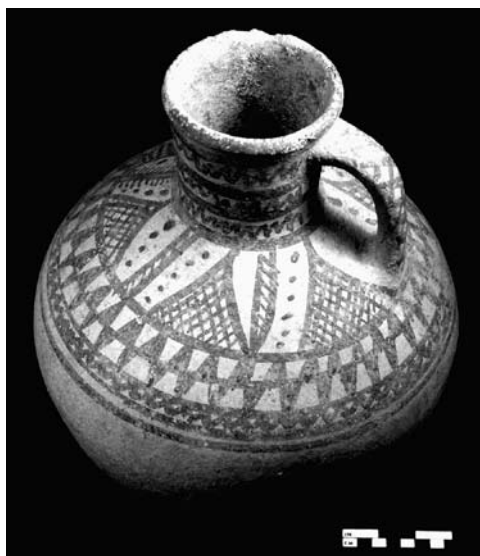


Figure 2. A painted Middle Islamic jar from Saqaveh in the Loeffler Collection

and fellow archaeologists commingle and exchange information. There is an irony that, in this congress and many archaeological centers, the two late-comers to the archaeology of the ancient Near East are the prehistoric and Islamic, the chronological peripheries.

One might close with a note on the paper at ICAANE by Dr. Iman Saca, a prehistorian and former Research Associate at the Oriental Institute. She made an eloquent plea for consideration of “community archaeology” as an essential aspect of the future of archaeology; this would mean the forging of a new discipline and identity in fieldwork and its interpretations, particularly in museums and in education. The field of Islamic Archaeology is a natural aspect of this future and the Oriental Institute is in a position to lead in this direction by making ancient and Islamic an explicit program for its future identity.



Figure 3. Design of a turquoise glazed tile from the Iranian city of Rayy
