

Donald Whitcomb

After a quiet summer, the year began in a most unusual way with two visitors. The first was Kristoffer Damgaard, an advanced doctoral student from Copenhagen, whom I had met at several conferences. He is now pursuing his dissertation subject on the Early Islamic cityscape, the archaeology of Aqaba (Ayla). This is a subject of great interest to me; indeed, we had intentionally left one quadrant of the site for the future. It appears that the future has arrived and is most welcome. Kristoffer and I spent the next two months reviewing the excavation seasons at Aqaba, the recording systems, and the artifacts in the Oriental Institute. Kristoffer has made extensive copies and photographs and the result should be a seamless transition to his new excavations. Alas, I fear that he will find approaches differing from what I might suggest but the result will be fascinating regardless. He has already offered a perspective on the role of this port in the cultural history of the Red Sea which greatly enhances my earlier suggestions.

My second visitor was Katia Cytryn-Silverman, from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was familiar with her research on Islamic archaeology of the north Sinai, and more directly as a reader for her dissertation, which she took *summa cum laude*. She came to Chicago with a new project, an idea for the location of the Congregational mosque (the *masjid jam'a*) in Tiberias. The site of Tiberias (Islamic al-Tabariya) has suffered through many excavations and salvage projects. Katia suggested a large covered market was actually the mosque, an idea we debated and she has now proven. Not to get too far ahead of my story, but since her return to Jerusalem, she has conducted excavations which prove her ideas, received a large multi-year grant to continue the research, and, most wonderful, received a tenure-track position in Islamic archaeology at Hebrew University.

I decided to find a common denominator between these guests and the interests of my students in Islamic archaeology. This was a seminar on “The Archaeology of Travel.” This would begin with a focus on “travel” in Islamic cultures, which would turn on four concepts: *hijra*, an idea of movement for a new religious life; *hajj*, the idea of pilgrimage found also in Christianity and Judaism; *rihla*, the idea of travel in search of knowledge and dispersion of scholarship; and *tijara*, another kind of profit, that of mercantile commerce which came to bind the entire Islamic world. This last aspect of travel may be the most susceptible to archaeological research. Commercial practice would seem to bind together the Red Sea ports for Kristoffer with the “road khans” or caravanserais which were the subject of Katia’s dissertation.

In late November, the American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting was held in Boston; and this year proved exceptional, a turning point for Islamic archaeology. Over twenty papers were presented covering a wide variety of subjects. There were special papers on Islamic aspects of large excavations and special papers on Ottoman archaeology. A roundtable of the “Role of Empires” featured discussions of the Islamic periods organized by Bethany Walker, who also presented a special section on “ASOR at 40 Years” and its long history of Islamic research from the beginnings with Jim Sauer. Asa Eger and Debra Foran organized another of their panels on Byzantine and Islamic archaeology featuring work in Turkey. Finally, there was another session on “Landscape Archaeology,” in which I offered a paper on the urban landscape of Fustat utilizing the methodology suggested in Tony Wilkinson’s new book. It would appear that breadth and variety of Islamic subjects at ASOR have made it the equivalent of the MESA meetings for Islamicists interested in material culture in the Near East.

Then, in the middle of February, I traveled to Jerusalem where I lived for the next six months. This was at the invitation of Gideon Avni, who was taking a sabbatical from his position as director of antiquities to co-direct a research program in urbanism (see *Archaeology of Islamic Cities Project Report*). Though I had visited the West Bank briefly last year, my only visit to Jerusalem was some fifteen years ago (when I met a young student, Tracy Hoffman, who followed me back to Chicago and became my first doctoral student). As Gideon had guessed, after working in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria I was ready to see the archaeological sites in Israel.

My students have no doubt wearied of hearing me preach that one doesn’t understand an archaeological site until one stands on it. Now was an opportunity to put this into practice. Our research group held a seminar each week balanced with a visit to an archaeological site. As an example, we first went to Tel Aviv and visited Tell Qasile, a famous Bronze Age site. The tour was led by Amihai Mazar, its long-time excavator, who carefully pointed out to me the remains of an Islamic caravanserai (as well as some late “disturbances” near his ancient temples). There followed a succession of tours at urban sites such as Beth Shean (Baysan), lead by Yoram Tsafrir, who pointed out



Figure 1. Michael Eisenberg describes the site of Sussita (classical Hippos)



Figure 2. Right to left, Ken Holum and his wife Marsha, Yael Arnon, and Jan Johnson in the amphitheater on Caesarea



Figure 3. The qibla wall of the White Mosque at Ramla

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH

to me the changes in the classical city in the early Islamic period; and Sussita in the Golan, where Michael Eisenberg discussed the history of this city, which at the time of my visit was completely covered with spring flowers (fig. 1). Then there was the trip to Akko, with standing Crusader and later buildings explained by Edna and Eliezer Stern. The list goes on (fig. 2) and the frustration is that, in this densely packed ancient land, there are always more sites to see and people ready to explain the past than one has time to experience.

This brings me to the second, even more pleasant aspect of my research in Israel. When I was finally able to visit Ramla (fig. 3), the early Islamic capital of the Jund Filastin (after trying to study the city for many years), I was guided by Ofer Sion, who was engaged in some salvage excavations in the modern town. As we sat in his temporary camp, I met Ron Toueg and Moti Haiman, both experienced archaeologists dealing with Islamic remains. Indeed, meeting young archaeologists who are either specializing in or seriously pursuing evidence for the Islamic periods is a wonderful revelation. One might even suggest that fieldwork in Islamic archaeology may be advancing faster here than anywhere else in the Middle East. The irony is not lost on some archaeologists, like Rafi Greenberg, who excavates at Beit Yerak (Khirbat Karak, first excavated by the Oriental Institute) and who is active in co-operation with Palestinian archaeologists and, in his words, multi-vocular interpretations of archaeological sites.

One of the more pleasurable aspects of my time in Jerusalem has been the continuing interaction with my students, both past and present. I was able to visit Tracy Hoffman at her excavations in Ashkelon. We put together a provisional type series of Islamic ceramics, from the earliest through Fatimid, which will make her famous when she refines and publishes it. I also visited Katherine Strange Burke, who with her husband Aaron is excavating Tell Jaffa; she has an amazing range of Mamluk through Ottoman materials which have at least as great potential. During my time at the Institute in Jerusalem, she and Edna Stern organized an Islamic ceramic workshop which brought together at least thirty interested scholars to observe (and handle) ceramics from a dozen sites. The co-operation and excitement led to calls for more such meetings.

While she is engaged in her dissertation research in Cairo, Tanya Treptow made the trip to Jerusalem (by bus across the Sinai, which proves that adventure is not gone for students). We toured the Old City, but the Rockefeller Museum really seemed to be the highlight. She appreciated the Khirbet Mafjar collection of stuccoes and the library, where I often work. It is very reminiscent of the Oriental Institute Research Archives. Rockefeller was a generous man but he seems to have used the same architect: even the window hardware is identical to that in Chicago. Slightly earlier, Asa Eger came to Jerusalem from Istanbul, where he holds a postdoctoral position at Koç University. He accompanied us on several site tours and even visited the site of Khirbet Mafjar near Jericho, his curiosity aroused by my constant references to its marvels during his studies.

I will save my further activities for the next *Annual Report*, as they will fall into the next "year," and close only remembering the early expeditions that Breasted sent out to the Near East stayed for many more months and must have also been ready to return to Chicago.