

## Donald S. Whitcomb

**Donald S. Whitcomb** pursued plans for future excavations as well as the first scientific publication on Hadir Qinnasrin, which is a report on the results of the 1998 sondages that will appear in *Archéologie Islamique* in 2000. This report builds upon the hypothetical foundations laid out at the UNESCO-sponsored conference called The Silk Road and Archaeology in Syria some four years earlier. These foundations are explained in "Notes on Qinnasrin and Aleppo in the Early Islamic Period," which appeared at the time of the Hama conference this fall. Its prediction of an early Islamic site in the region of Tell Chalcis has proven well justified through the surveys of Claus-Peter Haase and then the 1998 sondages on the edge of Hadir.

Don met with his collaborator, Mariannne Barrucand of the Sorbonne, in Hama before proceeding to the town of Hadir. As noted in the Hadir Qinnasrin report (see separate report), research on this site is complicated by its overlay of the modern town. Unlike the romantic notion of going out into the desert, this is a special kind of urban archaeology that Don had encountered in Aqaba and Luxor. Special requirements for such research entail careful and patient discussions with inhabitants, who often have vital pieces of information (if not actual artifacts) but lack the chronological and contextual information necessary to make this a part of their history. A description of this survey, done with the assistance of Katherine Strange and Colleen Coyle (graduate students) is available in *Oriental Institute News & Notes* 163 (Fall 1999). Another factor in the success of this venture has been the understanding of Syrian archaeology offered by Alexandrine Guérin, who was a Fulbright scholar here at the Oriental Institute.

In the spring, Don gave invited lectures at the Sorbonne, where he discussed religious architecture at Aqaba in his "From Earliest Church to Earliest Mosque," and at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin, where he presented "The 'Commercial Crescent': Trade and the Port of Ayla (Aqaba)," a regional contextualization of Aqaba through archaeological evidence. This is a subject of interest to German projects in the plain behind Aqaba and in Yemen as well. Indeed, Aqaba retains a research interest in a new initiative to examine the Aqaba castle, the context of which Don wrote in his "The Town and Name of Aqaba: An Inquiry into the Settlement History from an Archaeological Perspective," which was published in the sixth volume of *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*. Between these lectures, Don attended the Second International Congress on Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Copenhagen, which featured special sessions on Islamic archaeology. In fact, the sessions on this subject filled the entire week, within which Don presented his most recent discoveries on archaeological evidence for institutional features of the early Islamic cities.

In addition to courses on introduction to Islamic archaeology and on Byzantine and Islamic archaeology of Syria-Palestine, a new course, entitled "Jazirat al-Arab: Islamic Archaeology of Arabia," grew out of an article called "Out of Arabia: Early Islamic Aqaba in Its Regional Context." This course proved highly successful, even though the enormous amount of information was difficult to get through in the short time available during a single quarter. An inspiration for this course was the geographical studies by Paul Wheatley, who sadly passed away during this year. He was enthusiastic for the Islamic archaeology program. At present there are three students with dissertations in progress, all working on ports during the Islamic periods: Ghida el-Osman on Beirut, Tasha Vorderstrasse on al-Mina near Antioch, and Tracy Hoffman (née Alsberg) on Ascalon (Ashkelon). One final aspect of teaching this year was participation with Fred Donner and Walter Kaegi in a summer workshop on "Islamic Origins" sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, during which it was shown how archaeological evidence plays an increasingly important role.

**RESEARCH**

Iranian studies proved another, growing research facet with the appearance of “Sasanian or Islamic? Monuments and Criteria for Dating” in the festschrift for Ezat Negahban, edited by Abbas Alizadeh. Likewise, Don appeared in an Iranian television documentary on the history and archaeology of Iran. Most recently, his attention has come full circle in his assistance for the reopening of the Persian Gallery in the Oriental Institute Museum, in particular the Islamic period city of Istakhr, the medieval continuation of Persepolis. Study of this Oriental Institute excavation formed a major portion of Don’s dissertation and remains a continuing research interest. He had the pleasure of reviving these ideas in a docent lecture in anticipation of the gallery’s reopening.

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