

RESEARCH

Donald Whitcomb

An account of **Donald Whitcomb**'s activities this year may begin with field research conducted last summer in Turkey at the site of Mar'ash, reported in *News & Notes* 171. This project was in conjunction with the Karamanmarash research of Elizabeth Carter, a former student in the Oriental Institute, who has surveyed and excavated at Domuztepe in southeastern Turkey. Don's interest stemmed from the Hadir Qinnasrin project (see separate report). In the early Islamic period, Qinnasrin was the capital for north Syria and the staging place

for the yearly campaigns into the Byzantine-held Anatolian steppe. Mar'ash was the forward post supplied in men and materiel from Qinnasrin. One of the most interesting results from this research is identification of the distribution of early Islamic sites, which cluster around the southern portion of the plan near the marshes (*'amuq*), a situation remarkably similar to that of Qinnasrin itself.

Hadir Qinnasrin was the subject of a paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association in San Francisco, where Don also responded to papers in John Meloy's panel on the Indian Ocean (fifteenth–seventeenth century). Other activity and travel involved his role as external reader for dissertations. His old friend, Edouard LaGro finished at the University of Leiden, writing on "... mediaeval pottery from the cane sugar production and village occupation at Tell Abu Sarbut in Jordan." Another dissertation was that of Michele Ziolkowski, University of Sydney, who wrote on "The Historical Archaeology of the Coast of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates" He traveled to the University of Göteborg, Sweden, to examine Peter Pentz, another old friend, on "From Africa Proconsularis to Islamic Ifriqiyah"; and most recently to Cambridge University for the dissertation defense of Alison Gascoigne, on "The Impact of the Arab Conquest on Late Roman Settlement in Egypt." Each of these dissertations shows the diversity and gratifying growth of the field of Islamic archaeology.

Don taught Islamic archaeology of Syria-Palestine (Late Levant) and then two seminars under the general title of "Problems in Islamic Archaeology." The first of these reflected an interest which originally brought Don to Chicago, urbanism; the Islamic City continues to be one of his main research interests. The second seminar also reflected a personal interest, his undergraduate concentration in Art History. This seminar, entitled "Islamic Art and Artifacts," explored the difference in art historical and archaeological utilization of objects and buildings; the combination of archaeologists, art historians, and Islamicists among the students made differences in disciplinary training particularly revealing.

One of the most interesting discoveries of this past year resulted from class preparation. The site of Khirbet al-Karak, on the southern shore of the Lake of Galilee, is of great renown in Palestine. Its fame comes from the Early Bronze Age occupation, which resulted in the Oriental Institute excavations by P. Delougaz and R. Haines in 1952/1953. They also recovered a substantial occupation of the early Islamic period and published a complete report in *A Byzantine Church at Khirbet al-Karak* in 1960. The pottery from this site represents a clear collection of transitional late Byzantine and early Islamic ceramics from Palestine, ideal for class presentations.

This year, Don decided to examine the archaeological contexts in greater detail. First came the three construction phases of the Byzantine church, which ended after "... a period of neglect and encroachment" (according to Delougaz), with construction of an enigmatic "new Arab building." Recent research by Yitzar Hirschfeld now provides other examples of such building complexes, which he describes as villas or manor houses of late Byzantine or early Islamic times. The second aspect of the context was the Roman fort containing a fifth–sixth-century synagogue and bath house, excavated in 1950. A quick examination of Palestinian synagogues, made possible through Chuck Jones' computerized resources of the Oriental Institute library, revealed that the identification of the Khirbet al-Karak synagogue has been challenged. Rony Reich, one of the most prominent Israeli archaeologists, proved this could not have been a synagogue but did not advance further explanation.

The Israeli excavations had noted similarities of the bath to features of the early Islamic bath at Khirbet al-Mafjar. From this and other features, it is possible to show the whole complex to be a so-called "desert castle," a palatial complex of the Umayyad period. Hap-

RESEARCH

pily, the story of discovery does not end there: research into the historical geography of this region revealed the existence of al-Sinnabra, somewhere near Khirbet al-Karak. Al-Sinnabra was known as the winter resort of Mu'awiya, Marwan, and other early Umayyad caliphs. Remarkably, no one seems to have put together al-Sinnabra with the Islamic palace complex at Khirbet al-Karak; and Don has now done this from the comfort of the Oriental Institute basement and library.

In April, Don presented this discovery at the Third International Congress of Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Paris. With the greatest of ironies, his lecture took place at the same exact hour that Raphael Greenberg presented his new research on the Bronze Age site of Khirbet al-Karak. Consultations after the papers revealed that much more evidence on the Islamic occupation lies unused in the archives of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The logical proposal is to join interests for a new archaeological project, though this may be for our students in better times.
