

Donald Whitcomb

In early July, a repeat of the Umayyad Legacies conference of last year with reprise of ideas on Fustat provided **Donald Whitcomb** an opportunity to visit Beirut with Rana Mikati, to meet the Director of Antiquities with her, and to visit Baalbek. He had previously visited the Bīqa' valley to see the remarkable early Islamic foundation of Anjar, the subject of many a classroom presentation and striking parallel (model?) for the remains at Aqaba. A few days after returning to Chicago, fighting destroyed much of Beirut and even damaged Baalbek; happily Rana's family was safe and she returned to Chicago.

In November Don had an opportunity to return to Damascus for a conference on Late Antiquity and early Islam sponsored by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, where a total of some forty papers were presented. This was an overview of the results from the Aqaba excavations with a first presentation of the Mosque and Dar al-Imara. Sadly other activities have still prevented the publication of these discoveries. There was a day-trip to the still mysterious early Islamic town at Jebel Says (also known as Usais), which reveals a pattern of settlement surprisingly different and possibly Arabian in inspiration. Finally there was a return to the "desert castle" of Hallabat, not

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH



Don and Joy McCriston enjoy the diwan of King Abdulaziz palace in Dawasir, Saudi Arabia

far from Amman. This site has been the subject of the painstaking and precise investigation and reconstruction of Ignacio Arce, director of the Spanish archaeological mission. He has successfully identified a Ghassanid occupation (fifth–sixth centuries), a palace and monastery building upon the Roman fort, later translated into an early Islamic *qasr*.

Upon his return Don was invited to participate in a conference at Brown University on the archaeology of Jerusalem. This paper, “Jerusalem and the Beginnings of the Islamic City,” was the first public discussion of some rather unusual ideas on the initial transformation of that holy city, especially before a group of Israeli archaeologists who have excavated and studied Jerusalem for most of their careers. Their polite response and encouragement suggests that there will be more investigation of this neglected part of its history, somewhat ironic after the Israeli discovery and restoration of Islamic monuments south of the Haram al-Sharif. Participation of several Palestinian archaeologists also gives hope for a future through common understanding of archaeological research.

In the spring, Don began yet another possible project. Under the leadership of David Graf, a small group were invited to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the sponsorship of the Department of Antiquities and the American Embassy. At King Saud University in Riyadh, Don gave a paper on the “Archaeology of Islamic Urbanism,” which seemed rather like “bringing coals to Newcastle,” considering the expertise on this subject there. This visit included a wonderful trip to Qaryat al-Fau, pre-Islamic city in the center of the Kingdom. What they witnessed was an impressive revelation after twenty-five seasons of excavations and a vital contribution to pre-Islamic antecedents of Islamic cities of Arabia and the Middle East.

Along the way, Don’s students have progressed with increasingly specialized seminars on Islamic archaeology and relevant artifacts. Katherine Strange Burke took her doctorate with honors, having written her dissertation on the Sheikh’s house at Quseir al-Qadim. One fruition of these studies was that, in the fall, Tanya Treptow and Don began a collaboration on the concepts and practicalities of a temporary exhibit on the medieval Persian city of Rayy, modern Tehran. Some six months later this effort to explain Islamic archaeology resulted in the opening of *Daily Life Ornamented: The Medieval Persian city of Rayy*. Tanya and Don gave brief talks at the opening, his on Erich Schmidt, hers on archaeology and potsherds.

Most recently, the 10th International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan was held in Washington, D.C., where Don returned yet again to summarize the results in a paper, “Ayla at the Millennium,” referring to the year 1000 C.E.