

Donald Whitcomb

Donald Whitcomb left the last account of the individual research happily engaged in archaeological visits and research based at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. With the end of the school year, Donald's wife Janet Johnson was able to make her first visit to Israel. Of course this meant tours, but with a difference: Gideon Avni generously showed both around Jerusalem, including some places Don had not seen before; then they went to Caesarea with Ken Holum, its long-time excavator (and Yael Arnon, who engaged them in lively debates on multitudes of archaeological problems for the Islamic periods — more than Jan wished to hear). Next, they participated in an impromptu workshop organized by Edna Stern and Katherine Burke on Islamic ceramics. Then he took a trip south for a conference at Ben Gurion University in Beersheva, but mainly an excuse to visit a few of the sites in the Negev (Donald did try his hand at “gender archaeology” with a paper on the “Ladies of Quseir”).

Jan returned to Chicago in early July, just before Don participated in the “From Jahiliyya to Islam” conference; this is a very prestigious event at Hebrew University, which included a day of archaeological papers this year. He revised some old ideas on the origins of the mosque before a very knowledgeable and critical audience. In the last few weeks, Don wrapped up some long-standing papers on Islamic archaeology of Caesarea and Jerusalem. He was able to visit Rafi Greenberg's excavations at Khirbat Kerak (Beit Yerach), a site well known to the Oriental Institute. This year Rafi was working with a talented archaeologist, Taufik Dea'dle, on the Islamic component hoping to confirm Don's ideas on its medieval importance as Sinnabra. Both Rafi and Taufik are actively engaged in Community Archaeology, the involvement of local populations both Arab and Jewish in their understanding and appreciation of their archaeological heritage, in what Rafi calls “multivocular” approaches.

Finally, just before leaving Israel, Donald was able to attend a conference by the World Archaeological Congress in Ramallah. This was a wonderful opportunity to renew his acquaint-

tance and meet many Palestinian archaeologists and hear about progress on the West Bank. Don spoke with Hamdan Taha, director of the Palestinian Department of Archaeology, about his hopes for the site of Khirbat al-Mafjar. With the strong encouragement of Gil Stein, this led to a special visit to Ramallah, in March, for detailed plans for this site. Thus, the spring presentation of archaeological projects of the Oriental Institute included its newest, and very prestigious, excavation plans for the site of Khirbat al-Mafjar. The site is a magnificent early Islamic palace complex filled with



Hamdan Taha at the place entrance of Khirbat al-Mafjar



Gideon Avni and Taufik Dea'dle examine plans of Kkirbat Kerak

magnificent mosaics, stuccos, and — well, this will be the subject of a special report next year (*Inshallah*).
