

RESEARCH

Donald Whitcomb

This year has proved somewhat frustrating in the pursuit of fieldwork projects, but has more than filled up with teaching and participating in a variety of conferences. These papers varied from detailed examinations of particular cities to more generalized considerations of a model for the archaeology of the early Islamic city (see projects).

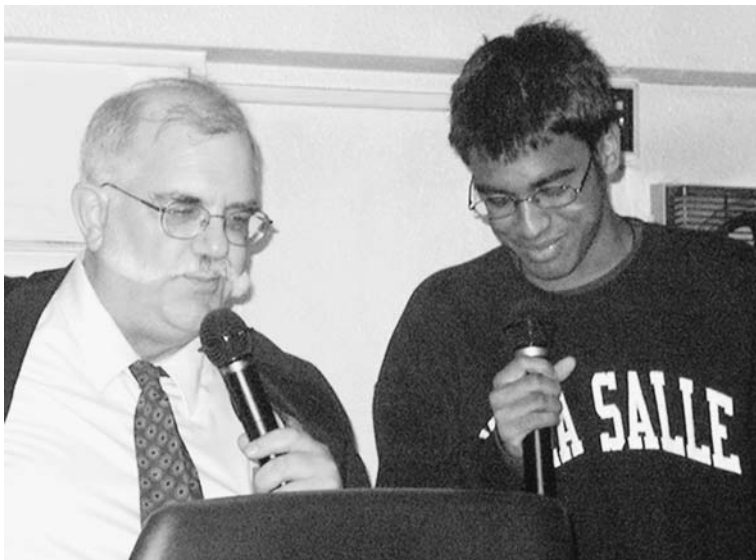
During the summer, the contexts for Qinnasrīn were explored in a conference held at the beautiful Danish Institute in Damascus, where **Donald Whitcomb** spoke on archaeological discoveries and al-Muqaddasī's account of northern Syria. This conference provided an occasion to visit Ḥaḍīr Qinnasrīn and pursue plans for another season of excavations at that site. This fieldwork was destined to be postponed until July 2005, when Marie-Odile Rousset could assume the direction of the French portion of the excavations.

Though mentioned last year, the development of an element of the early Islamic city was presented to a conference at Newnham College, Cambridge, on "The City and its Parts: Articulations of Ceremonial and Social Space in Islamic Urban Contexts" in July. The focus was on the "balāṭ" which might be considered an institution connected with the *diwān*, often ignored as a physical entity on the urban landscape. More broadly, the urban model was proffered to an interested and informed audience.

In the fall, there was a return to Iran, or rather to the region of his first research, the Persian Gulf. This took place in the unlikely island of Cyprus, at Limassol, where Larry Potter had organized a conference on "The Persian Gulf in History." Whitcomb presented a paper on the ports and settlements of the early Islamic period; this proved an interesting balance of textual resources for the Iranian coast (with the important addition of the Siraf excavations) against the archaeological evidence resulting from intensive surveys and excavations during the last two decades on the Arabian side, from Kuwait and Bahrain to the United Arab Emirates and Oman. He also visited Paphos and a number of medieval sugar factories, which have direct parallels to sites of earlier sugar industry in Jordan and in Khuzestan.

On the way to this venue, he stopped in Beirut where he lectured at the American University in Beirut and saw archaeological achievements during the amazing revival of downtown Beirut.

There was a necessary pilgrimage to 'Anjār, an archaeological site in the Baqa'a valley. The ruins of an early Islamic city, carefully planned and well preserved, lie within towered walls. He wandered among the palaces and houses with John Meloy, who studied for many years at the Oriental Institute, and Noha Sadek, known to many here for her research in Yemen. After studying and teaching this site for many years, it was most revealing to feel the to-



Don Whitcomb and his son, J. J., try karaoke while in Tokyo, Japan

pography of the city and the surrounding landscape.

An opportunity retrospectively to assess the progress in the archaeology of the Islamic city was provided with an invitation to attend the annual conference of The Middle East Culture Center in Japan (MECCJ) in November. His host, Prof. Mutsua Kawatoko (in the presence of HIH Prince Mikasa), organized a seminar on “Residences in Islamic Cities.” In addition to the conference, he visited the National Museum and the planned city of Kamakura, a Samurai capital of the thirteenth century.

In the winter, Whitcomb returned to the evidence recovered from Qinnasrīn which inspired a consideration of the archaeology of nomads. More precisely, this was the archaeological evidence for sedentarization in Bilād al-Shām (greater Syria) in the early Islamic period. A paper on this subject was offered in Halle, Germany, where a research program entitled “Difference and Integration” devoted a session to the subject of the visibility of nomads in the archaeological record. The Qinnasrīn evidence was compared to that at Abū Ṣuwwāna, as reported by Jodi Magness and published as an essay in *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives*, edited by Donald Whitcomb (Oriental Institute Seminars 1; Chicago, 2004), and recent work near ‘Aqaba.

The research of Jodi and Uzi Avner was the inspiration for a paper on Aqaba in light of its connections with the Wādī ‘Araba. The occasion for this was a special conference at the American Schools of Oriental Research on the archaeology of the Rift Valley, in which this geographical entity was considered as a single region. In the case of ‘Aqaba, this meant reuniting the medieval city with its agricultural and economic hinterland, located behind the modern city of Eilat.

Teaching was somewhat interrupted with the Iranian adventure, though several students took a seminar on Iran and Iraq offered in the fall. One point of pride is the second Ph.D. dissertation in Islamic Archaeology; in June, Tasha Vorderstrasse successfully defended her study of al-Minā, the port of Antioch. Though she can never be replaced, we are happy to see several new students in Islamic Archaeology will begin the program this fall. In addition to teaching a series of courses on Islamic Archaeology, there was an opportunity to use Jodi Magness’ new book, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine* (Winona Lake, 2003). The students had ample time to dissect the data and thesis of this monograph, when Jodi paid a visit to the class and explained the genesis and intentions of the book.

The spring thaw produced a rapid succession of conferences. The first was an invitation by Ken Holum to discuss the “Shaping of the Middle East: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in an Age of Transition, ca. 550–750 C.E.” Whitcomb took the challenge to attempt a synthesis of the formidable evidence for early Islamic Qayṣarīya (see *Project Reports*). The result was a confirmation of the role of the Caliph Mu‘awīya and a surprisingly coherent model of the formation of the Islamic city.

Two further conferences followed to the Qayṣarīya paper in Maryland. The first was at the Spring Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in which he presented “Amṣār Revisited.” In this paper he examined the concept of the *miṣr* as an urban foundation. This paper built upon ideas published some ten years earlier in which he perhaps more methodically attempted to move beyond the common concept of “garrison cities” or cantonments and make the case for a consciously organized program of urban settlement based on Arabian experience and the need to create a settlement to house the early Islamic *umma* or community. This was a debate which Paul Wheatley and Donald Whitcomb pondered for many years. The last paper was in the Aga Khan symposium at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he attempted to pay homage to

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Wheatley's monograph by considering his, and Muqaddasī's, use of archaeological evidence. Perhaps their relative negligence may be summed up in the words of Muqaddasī, who was a tenth century geographer:

“The cities of Solomon — peace upon him — Ba‘albakk and Tadmur,
are among the wonders [of al-Shām],
as are the Dome of the Rock, the mosque of Damascus,
and the harbors of Şūr (Tyre) and ‘Akka (Acre)” (186).

His acknowledgment of the impressive ruins of Ba‘albakk and Palmyra are balanced with two Islamic achievements in Jerusalem and Damascus. Then, the third leg was placed in economic foci, the two main harbors of Syria (the latter of which was built by Muqaddasī's grandfather).

Finally, in March, a rare chance to indulge in Ottoman archaeology presented itself at Northwestern University at the Great Lakes Workshop. Once again he turned to the Persian Gulf for a period rarely visited archaeologically. He resurrected some old field notes on al-Ḥaṣā oasis in eastern Saudi Arabia and examined the evidence in light of this fringe of the Ottoman Empire. The results once more confirmed the contribution possible from archaeological evidence in historical circumstances where documentary evidence might be considered more than ample. Several students from the Oriental Institute attended and may be among the rare archaeologists realizing the future value of Ottoman archaeology.
