

DONALD WHITCOMB

One of the more general results of the Aqaba excavations (see separate report) has been a focus on the phenomenon of the *amsar*, the new urban foundations which accompanied the Muslim conquest. **Donald Whitcomb's** first exploration into this subject, reported in the *Annual Report* for 1990–1991,

was expanded into a panel for the Middle East Studies Association meeting in Washington, D.C., in November. This panel was called, "New Approaches to the Early Islamic City," and examined a variety of early Islamic cities. This was followed in December by participation on two panels convened during the annual meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America. The first panel reported on Islamic Archaeology in Egypt and the second was a workshop on Islamic ceramics. He also attended a meeting of the North American Historians of Islamic Art, part of the College Art Association, in February. In the meantime he finished a study of the glass and bronze weights from the Aqaba excavations, entitled "Ayla in the Balance."

On the lighter side, Whitcomb was a negative voice during the brief excitement caused by mysterious discoveries in South Arabia. Reports of the legendary city of Ubar effectively masked the probably interesting and important results by Juris Zarins, an experienced Arabian explorer. This excitement coincided with an article he was preparing on the Arabian context of the results of the Aqaba excavations, provisionally entitled, "Out of Arabia." With visions of the golden towers of Ubar in mind, Whitcomb set off for his spring season at Aqaba.

This field season was preceded by participation in the Fifth Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan, held in Irbid, Jordan. Mr. Whitcomb presented a paper on the "Misr of Ayla," revising his earlier ideas with important new additions on the Arabian city (in effect arguing for a combination of orthogonal and cluster patterns). This conference was the occasion of the appearance of his "Reassessing the Archaeology of Jordan of the Abbasid Period," in the *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan IV* and, by coincidence, "The Islamic Period as Seen from Selected Sites," in *The Southern Ghors and Northeast Arabah Archaeological Survey*.

In the fall Mr. Whitcomb taught his popular course, "Egypt after the Pharaohs," as well as a reading course on Islamic architecture and a class for the archaeological theory course. He began work on a single volume encyclopedia, *An Encyclopedia of Islamic Archaeology*, contracted with Garland Press, which will be part of a series including encyclopedias of Egyptian, Anatolian, and Levantine archaeology. A board of advisors, made up of active archaeologists and historians of art in the Islamic field, has been assembled and invitations for articles have been sent out to over one hundred scholars with enthusiastic responses returned. Despite the excellent beginning, many scholars and subjects remain to be matched for this complex endeavor.
