

Donald Whitcomb

Donald Whitcomb initiated a new research project in Syria, the Hadir Qinnasrin excavations (see separate report). This is an international venture with participation of the Syrian directorate general and the Université de Paris IV (Sorbonne). This first season included only a brief survey and about 10 days of excavation. Nevertheless, the results were exactly as predicted and even may boast of new evidence for tribal settlement in the early Islamic (and possibly pre-Islamic) periods. At the end of the season, Pierre-Marie Blanc of the Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient (IFAPO) gave the team an exhaustive tour of the Byzantine and Islamic remains at Bosra.

In October Don returned to Jordan for a sort of busman's holiday, to assist the Belgian excavations at Lehun. He had spent some time digging a country mosque about ten years ago and was pleased to find some of his boys, now grown men, re-

membered that experience. This time he was teamed with Johnny De Meulenmeester, a professional excavator who works in Belgium, Luxembourg, and Spain on medieval (and occasionally Islamic) sites. With only about eleven days for digging, they revealed an Ottoman period farmstead that had more formal antecedents as an early Islamic *qasr* and very probably a Nabataean caravanserai. The stratigraphy was very strange, with 3 m in some rooms of Ottoman occupation while in the next room only 50 cm of Islamic before good Nabataean materials.

When this dig ended, Don met the indefatigable Bill Harms, of the University News Office, for a tour of the antiquities of Jordan. Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, the Director of Antiquities, arranged for interviews and transportation to see the major archaeological sites. This naturally featured a visit to Aqaba and the Oriental Institute excavations there. The Aqaba Inspector, Sausan Fakhry, showed us the immense changes wrought by a new hotel built directly beside the site. She has been laboring to lessen its impact and to secure and beautify the site, a Herculean task. Finally she showed us the excavations of “the earliest church,” uncovered by the University of North Carolina in Aqaba and subject of some uncertainty. A few days later Suleiman Farajat arranged a tour of Petra and we saw the beautiful, newly protected Petra church. Bill’s only comment was “Now, *that’s* a church.”

Returning to Chicago, Don participated in a special session of the Middle East Studies Association organized for the Syrian Studies Association by Dorothee Sack from Berlin. He presented “Two Abbasid Farmsteads near Tell Sweyhat.” The irony is that these materials, collected over 25 years ago, now fit a pattern clarified by the results from Hadir Qinnasrin and other recent work in Syria. In the midst of this Syrian involvement, Don was filmed for an Iranian television documentary on the archaeology of Iran. Over the past few years, Don has maintained his original interest in Iran by writing a series of articles for *festschriften*. In addition to waiting for publication of these articles, two long-awaited articles on Arabia suddenly descended, “Out of Arabia: Early Islamic Aqaba in its Regional Context” and “The Darb Zubayda as a Settlement System in Arabia.”

Finally, this year marks the fruition of many years of promoting Islamic archaeology – the arrival of a group of students specializing in this field. Since the number of archaeology students and students from other areas of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations has grown, Don offered an increasing number of courses, including Egypt after the Pharaohs, Late Levant, and major revisions in his Introduction to Islamic Archaeology.
