

## Donald Whitcomb

**Donald Whitcomb's** major activity this year was a large season of excavations at Aqaba (see separate report). This season was unusual in that the staff and students of the team were truly international. The backbone of the team was the Jordanian students and staff, many of whom returned as veterans of previous seasons. We welcomed the addition of two students from the Palestinian Institute of Archaeology at Bir Zeit University and another French student from the École Biblique in Jerusalem. The main excitement of the season, aside from the archaeological finds, was the earthquake of October 22nd, which measured 6.2 on the Richter scale. Happily no one was hurt and our residence was unharmed. Two days later, Janet and the kids (J. J. and Felicia) arrived in Aqaba and experienced a few of the aftershocks (which continued up to the last days of digging; the earthquake on December 26th measured 5.2 on Richter scale).

During the excavations, Don went to Amman and gave a lecture for a Tourist Guides training program. Back in Aqaba, the excavations welcomed Peter Piccione and a tour from the Oriental Institute Travel Program. We managed to squeeze a brief visit to the site and museum into their very full schedule. No sooner had Don returned to Chicago than the artifacts from this season arrived. Almost directly after being unpacked, these objects had to be moved to a new, temporary Islamic Archaeology Laboratory, Room 320 (generously loaned by the Assyrian Dictionary). During the summer, we were lucky to have Lammya Khalidi return to assist in drawing the artifacts, including the marble head of the Roman period, mentioned in "*Aqaba Work Defies Mother Nature*" (*News & Notes*, No. 149, Spring 1996, p. 4).

Back in Chicago, Don gave a lecture on Docents' Day in September on trade and the concept of the "Fertile Crescent." Other lectures were given to an Islamic Civilization class (on cities and settlers) and to a Near Eastern Archaeology class on Islamic settlement in southwest Arabia. He also lectured to the Mamluk Studies workshop on the "State of the Art of Mamluk Archaeology." The exhibit on "Ayla: Art and Industry in the Islamic Port of Aqaba" continued to be on display in the Oriental Institute museum and has the somewhat dubious honor of being the last exhibit before the closing of the museum. The exhibit will now be taken to Jordan and put on display in Aqaba, where a new, larger museum has been approved and will soon be built. Don has taken responsibility for editing archaeological articles for *al-'Usur al-Wusta*, the newsletter of Middle East Medievalists, edited by Fred Donner of the Oriental Institute. This group was formed to disseminate information and ideas on medieval history with an emphasis on primary evidence. Unlike many such organizations, the Middle East Medievalists group has recognized the value of Islamic archaeology and a tradition has developed of having a lead article on new archaeological discoveries of historical importance.

His interest in Arabia resulted in an invitation from King Saud University in Riyadh, where Don gave a series of lectures to the Department of Archaeology of the university with active participation of the history department in March. He also gave a lecture at the museum of the Department of Antiquities; this was an interesting return,

since he had done research in the museum almost twenty years ago. Finally, the university arranged for Don to visit the al-'Ula archaeological sites, including the Petra-like tombs at Mada'in Salih and the early Islamic city of Qurh (al-Mabiyat). His guide on this visit was Dr. Khalil al-Muaikel, who became known to many at the Oriental Institute during his time studying here. One of the most interesting observations in Saudi Arabia is the number of recently abandoned towns and the ready availability of traditional architecture. While the government is actively protecting some of these monuments, the sheer quantity of these threatens the permanent loss of valuable aspects of Saudi life and culture. In a curious connection, soon after returning, Don attended a symposium on Ottoman archaeology at Binghamton University. This meeting stressed the growing interest throughout the Middle East of archaeology of the very recent past, a field which could eventually even be incorporated into the ken of the Oriental Institute.

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