

# IN MEMORIAM

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## ALDIS V. LIVENTALS

A long-standing friend and supporter of ISAC, Al Liventals passed away in autumn 2023. Al joined our Advisory Council in 2015 and was especially dedicated to the Jericho Mafjar Project, our Islamic collection, and our Tablet Collection.

Born in Riga, Latvia, Al immigrated to the United States after World War II and grew up in the Midwest. He graduated from Northwestern University with a bachelor of science degree in chemical engineering and a master of business administration degree in quantitative methods. He joined Mobil Corporation (now ExxonMobil) and held numerous roles worldwide in that organization, including posts in Saudi Arabia and Singapore and responsibility for Mobil's interests in China, East Africa, and Latin America. Al transitioned from field operative to industry theoretician and retired as the head of Mobil's strategic planning unit in Fairfax, Virginia. Throughout his career, Al enjoyed the local history, archaeology, and traditional arts of the regions he worked in. His assignment in Saudi Arabia inspired a particular appreciation for Middle Eastern history, Bedouin culture, and what he described as a "serious addiction" to tribal rugs. Al is survived by his wife, Malda; a daughter; and a son and his family.



## DONALD S. WHITCOMB

Donald Scott Whitcomb, a research associate professor at ISAC and in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) of the University of Chicago, passed away in February 2024 at the age of seventy-nine.

A pioneering scholar in the field of Islamic archaeology, Don excavated at numerous sites throughout the Middle East, including Quseir al-Qadim on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, Luxor on the east bank of the Nile in Upper Egypt, the port of Aqaba in Jordan, and Khirbet al-Mafjar in Jericho in the Palestine territories. His 1992 discovery in Aqaba of a hoard of thirty-two rare gold coins made headlines around the world.

Don's groundbreaking scholarship helped develop basic theoretical and methodological standards for the field, demonstrated that Islamic material culture is an essential part of medieval studies, and provided evidence for the development of Islamic societies and economies by unearthing and studying artifacts that can be compared with relevant text sources. Don published eight books and many articles on topics ranging from his excavations to theoretical research on the implications of particular sites for the history and culture of Islam. He was a trusted mentor who created master's and doctoral programs in Islamic archaeology at the University of Chicago that were based on the breadth of his fieldwork geographically and temporally and provided practical field training for generations of students. As his former student A. Asa Eger noted, "Rare is the publication [in Islamic archaeology] that does not reference him" (*Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 11, no. 1 [2024]: 1–2). In 2018, Don received the Middle East Medievalists' Lifetime Achievement Award for his transformative work in historic Islamic archaeology.



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Don was born in 1944 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. After graduating from Emory University with a bachelor's degree in art history in 1966, he joined the Peace Corps and taught English in Bushire, Iran. After returning to the United States, he earned a master's degree in anthropology from the University of Georgia in 1971 and a doctorate in Islamic archaeology from the University of Chicago's Department of Anthropology in 1979.

From 1981 to 2024, Don was a research associate at ISAC and an associate professor in NELC. In addition to his teaching and fieldwork throughout much of the Middle East, incorporating and developing the latest survey and excavation techniques, he also served as a research fellow at the American Center of Research in Amman, Jordan; the American Research Center in Egypt in Cairo; the Smithsonian Institution; the Field Museum of Natural History; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. From the beginning, he was especially active in the illumination of ports, international trade, and the development of Islamic urbanism. He enjoyed mentoring young scholars, several of whom are now established academics in the field of Islamic archaeology. He was proud to work with both Palestinian and Israeli students and colleagues and to excavate in both areas.

According to Don's family, he loved to explore and be outdoors. He enjoyed riding tractors, barbecuing at his family farm in Indiana, and Saturday morning soccer games. He liked reading, especially sitting in the garden with a good book.

Don is survived by his wife of forty-eight years, Janet H. Johnson, the Morton D. Hull Distinguished Service Professor Emerita of Egyptology in NELC, and his two children, John and Felicia.

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