



**RESEARCH**



## PROJECT REPORTS

### ARCHAEOLOGY OF ISLAMIC CITIES

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I outlined the contribution of the Oriental Institute to this field of research in the last *Annual Report*. This year requires a shift of focus to the nature of these studies outside of the Institute.

The role of the International Congress for the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE) has become fundamental for Islamic as well as for earlier Near Eastern archaeology. During the introduction to the 2008 meetings, I was invited to give a plenary statement on the relationship of “Ancient and Islamic” in Near (or Middle) Eastern archaeology and those present in Rome formally voted to include Islamic archaeology as an integral part of ICAANE. Our Italian hosts have now published this congress; this address begins a separate volume of *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE)*, Volume 3: *Islamic Session* (edited by Paolo Matthiae, Lorenzo Nigro, and Nicolo Marchetti; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010). The volume presents some seventeen papers, over half Italian contributions illustrating the variety and intensity of Islamic research. Likewise, over half of the subjects are found in the region of Bilad al-Sham (mainly Syria), followed by Iran and Afghanistan. Happily, one paper, by Alison Gascoigne, adds an Egyptian study, an area not normally included in the ICAANE meetings. While many papers are very useful site reports, others specialized in material artifacts, particularly the common interest in ceramics.

The seventh ICAANE meetings were held in London, in April, at the British Museum and University College. A curious arrangement for papers meant that some Islamic subjects were transferred to main themes; nevertheless, thirty-one papers (almost twice as many) in Islamic archaeology were given compared to the ones in Rome. This time, about two-thirds of the subject dealt with studies in Bilad al-Sham, but many more from Turkey and a good representation of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions. The Icelandic ash clouds prolonged the meetings, and conversations shifted from purely academic archaeology to tactical information on getting back (renting cars, flying to Madrid, etc.). Prompted by my Israeli colleagues, we visited the Victoria & Albert Museum to examine the new exhibitions of the ceramics department. The entire sixth floor, endowed with splendid natural light (even during the ash emergency),



*Figure 1. Exhibition case of Islamic ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1983*

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**Figure 2.** *Palestinian school group entering the palace structure at Khirbat al-Mafjar*

Baramki; this rare work is an account of the excavations at Khirbat al-Mafjar by its principal archaeologist and his unpublished interpretations of that early Islamic site (fig. 2).

This year may be considered a special “moment” in the history of Islamic archaeology with the appearance of two monographs dedicated to the discipline. The first is Alan Walmsley’s *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (London, 2007). This volume had not appeared in time for the previous ICAANE and has now been used in classrooms. Styled as part of the Duckworth Debates in Archaeology, Walmsley picks up themes under constant discussion: material culture and social change, settlement processes (especially “urban archaeology”), and the nature of Islamic archaeology and Islamic studies. Sometimes the “debate” is a little forced, but the balance and presentation is extraordinary. Coming from some six months in Jerusalem, I found the coverage of sites and materials in Israel/Palestine somewhat limited in view of the wealth of information becoming available. This would have required another, much larger book.

More recently, Marcus Milwright has published *An Introduction to Islamic Archaeology* (Edinburgh, 2010). This book is intended as a general text book, defining the nature of the discipline and then giving detailed descriptions of the Islamic world from a traditional culture historical approach. He includes a wide range of examples that produces a rather kaleidoscopic effect on the topic under discussion. However, this is not the place to review the book but only to bring it to the attention of the interested scholar and student.

To these may be added, or in a sense will be augmented by, recent dissertations on Islamic archaeology (which came to my attention when I was asked to serve as an external reader). Denis Genequand is a Swiss archaeologist who in February took his doctorate from Lausanne and the Sorbonne (technically two degrees). He is well known to archaeologists working in Syria and Jordan for his numerous surveys and now excavations at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, al-Bakhra, and



**Figure 3.** *Sgraffiato ceramics from Banbhore, Pakistan (courtesy K. Lashari, 2006)*

at Palmyra (Tadmor). In many years of field research, he has been fixated on one question — the nature of the early Islamic *qusur*, the so-called “desert castles” — or as he styles them, “aristocratic Umayyad residences.” The number of these monuments that have been identified seems to grow every year and many of these discoveries, both important and additional examples, belong to Denis. He has further seriously considered the ecological and economic basis through field observations and testing. In sum, the dissertation brings a much needed synthesis to this important subject; it will not be a block-buster movie, but certainly a pleasing monograph.

The subject of the *qusur* leads back to the newest of the Oriental Institute projects, the site of Khirbet al-Mafjar, near Jericho. This project returns to an early excavation of the 1930s and 1940s with new ideas for archaeological discoveries. Another approach is the revelation of new archaeological regions for which there is little knowledge. Here, a second dissertation allows the addition of the Sind, the southern province of Pakistan, as a new lecture for the Introduction to Islamic Archaeology course. The dissertation is a thorough study of the Islamic ceramics (fig. 3) of the Sind by Annabelle Collinet, submitted to the Sorbonne and based on the extensive excavations and surveys of Monique Kervran. There are no doubt many other research products; and the sum of the information from professional meetings, publications, and dissertations — not to mention fieldwork — points to the growing need for a means of communication, probably the long dreamt Web site.

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