

OBITUARY

BASTIAAN VAN ELDEREN, 1925-2004

Our friend and colleague Bastiaan Van Elderen passed away on Sunday, August 8, 2004. He had been under treatment for a recurrence of cancer, which had weakened him, though his condition was not 'terminal'. He died of a heart attack, but nevertheless peacefully, at home, 79 years old.

A graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, with advanced degrees from the University of California at Berkeley and the Pacific School of Religion (Th. D. 1961), Dr. Van Elderen was world-renowned for his expertise in New Testament. In his impressive teaching career as Professor of New Testament, which included tenures at Calvin Theological Seminary (1958-1984, Grand Rapids, Mich., USA) and the Free University of Amsterdam (1984-1990, Nederland), he inspired a generation of students to pursue scholarly careers, especially in early Christian manuscript studies. His keen interest in early Christianity governed his choices of archaeological field work.

Dr. Van Elderen's career in field archaeology spanned over forty years. He began with two seasons as area supervisor on the Wheaton College excavation at Dothan on the West Bank (1962, 1964) and one season on the British Institute of Archaeology Excavations at Alahan, Turkey (1965). After 1967 he served as an area supervisor for the Andrews University Excavations at Tall Óisbān (four seasons, 1968-1974), where his main assignment was the excavation and preliminary publication of the acropolis church.

Concurrently he served two terms as director of the American Center for Oriental Research (ACOR), in 1970 and 1972-1974, at a time when the center was located in a home near the Third Circle on Jabal 'Ammān where he resided with his wife (Vivolyn Van Elderen) and daughter (Anita Eerdmans). As ACOR director he availed himself to the Department of Antiquities on numerous res-

cue excavations at churches, like those at Māsūh, Kufr Abū Šarbūṭ and aš-Šwayfiyya. His fluency in Koine Greek was applied to excellent epigraphic work on Byzantine mosaics and other inscriptions. One especially memorable achievement is the decipherment and translation of the duplicate dedicatory inscriptions of the Jarash South Theater, which attributed construction patronage to the Emperor Domitian.

In the mid-seventies his focus shifted to Egypt's early monastic communities. He directed the Nag Hammadi Excavations from 1975-80, and served as principle investigator of the Wadi Natrun Excavations from 1992 to the present. But even Jordan drew him back, he served on the senior staff of the Abila Excavations for six field seasons from 1986-1996.

Notably, much of this active field work continued after his retirement from teaching at the Free University. Moreover, after he and his wife Vivolyn returned to Michigan in the nineties, he developed a mini-career in museum-related jobs. First he served as director of the Scriptorium in Grand Haven (1996-2001), then as program director of the Dead Sea Scroll Exhibit at the Grand Rapids Public Museum (2002-2003). His scholarly writing, which included numerous articles and field reports, reflect his passion for the history of early Christianity, and continued into the final year of his full life.

Those of us who sat in his classes were served up a smorgasbord of archaeological landscapes, backed with slides of the hundreds, if not thousands, of sites he knew intimately and loved deeply from over forty years of travel, excavation and residence in the East Mediterranean.

Bert de Vries
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