

Reminiscences of the École by a Student of the Scrolls

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Introduction

My presentation will be a more personal account of my relation to the École Biblique as a student of the Scrolls. I would like to recall my own experience as a student there from 1974 to 1976 and, as a result, of my involvement in the study of the Dead Scrolls during my academic career at the Université de Montréal.

Background and first contact with the École

Let me first provide some information about what brought me to the École.

In the footsteps of Guy Couturier

I began to study theology at the Université de Montréal in 1968 and I took several courses in the Biblical area with a young, competent and enthusiastic scholar, Prof. Guy Couturier, whose background was really impressive. After a first degree in theology in Rome, he had studied Semitic languages in Baltimore and Paris, and had spent three years at the École Biblique, studying and working with Fr. Roland de Vaux, among others, who was a true mentor for him particularly in the fields of history and archeology of Ancient Israel.

When teaching on the social criticism of the prophet Amos, Guy could talk vividly of the clear separation between the rich and the poor that he had seen, materialized in the stones of Tirzah, the ancient capital city of the Northern Kingdom, where he had taken part in two excavation campaigns led by Fr. de Vaux. The time spent in the classroom with such a teacher always ran out too fast.

I married Paule-Renée Villeneuve in the summer of 1972. As part of our wedding trip, we spent two weeks in Israel, where Guy was completing a sabbatical leave at the École Biblique. We were privileged to visit not only Jerusalem with him, but also Qumran, Masada, Jericho, and a few other sites. His passion for history and archeology, already noticeable in the classroom, was all the more visible *in situ* where it was as if he was bringing the stones to life in front of us.

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Graduates studies at the Université de Montréal (1973-74)

When we were back in Canada, Guy invited me to consider a graduate degree in Biblical studies. I registered, providing that he would be my research director. Guy immediately suggested that I explore a new and promising field of studies, the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Having gone through introductory publications on the Scrolls and read them in the French translation by André Dupont-Sommer, I was attracted by one specific text, which contained what was thought to be a key doctrine of the Scrolls, the « Treatise on the Two Spirits », found in the Community Rule (1QS III 13 – IV 26). I wrote my Master's thesis on this fabulous text.

Historical criticism was the flavor of the day and, learning much from a few pages of a recently published dissertation, I explored the literary growth of this text, along with its biblical and possibly Iranian background. One of my findings was that the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness, who appeared in this text as the supernatural leaders of the forces of good and evil, may have been introduced in a secondary development of an earlier wisdom instruction.

But Guy had more projects for me. He strongly encouraged me to apply for doctoral scholarships and to spend two years as a student at the École Biblique. Based on his own experience, he explained that I would be trained for advanced research in close contact with the top scholars in their field, learn Biblical history and archeology by visiting the sites with experts, and be part of a stimulating community of teachers, researchers, and students from several parts of the world. How would you resist such arguments? I did apply, got funding, and was admitted to the École.

Two years as a student of the Scrolls at the École (1974-76)

1974-75

I left for Jerusalem in May 1974 with Paule-Renée and our first son, Bernard, who was then almost five months old. But we were not alone. During his sabbatical year, Guy had planned a four weeks' field trip in Biblical history and archeology that the Université de Montréal was offering for the first time. We spent the month of May visiting some 60 archeological sites, museums, etc., all over the country. By the end of the month the group returned to Montreal. I spent the next two months with my small family in a guesthouse and in a convent. We finally found an apartment in East Jerusalem, where we settled for the next two years.

One of the reasons why I came to the École was to work under the direction of Fr. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. He was a leading authority in Dead Sea Scrolls studies and had published several articles on the literary growth of the Community Rule and the Damascus Document. I took a class with him on the history of the Community of Qumran.

I also discussed with Fr. Murphy-O'Connor a topic for the "mémoire", a substantial essay that regular students of the École are to write during the academic year. I showed him my hypothesis about the figures of the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness. He was not totally convinced

by my argument that they were part of a secondary development in the Treatise on the Two Spirits. But he nevertheless agreed that the study of other texts where similar figures appeared could help clarify the situation. One of such texts was found in column XIII of the Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, in short the War Scroll.

This is how I was “drawn into the war”, so to speak, sitting for several hours a day in the library of the École and trying to make sense of column XIII of the War Scroll. Fortunately, a few other people there were also involved in Dead Sea Scrolls studies, and we had frequent opportunities to discuss our ideas and to support one another. Near my desk in the library were Fr. Jean Pouilly, a French monk also studying under with Fr. Murphy-O’Connor, and two researchers at the beginning of their careers: a French epigraphist by the name of Émile Puech and a young Spanish scholar by the name of Florentino García-Martínez. We developed a friendship which is still very much alive.

The École had obviously other things to offer as well. During this year, I studied selected texts of the Books of Samuel, Biblical archeology, the topography of Jerusalem, rabbinical literature, and Aramaic. Our group of students also spent several days visiting Samaria and the Southern part of the country (Shephelah, Negev). At the end of June 1975, I left with my family for a two months’ stay in Munich to improve my knowledge of German.

We came back at the end of August and I still had a month to complete the mémoire. This work led to the unexpected conclusion that the presence of the Prince of Light and his opponent Belial in column XIII of the War Scroll was also the result of a development of an earlier hymn praising God and his “mighty hand” for having provided help to the true remnant of his people. A revised version of this mémoire was published in the journal of the École, *Revue Biblique* (1977).

1975-76

The next year at the École (1975-76) was as busy as the previous one. I took courses and seminars on the Books of Samuel and the Book of Isaiah, the history of the Exilic and Post-Exilic periods, Biblical geography, structuralist interpretation of the Bible, textual criticism of the New Testament, and Ancient Syriac. There were also field trips to Galilee, around the lake of Tiberias, and in the Sinai area.

But there was also something new. Prof. John Strugnell, from Harvard University, was spending a sabbatical year at the École. He was a member of the team responsible for the official edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and I was suggested to work with him for my mémoire. Prof. Strugnell was also preparing a Commentary on the Book of Ben Sira and he convinced me to write my essay on a section called “The Praise of the Fathers” (chap. 44-50).

After a few months, however, it became clear to me that I would not make it. Looking for an alternative, I returned to the “Treatise on the Two Spirits” and I made a thorough analysis of the

various redactional levels found in it. The mémoire was accepted and published in the *Revue Biblique* (1977) and, as a result, I could finally get the Diploma (“Diplôme”) of the École.

During these two years spent at the École, I benefited from privileged contacts with professors and scholars sharing their research. They were models of dedication, rigorous scholarship, clarity, and openness. I also got to know them as human beings, with their qualities and weaknesses, in search of a balanced professional and personal life style. I made lasting contacts with colleagues, students who became scholars in various academic institutions. I was privileged to use what was already a first class library in the field, even if it was rather cold and humid during the Palestinian winter. This stay provided a significant experience of the Land of the Bible, its geography, history, and archeology, which was somewhat different from what can be found in books alone. Through the contacts of the École and its reputation, doors were also opened for its students to various other institutions in the area, such as the Studium Biblicum of the Franciscans, the Museum of Israel, the Hebrew University, etc. Finally, living with a family near the École, in the Eastern part of Jerusalem, provided an opportunity to get better acquainted with the daily life of ordinary Palestinian people.

An academic career as a student of the Scrolls (1976-2013)

Keeping in touch with the École

Following these studies at the École, I applied for a position in exegesis of the Old Testament at the Université de Montréal where I started teaching half-time in 1976 and full time in 1980 until my recent retirement.

During the first years of my career, I had to focus on the contents of the courses that I was teaching in the Biblical field. Among them was the historical and archeological field trip to Israel set up by Guy. We were partners in this activity which was offered every other year until 1984. The tour included, of course, a visit to the École Biblique, which was an occasion to keep in touch with people there.

I was later given the opportunity to come back to the École Biblique in 2002 for the Winter term as the visiting professor of the Catholic Biblical Association. I convened a weekly seminar on “The Contribution of the Social Sciences to Bible and Qumran Study.”

I was very pleased to be back at the École, renewing acquaintances with its professors and getting to know a new generation of enthusiastic and serious students. One of my most pleasant surprises was to discover a newly renovated library, filling two floors, brightly lit, air-conditioned and equipped with computers linked together in a network, with an electronic catalogue through which you could perform a search in a matter of seconds. In the meantime, at the museum, a team led by Fr. Jean-Baptiste Humbert was preparing the second of a series of volumes planned to complete the publication of the Qumran excavations.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, again and again

Around 1982, I was able to resume my studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I planned to use sabbatical years to advance my research in universities and similar institutions providing research facilities and access to the relevant literature. I took part as much as I could in academic gathering on the Scrolls, both to discuss my findings and to learn from other scholars.

The topics for my research were in continuity with what I had done at the École as a student. I revisited the Treatise of the Two Spirits time and again, studying it from different angles. I devoted articles to a detailed analysis of the structure of its main section (1QS IV 2-12) and of the whole treatise (1QS III 13 —IV 26). It also became the starting point of articles on “Dualism”, “Determinism” and on “Light and Darkness” for the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2000).

I remained very much attracted by the War Scroll. At the École, I had noticed that the literary genre of this scroll was still a much debated question. During a first sabbatical year (1984-85), I benefited from orientations provided by Hans-Dieter Betz at the University of Chicago to explore the suggestion, put forward by Yigael Yadin but not fully substantiated, that the War Scroll could have been modelled after ancient Greco-Roman military manuals. I found ten such manuals, grouped them into four categories, and identified one of them, the “tactical treatise”, as the type to which the War Scroll would best compare in spite of its specific characteristics.

Following this, I was asked to prepare an annotated transcription and translation of the War Scroll manuscripts for the Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scroll Project led by James H. Charlesworth, another alumnus of the École Biblique (1995). A fully revised translation was published in *Outside the Bible*, a collection of ancient Jewish writings related to Scripture (2013). For this updated edition, I largely benefited from a detailed review of the first one written by Émile Puech and from personal correspondence with him.

I also wrote an introductory book entitled *The War Texts* for the series “Companion to the Qumran Scrolls” (2004) and summarized the main points in articles for the *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (2009) and the *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (2010).

These were not the only topics which I developed in my career as a student of the Scrolls. If I am pointing to these, it is to show how the work initiated during my graduate studies in Montreal and then at the École Biblique during my two years’ stay in the 1970’s was fruitful and prompted material and ideas for several years to come.

In addition to these two central topics, I have done work on messianism, wisdom texts, beliefs in the afterlife, etc. in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since 2005 I have also been involved, with a team of Canadian scholars and students, in a new French bilingual edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls called “La Bibliothèque de Qumrân”, still in progress.

Wei Wang

In an article exploring “Recent Studies on Messianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (1997), I was advocating for a social scientific study of Qumran messianism. Sometime after that, a graduate student of Chinese background by the name of Wei Wang came to my office and explained that he would like to take this as a topic for his doctoral dissertation.

Wei was admitted to the doctoral program in 2009. He knew almost nothing about the Dead Sea Scrolls then, but he was a hard and disciplined worker, learning very fast. As he was doing the course work and preparing the comprehensive examination required for the doctoral program, he received the publicity from the Canadian Friends of the École Biblique and decided to apply for a scholarship. I strongly recommended him and he was awarded a grant to spend the Winter term of 2012 at the École.

Wei worked under the direction of Émile Puech, with whom he was initiated into the mysteries of paleography, significantly improved his knowledge of the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Qumran texts, and got a better understanding of the issues involved in their interpretation. I could not have dreamed of a better way to complete his preparation for the doctoral dissertation.

When he came back, he successfully completed the comprehensive examination, got his proposal approved and wrote a very good thesis on “Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls”. His thesis was accepted in 2014 and is now accessible online at the library of the Université de Montréal. Unfortunately, Wei became severely ill and he went through several treatments for cancer. Earlier this year he died peacefully, leaving us with the image of a talented student, a loving husband and father, and a man of deep faith.

I officially retired from the Université in 2013. But I keep working on a few projects, particularly “La Bibliothèque de Qumrân”. In addition to that, I have recently accepted an invitation by my colleague Marc Girard to contribute to his preparation of the Book of Psalms for the ongoing project of the École Biblique, “La Bible en ses traditions” (BEST). We are looking together at all the relevant Psalm material found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as in related ancient Jewish texts, in order to include in the BEST the most significant references.

A unique institution

When I look back at my career as a student of the Dead Sea Scrolls, I realize how much the two years spent at the École were determinant for me. My interest for the Dead Sea Scrolls, first prompted by Guy Couturier in Montreal, flourished at the École in the company of scholars and students sharing the same passion. This experience has marked my academic journey up to this day. It has been significant not only in terms of teaching, research and publication, but also in terms of professional networking and even personal friendship.

When I look ahead, I wish that I will see in the near future the completion, by the team of the École Biblique, of the publication of Fr. De Vaux’s excavations at Qumran. I also realize that

among the younger generations of Qumran scholars, many have received part of their education at the École, or have been working with scholars connected to it.

I hope that this will last for many years to come and that the École will continue to stand as a place where scholars involved in Dead Sea Scrolls research can share and discuss their ideas and support each other. I also wish, more generally, that the École will remain and develop as a centre of high level training in Biblical studies and related areas, and that the Association of its Canadian Friends will maintain, and hopefully increase, its support for Canadian students and scholars willing to benefit from and contribute to this unique institution.