

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the École Biblique

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I am pleased to be invited to say a few words this evening to highlight the important and critical role that the École Biblique played in the early years of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls – a role it continues to play, in a somewhat different manner, in the present.

The links between Dead Sea Scrolls and the École have not always been well understood. I don't know how many times over the years people have asked me: Where are the scrolls kept at the École? Are there scrolls still hidden in the basement?

Anyone who read *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, a book that was very popular for a brief moment around 1990, came away with a somewhat sinister view of the situation. According to these journalists, it was the Vatican – from the very beginning, even before anyone really knew what was in the scrolls – that thought the scrolls might contain something totally new and disruptive, which, it somehow sensed might cause damage to the Catholic faith,. And so, according to these journalists, the Vatican manipulated the situation so that the Dominicans at the École would control the whole process of publication and access.

In fact, the reality was far less dramatic and more mundane. As Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (a Dominican from the École) wrote in his response to Baigent and Leigh, the

involvement of the Dominicans was initiated not by the Vatican, but by an English Protestant gentleman, Gerald Lankester Harding, the Director of Antiquities of Jordan. According to Murphy-O'Connor, Harding “chose [the Dominicans] only because they were on the spot and had the qualified manpower that his fledgling department lacked.”

Two names come up repeatedly in the early years of the discovery: Gerald Lankester Harding and Roland de Vaux. Harding was a British archaeologist, born in China and raised in Singapore, who was head of Department of Antiquities from 1936 during the British Mandate and then head of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities from 1949 until his abrupt dismissal during the Suez Crisis in 1956.

Roland de Vaux was born in Paris, ordained a priest in 1929, and became a member of the Dominican order. He came to the École in 1933, where he served as professor of history and archaeology, director of the school from 1945–65, president of the board of trustees of the Palestine Archaeology Museum (sometimes called the Rockefeller Museum, which opened in 1938). All of de Vaux's roles overlapped and meshed: archaeologist, director, trustee of the Museum, friend of Lankester Harding. Often it is hard to know in what capacity he was acting. (Fr. Jean Jacques Pérennès, the present Director of the École, is currently writing a biography of de Vaux – it promises to be a wonderful resource.)

However, before we talk more about de Vaux and Harding, we need to backtrack, since de Vaux did not come on the scene until more than two years *after* the first Dominicans became involved with the scrolls.

To recall briefly the history:

- The first cave was found in the winter/spring, perhaps late 1946 or January/February 1947;
- Some scrolls that were taken from cave 1 were brought to Bethlehem in March/April 1947 to an antiquities dealer (Kando) who had ties with the Syrian Orthodox church.
- In July 1947 four of the scrolls were taken to St. Mark's Monastery (near Jaffa Gate) and entrusted to Mar Athanasius Samuel.
- Sometime in July 1947, Archbishop Samuel invited a Dominican from the École whom he knew through the Syriac church, Fr. Marmadji (a priest of the Syrian rite from Baghdad, who taught Arabic at the École), to come and see some scrolls in his possession.

We know really nothing about that first visit, but ten days later (at the end of July or early August 1947), Marmadji asked to bring a fellow Dominican to see the scrolls: Fr. Johannes Van der Ploeg, from Holland, who was studying at the École.

Van der Ploeg describes how a tray was brought out with three scrolls. As the largest was unrolled, Van der Ploeg recognized a copy of Isaiah (he was probably the first to make this identification). The second, smaller scroll, he thought was “some other biblical book, but not certain” – probably the commentary (*Pesher*) on Habakkuk. Another scroll – what came to be called *The Rule of the Community* – he recognized as not being a biblical work. Although the Archbishop was claiming that the scrolls were two thousand years old, Van der Ploeg was very skeptical. He assumed that they must be much more recent, perhaps medieval at best, taken/stolen from some synagogue.

When he recounted his visit to his colleagues at the École, he was warned by “an eminent scholar” that these were probably forgery. Some years later, in re-telling the incident, he wrote: “I was confirmed in my conviction that the scrolls were of no further significance to me personally and I paid no further attention to the matter.”

We don't know exactly when de Vaux and other Dominicans at the École first became aware of the discovery. It was later in the year, November 1947, when Dr. Eleazar Sukenik, from Hebrew University, made his famous trip by bus to Bethlehem and purchased three scrolls (*The Thanksgiving Psalms*, *The War Scroll* and a fragmentary copy of Isaiah). The Archbishop kept his four scrolls at the monastery and eventually showed them to scholars at the Albright Institute in Jerusalem on Feb. 18, 1948. Soon after, he took these four scrolls with him and fled to Beirut and eventually to the United States.

The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) made the first public announcement of the discovery of four scrolls on April 10, 1948. Two weeks later, on April 26, 1948, Sukenik put out his own press announcement, surprising everyone by announcing that he possessed three more scrolls.

When and what the Dominicans at the École first heard about all this is unclear. Harding did not seem to have known anything until a published copy of the ASOR Bulletin arrived in Jerusalem by slow mail in November 1948!

Harding and de Vaux immediately became involved, and made a number of key decisions at this very early stage. The first priority was to find the exact location of the cave from which this material had come.

Cave 1 was discovered on Jan. 28, 1949. An excavation was quickly organized under de Vaux between Feb. 15 and Mar. 5, 1949, which recovered many more small fragments from Cave 1 that matched fragments from Cave 1 that Kando had in his possession.

De Vaux entrusted the first work on these fragments to two young scholars who were at the École: a Dominican priest, Dominique Barthélemy, who had arrived in Jerusalem early 1949 to study, and Josef Milik, a Polish priest who came in December 1951 at the invitation of de Vaux. Milik had come to de Vaux's attention because a few months earlier he had published one of the very first translations of *The Community Rule* – all in Latin! Everything was arranged very informally, and by 1953 Milik and Barthélemy had prepared all Cave 1 fragments for publication (although their volume did not come out in print until 1955).

The first excavation of the site of Qumran was undertaken by de Vaux between Nov. 24 and Dec. 12, 1951. This confirmed that the pottery in the ruins was identical to that coming from the cave. Some coins were found which belonged to 2nd /1st century BCE; a few graves in the cemetery were dug. From March 10 to 29, 1952, de Vaux and a small team undertook a systematic search of the cliffs behind Qumran and investigated some 275 caves – but for the most part, the Bedouin were still getting to the caves first.

Beginning in mid-September 1952, the Bedouin started bringing bags and shoe boxes of fragments to the door of the École. They had found Cave 4, the so-called “Cave of the Partridge,” which contained the largest cache of fragments from scrolls that had not been placed in jars and hence were all badly damaged and in small pieces. By close collaboration, de Vaux and Hardin were quickly able to shut down attempts by the

Bedouin and Kando to sell pieces separately to each of them and play them off against each other. Instead, a standard price was established per square centimeter.

The crisis for de Vaux and Harding soon was money. In the handwritten ledger of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, we can see an entry that 14,000 Jordanian dinars (approximately \$42,000) had been allocated for the “Purchase of Antiquities.” This was quickly used up. Harding began to send out begging letters to places such as the Oriental Institute in Chicago, the British Museum and the Library of Congress, but either there were no replies or negotiations went nowhere.

De Vaux also became involved with trying to raise money. At the meeting of the International Organization for Old Testament Studies in Copenhagen in August 1953, he made an impromptu, impassioned plea to scholars to try to get institutional support to buy the scrolls. The plan was that the fragments would eventually go to the institution that purchased them, after they had been studied and published in Jerusalem.

In de Vaux’s audience was a United Church of Canada clergyman, R. B. Y. Scott, from McGill University. Scott came up with money, much of it from the Birks Family Foundation (Birks Jewellers), a substantial sum of \$20,000 which he sent to Jerusalem from Montreal in April 1954. This was the first major donation from an academic institution and came at a crucial moment.

The other crucial issue in these years was to make arrangements for publication of this material: that is, the establishment of what is often called “The International Team.” Many of the precise details are undocumented and uncertain, especially the exact roles of de Vaux and Harding. In some versions, as Jerome Murphy-O’Connor tells the story, de Vaux was the key player. “(T)he École became responsible for the publication of the

scrolls by default,” he wrote. “De Vaux won the consent of the Jordanian government for the formation of an international team, of which he became the coordinator.”

Weston Fields, who has done much archival work and written the fullest history of these years, emphasizes more the crucial role that Harding played. (It will be very interesting to see what Fr. Pérènnès’s research uncovers about these years.) What *is* clear is that much of the work was ad hoc and serendipitous. The various international schools that had institutions in Jerusalem (American, British, German schools) were asked to find scholars to work on the fragments -- often whoever could pick up and go to Jerusalem. The money came largely from the Rockefeller Foundation, and gradually between 1953–1958 a team was put together:

- Josef Milik of the École Biblique, who had already been working for a few years, was assigned much of the Enoch and apocalyptic materials.
- Through the American School came Frank Moore Cross of Harvard University and Monsignor Patrick Skehan of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., who were assigned much of the biblical materials.
- Via the British School came John Allegro and John Strugnell, who was assured that the task would take “one year, maybe two.”
- The German School brought Claus-Hunno Huntzinger, who soon returned to Germany when he got a full-time job.
- From France came Jean Starcky, who took on the bulk of the Aramaic materials.
- The last person formally appointed was Maurice Baillet in 1958, who ended up with a mass of small papyrus fragments, some 2,057 pieces. (Reading the Preface

to his volume VIII in the DJD series gives a poignant sense of how utterly frustrating and unfulfilling he found the task.)

It was an interesting mix!

Most of these were young men; some, like Strugnell, had not yet begun their doctorate. By contrast, Huntzinger and Skehan were “old fellows” in their forties. What was often a matter for surprise and comment was that Protestants (Cross, Strugnell and Huntzinger) were working alongside Catholics, even on biblical texts! There were no Jews. The Mandelbaum Gate (the 1948-‘67 border crossing between Israel and Jordanian-controlled East Jerusalem and the West Bank) separated what was happening in East Jerusalem from work that was going on at Hebrew University on manuscripts that they had purchased. Barthélemy and Benoit (who was given a small allotment of minor Greek and Latin fragments) were the only professors of the École to whom manuscripts were assigned.

De Vaux, an archaeologist by training, did not personally publish texts. His role as editor-in-chief was organization, fundraising and negotiating the complicated arrangements with Oxford Press for the publication of a series, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan* (after 1967, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert[DJD]*). The materials were kept and the actual work was done at the Palestine Archaeological Museum in the “scrollery.”

Much of de Vaux’s time and attention was devoted to his archaeological work over four campaigns between 1953 and 1956. In his field reports, which he published quickly and regularly in *Revue Biblique*, de Vaux emphasized the link between the site of

Qumran, the scrolls found in the caves and the description of the Essenes in the classical sources (Philo, Josephus and Pliny).

De Vaux has been criticized for being too ready to interpret the site and its occupants from his own experience. When he found a large stone in a certain room, he labeled it “laundry” because, he claimed, this looked just like what his mother used in France! Other rooms were labeled “refectory, scriptorium,” although de Vaux himself never used the language of “monastery,” since that terminology “represents an inference which archaeology taken alone could not warrant.”

Unfortunately, de Vaux never published a complete synthesis of his work nor a formal archeological report. He left photos, his field notes and the fullest outline of his views in the Schweich Lectures that he gave in December 1959, revised later and published in 1973 as *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Any further elaboration and refinement of his views was cut short by his sudden death on Sept. 10, 1971.

By the time of de Vaux’s death, volumes I to V of the official DJD series were published. Many changes had taken place in the previous decade.

- The Rockefeller money had dried up by the early 1960s.
- The members of the International Team dispersed around the world to take up full-time positions.
- In 1966 the Palestine Archaeological Museum was nationalized by Jordan (McGill and other institutions would never get the scrolls they had purchased; indeed one of de Vaux’s last projects was to negotiate the return of money to McGill).

- The Six-Day War of 1967 brought the museum and the scrolls themselves under the Israeli Department of Antiquities.

After de Vaux's death, the editorial team chose Pierre Benoit, then Director of the École, as editor-in-chief, a position that he held from 1971–1984. Volumes VI and VII of DJD were published in 1977 and 1982, after a long delay.

Pressure was beginning to mount in the academic community over delays, the inaccessibility of the materials and lack of clarity about who exactly was in charge. Benoit sent out a pleading letter in September 1985 asking each member of the International Team to provide a timetable for publication. He got very few responses. In 1984, a member of the team, John Strugnell, was appointed as his deputy, and in 1986, his successor.

In a certain sense the “official” involvement of the École with the publication of the scrolls ended with Benoit's death. Around this time, the last Dominican who was working on texts, Barthélemy, passed his materials and notes on the Minor Prophets Scroll to Emanuel Tov at Hebrew University for final publication.

But, of course, it was not quite so clear-cut. Strugnell, now editor-in-chief, came back to the École for many summers and sabbatical years. He always had a room at the École – so he was associated with it (though not officially), until his health, both physical and mental, broke down completely in the late 1980s. Strugnell was replaced as editor by Emanuel Tov, from Hebrew University, in the major reorganization of 1990/1991.

Since 1977, most of the teaching and research about the scrolls at the École was done by Émile Puech, a diocesan priest from France who was supported by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and who had taken over much of the Aramaic

scrolls research from Starcky. In the reorganization of 1990/1991, Puech was appointed to work with Emanuel Tov and Eugene Ulrich (in some sense, he represented the École).

As more scholars were invited to work on materials in the 1990s, many of these came to Jerusalem for short periods and often stayed at the École. Most consistent were the Germans scholars from the Qumran Institute in Göttingen. Hartmut Stegemann and his students and those working with him (Sarianna Metso, who is here today) frequently spent time in the summers at the École. Thus the École has continued to be a centre for scrolls research, although in a somewhat different way than earlier.

Let me conclude by saying just a few words about the archaeological component of the École's involvement with Qumran.

As I indicated earlier, de Vaux did not complete a final, formal, archaeological report of his excavations at Qumran and the nearby area before his untimely death in 1971. Following customary practice, the material finds (pottery, glass, textiles, some skeletons) and the right and responsibility to publish went to his institution. Very little was done until about 1984, when the École commissioned Robert Donceel, an archaeologist of the University of Louvain in Belgium, to prepare the final report. In 1988, the task was transferred to Jean-Baptiste Humbert, professor of archaeology at the École, a Dominican, who remains in charge of the archaeological work.

Three volumes have been published in recent years:

- The first in French in 1994 consisted mainly of photos and de Vaux's excavation diary (translated into English in 2013).
- The second volume in 2003 was a series of scientific studies on clay, metallurgy and some important notes on the cemetery.

- The third, Vol. 3a, came out very recently early in 2017. Most of this volume is Humbert's reconsideration of the interpretation of the site and a catalogue of all terracotta oil lamps; Vol. 3b, in preparation, will contain the ceramics/pottery and the architecture of the Hasmonean period and modifications made by later inhabitations.
- Volume 4 is promised, and will deal with all the caves.

A complete database of all the material, a project supported in part by the Canadian Friends of the École Biblique, has been in preparation for a number of years and is much desired and anticipated by many archaeologists around the world, but is not yet available.

And so, the work goes on and the saga of the École Biblique and the Dead Sea Scrolls continues.