



## The Library of the École Biblique et Archéologique de Jérusalem <sup>1</sup>

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The library of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem is located in the heart of downtown Arab East Jerusalem. It is part of the St. Stephen's Priory, which stands directly opposite the East Jerusalem Interior Ministry. Waiting outside the walled perimeter to gain entry into the Priory compound, one can see the Palestinian crowds across the street jostling outside the cramped Ministry building in the hope of gaining access before closing time. Israeli police watch them from all

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Father Kevin McCaffrey, Librarian at the École Biblique, for allowing *JQF* to interview him for this piece.

along the narrow street. Passing through the Priory gate, one suddenly finds oneself alone in a spacious garden of well-trimmed hedges, lawns, and majestic old pine and cypress trees, with quiet paths leading to the beautiful old Priory buildings.

Sequestered from the surrounding city, the tranquil landscape of the Priory compound seems to exist in a world of its own.

Such islands of residual European presence dot Jerusalem, reminders of the nineteenth and early twentieth century competition among the European powers to stake a claim to the city and to assert custodial rights over their Christian and Biblical heritage. The library of the École exemplifies this history. The École was founded in 1890 by Père Marie Joseph LaGrange, a French Dominican priest, who came with the idea of grounding Biblical research in an understanding of the Bible's original geographical context. He was one of the first Catholic scholars fully to embrace the new, nineteenth-century scientific approaches to the Bible aimed at shedding light on the text through historical and critical exegesis, archaeological research, and the study of geography. Since 1890 archeologists affiliated with the school have done important work to advance Biblical studies. In the 1920s Fathers L. H. Vincent and F. M. Abel did an important survey of ancient Jerusalem focusing on the topography of the city and the ancient churches and monuments (*Jerusalem: Recherches de Topographie, d'Archéologie, et d'Histoire*), while also conducting excavations at Jerach, Beit She'an, and elsewhere. In 1945 Father Roland de Vaux became the new director and shortly gained fame for his role in helping to excavate and direct the translation and study of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran in 1947 and

after. Today the library houses an important collection of Qumran studies, along with a major scholarly edition of the scrolls, the *Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, a work that represents decades of scholarly effort in transcribing, editing, and translating the scrolls.

The library of the École was founded at the same time as the École itself in order to support the school's research, and the collection mirrors the school's scientific approach to Biblical studies. It focuses on biblical exegesis and on the archaeology of the "Holy Land" and of the ancient "Near East" (i. e. West Asia or the Arab East in today's parlance), including a comprehensive collection of facsimiles of ancient texts and inscriptions. The library divides into sections on the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Bible, ancient Greek and Roman history and literature, and ancient Near Eastern history and literature. Less central to its holdings are two sections on the history of the Christian Church and a section on European and French history and literature. Each section includes the major reference works and journals in the field, and the collection of periodicals is up-to-date and comprehensive.

While the archaeological digs that the École continues to direct are funded by the French government, the library itself only receives a small subvention from them and is otherwise privately funded. It serves not only as a research library for advanced students of Biblical studies and archaeology but also as the private library for the Dominican fathers of the St. Stephen's Convent and for the staff and students at the École. The students at the École are predominantly European, especially French, and chiefly study biblical exegesis. Many of them go on to

teach at Catholic Seminaries or at educational programs in their Dioceses. The École only grants degrees at the doctoral level, awarding a DSS, or Doctorate of Sacred Scripture, a degree certified by the Vatican. To meet the needs of the Dominican fathers and these students, the library includes works on Christian theology and religion from the fourteenth century to the present. But the library mainly functions as a research institute for advanced specialists in Biblical studies and archaeology.

On the subject of Jerusalem, the collection is excellent on the city's ancient history and archaeology. Moreover, it has numerous works of travel literature by ancient and medieval pilgrims and much on Jerusalem during the Crusader period. However, there is little beyond the standard scholarly texts about Jerusalem during the Islamic periods or about the present-day city. Palestinians who turn to the library for primary, archival material about the many dimensions of the city's Islamic and Arab past will be disappointed. The collection is limited by the library's founding aim of exploring the Biblical roots of European culture.

The library has computerized approximately two-thirds of its collection, using a system that lets one search through both books and periodicals. For example, a search by author will call up both books and articles by that author, a feature that makes for a very convenient and powerful research tool. The catalogue is being computerized according to the most frequently researched subjects, meaning that the complete sections concerning the New Testament, the Old Testament, and Palestinian Archaeology can now be searched. Currently being computerized is

the section on Greco-Roman archaeology and literature.

For researchers in Biblical studies and archaeology the library of the École Biblique constitutes a superb resource. Its particular advantage is that it concentrates a great range of material related to Biblical studies in one area, with all the resources easily accessible via open stacks. Once you gain library privileges, you are free to roam through the stacks and can find everything readily available in one space, thus expediting research. However, because the library has open stacks that offer such a rich variety of materials, public access is restricted to doctoral or post-doctoral students who apply in advance and send their credentials, or to local graduate students who want material unavailable in their own institution's library.

**J. D.**