



The Library of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research¹

The **Albright** Institute of Archaeological Research does not have the defensive, inward-turning appearance of many other institutes and centers in the city, but rather faces out onto **Salah al-Din Street** in the heart of Arab East Jerusalem in a welcoming fashion, surrounded only by a low green fence, a short garden path to the main door, and the cool shade of pine trees that help relieve the commercial congestion of the street. The tall two-story red-roofed

¹ *JQF* would like to thank Sarah Sussman, head librarian at the Institute, and Sy Gitin, Dorot director and professor of Archaeology at the Institute, for allowing us to interview them for this piece.

stone building was originally designed for its current purpose, namely, to serve as a home away from home for visiting archaeological researchers. The school is actually a group of three buildings set about an inner quadrangle and connected by a loggia running around the inner court. The dining areas, the lecture rooms for seminars and talks, the apartments, the hostel rooms, the artifact workshops, the library, and the offices—all are functionally integrated to provide space for living, exchanging ideas, research, and quiet study. No doubt visiting scholars used to the hectic demands of academic life welcome the opportunity to associate on a more relaxed basis with colleagues. When I visited, however, the shady quadrangle was empty, as were the kitchen and lecture rooms, because it was the summer season and many visiting fellows were away on field excavations. Completed in 1925, the entire building has that stature and spaciousness of houses built in the open expanses outside the Old City before the era of air conditioning.

The institute was established in 1900 as the American School for Oriental Research (ASOR), and was renamed in 1970 after its most distinguished director, the renowned Biblical archaeologist W. F. Albright. Currently the school is independent, but affiliated with ASOR, as are other schools established by ASOR in the past century in Amman and Nicosia. With a charter membership composed of many well-known American universities, colleges, and theological schools, ASOR represented the American dimension of the great nineteenth-century European awakening of

interest in Near Eastern archaeology. ASOR moved into the current building in 1925. The library's collection, however, consists of books acquired since the institute's inception. Indeed some of the early volumes have since become rare books and have recently been moved to a special closed cabinet in the library for protection and preservation.

The school has a long and rich history of contributions to the Herculean archaeological endeavors that have been undertaken in this region, but only a few highlights can be mentioned here. The institute participated in the recovery, restoration, and translation of the Dead Sea scrolls and in digs at such sites as Megiddo, Samaria, Gezer, Caesarea, and Shechem. In recent years the school has advanced scholarly understanding of the coastal Philistine cultures of the Early Iron Age and the so-called "Sea Peoples," whose migrations either caused or were a symptom of the great decline of Late Bronze Age urban culture throughout Syria-Palestine (the debate rages on). Of particular importance were the finds at the site of Tel Miqne (Khirbet al-Muqanna') about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. In July 1996 the Albright Institute's team and a team from the Hebrew University uncovered a stone inscription dated to around 700 B.C.E. in a Philistine dialect closely associated with the Phoenician language. It was the dedication of a temple by the Philistine king of Ekron and provided the first definitive attestation of the existence at the site of the Philistine city of Ekron. The dig also shed light on Philistine trading and industrial practices

and their economic importance in the neo-Assyrian imperial system.

The library is in the right wing of the building on the first floor, with a periodical room downstairs in a basement below the main stacks. In light of the recent heat wave I should mention that it has air conditioning, a feature that thankfully lets you read about Babylonian brick kilns without feeling that you are in one, while also helping preserve the books from the decaying properties of outside dust.

As a private, non-profit institution relying on U.S. government and private grants for its funding, the library has had its financial ups and downs, but recent developments are positive, with a Getty grant for preservation and binding and an NEH-funded project underway to computerize the card catalogue system.

The library is non-circulating and open by invitation or appointment only and is intended chiefly for the use of the visiting fellows, for whom it is open 24-hours a day seven days a week. But the fellows include scholars affiliated with both Israeli and Palestinian universities, and at their request the library often makes arrangements for their students to use the collection. Although a non-degree granting institute, the school also attracts a cosmopolitan group of pre- and post-doctoral students and scholars, including fellows from the U.S. and Western Europe and Mellon fellows from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Moreover, the staff itself consists of both Palestinians and Israelis, a fact that testifies to the school's long-standing efforts to preserve itself as a neutral space for

objective research apart from the political conflicts of the city.

The library holds 28,000 books and journals, classified according to the Library of Congress system. The main stacks include sections on such subjects as ancient architecture and city planning, the ancient Near Eastern economy, Biblical studies, Ancient religion and ritual, and anthropology. But the largest sections are devoted to archaeology, in which field up-to-date series of all the most important journals are also available. At first it seems a rather modest collection limited to two levels of stacks on steel shelves in a single main room. But by focusing more exclusively on Near Eastern archaeology—as opposed to Biblical Studies—than other local libraries, it can be said to make up in depth for what it lacks in breadth. Moreover, it is located within walking distance of the École Biblique, the British School of Archaeology, and the Rockefeller Museum and has arrangements with their libraries for sharing their resources. And so while it may not have at hand every title the researcher requires, its unique location compensates for this lack. Clearly it well serves its function as a library away from home for visiting researchers whose main focus during their stay is fieldwork, but who still want to consult the most important books and journals in their specialization.

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