

# The Desecration of the Scrolls

Robert Eisenman

The recent revelations about and dismissal of the chief editor of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Professor John Strugnell of the Harvard Divinity School, because of antisemitic statements should give those interested in the Scrolls and concerned about the problem of antisemitism generally something to ponder. These revelations have provided a rare insight into the mindset of a kind of person many of us thought had passed out of existence with the high Church theology in the Middle Ages. However, they do not come as a surprise to any of us who have been in the field of Dead Sea Scrolls studies over the years and who have known Mr. Strugnell (he holds an MA from Oxford). We have been dealing with attitudes of this kind from the beginning.

In the Spring of 1986, I was in Jerusalem at the William Foxwell Albright Institute of Archeological Research (the proverbial 'American School') as Fellow-in-Residence on a National Endowment for the Humanities/American Schools of Oriental Research Award. Since I was unable to gain access to any previously unpublished Dead Sea Scroll (hereafter referred to also as "Qumran") documents, there was very little in Jerusalem I could do that year that I could not have done at home in California.

In April, Professor Philip Davies of the University of Sheffield in England arrived. Three years later we were to write a joint request for access to the Zadokite fragments, the documents found by Solomon Schechter in the Cairo Genizah in 1896, but that was in the future. Since I was going to see Magen Broshi, curator of the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum, to discuss the problem of nonpublication of the Scrolls and access to them, he accompanied me.

Broshi told us: "You will not see the unpublished Qumran fragments in our lifetimes." We were taken aback. It was this statement about the Scrolls that galvanized us more than any other: from that moment on we determined to prove him wrong. Almost five years to the day, complete access to the Scrolls was, in fact, achieved, owing to our efforts, but this was in the future.

In June of the same year the newly appointed editor of the Dead Sea Scrolls, John Strugnell, arrived in Jerusalem from Harvard. The former editor, also not known for his philosemitic or pro-Israel attitudes, Father Benoit, was incurably ill with cancer and Strugnell, despite his fairly widely known personal shortcomings, was appointed by the International Committee — which basically consisted of Professor Cross at Harvard and the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem — to replace him. This appointment had to be approved by the Israeli authorities, which it was in a pro forma manner, though not

without some protest from Professor Yuval Ne'eman, a member of the Knesset, to be explained below.

Not long after our interview with Mr. Broshi, Davies and myself met Strugnell at a soiree given at the home of Professor Jonas Greenfield of The Hebrew University, himself later added to the Israel Oversight Committee, which came into play as a direct response to our request for access to the Zadokite fragments. At the time, we had no inkling that Greenfield would emerge in this capacity, though we probably should have suspected it. Joseph Baumgarten of the Baltimore Hebrew Academy, who was also later to receive the same Zadokite fragments that Davies and I asked access to, was also present that night; and as we were later to realize, plans were already being hatched to effect this transfer.

At the end of the evening my wife and I took Strugnell home; he was in one of his usual cantankerous moods — earlier in the evening he had been railing against 'unqualified people' asking for access to the Scrolls. He was in no condition to negotiate the passage himself. This was my first real meeting with him, though I had seen him at a Chicago conference of the Society of Biblical Literature the previous year, when he subjected David Wilmot of the University of Chicago (now deceased), a student of Norman Golb, to withering criticism over his attempts to reinterpret the Copper Scroll as a Temple Treasure list even though scholars like John Allegro had already suggested this three decades before. Strugnell was also well-known too, for the 'hatchet-job' he did on this same John Allegro some two decades before, which virtually eliminated that scholar from the field.

Though he and Cross taught at American universities, in this case the same one, and Cross, in particular, had been a student of Albright at Johns Hopkins University and occupied a position of high status among the American Schools' leadership, both made a point of staying at the French School — 'French' in that the Dominican monks who ran it were primarily French. In so doing, they unequivocally demonstrated where their true loyalties and real sympathies lay. Indeed, Strugnell, although brought up in typical English prep school-style, converted to Catholicism — whether out of conviction or to further his career at the Ecole, or both, cannot be determined on the information available.

As per his wont, he followed us to the Albright School and continued his drinking much of the night, this time in the Albright Garden. About three in the morning, after announcing his desire to take my wife (my presence being immaterial to him) to watch 'the sun rise over Mo'ab,' he proposed a curious toast. Turning to me in the lucid way some alcoholics have, he asked whether I was prepared to drink to 'anyone he proposed.' Because of the originality of the request and the curious way he phrased it, I agreed.

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Thereupon he raised his glass and said he wanted to drink "to the greatest living man of the latter part of the twentieth century," and paused. Curious to know whom he might have in mind, I drew forward on my chair. This was the time of the revelations about Kurt Waldheim's checkered past in the world press; the chorus of outrage was particularly strong in Israel. He proceeded to pronounce that dreaded name, "Kurt Waldheim," and I was flabbergasted.

I had heard that he along with one of the successors of Milik and De Vaux at the Ecole, Emile Puech (now one of the editorial troika of the Dead Sea Scrolls) wished to fly a Crusader flag over the Ecole to commemorate the anniversary of the battle of the Horns of Hittim and the defeat of the Crusaders; I had also heard that one director after another refused to recognize Israel, and would not have anything to do with it of an official nature, bridling even at the thought of any Israeli interference in the Scrolls, though the Israelis through their annexation of Jerusalem were now the de facto custodians (even owners) of the unpublished materials at the Rockefeller Museum.

But I was not prepared for a such a blatant display of antisemitism. In retrospect, this would be reinforced by the shocking interviews which were the subject of international press coverage last winter, where Strugnell was quoted as claiming among other things that "Judaism was a horrible religion," that he had "nothing against Jews, only Israel," and that in line with Church theology (a particularly relevant bit of bombast) "the Jews should have disappeared long ago." However, not wishing at the time to appear distressed or nonplussed, I drank and quietly replaced my glass, searching my mind for a name that would cause him as much distress as he had caused me.

Strugnell had been a 'day boy' at St. Paul's School in London. When informed that my wife, who was British, had converted to Judaism, he was much perturbed as to why she should want to do this, but even more so, why she should want to marry a Jew. When my wife reminded him that Virginia Woolf's Jewish husband, the late Leonard Woolf, founder of the Hogarth Press, had also gone to St. Paul's School, he seemed surprised, but responded that in that case perhaps he ought to reevaluate his allegiance to it.

I then hit upon the very name — Orde Wingate, the English chief of Wingate's Raiders in Burma. An ardent Zionist from his days in Palestine in the thirties, he had been the pro-Jewish T.E. Lawrence of that time. As such he had laid the foundation for the Israeli army and trained all of Israel's future military leaders of the next generation like Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan. He had done this consciously with his "Special Night Raiding Squads" setting out his military philosophy of attack and more attack, particularly at night. So imbued was he with Biblical history, that he named the campaign he fought in Ethiopia in 1942 to reinstall Haile Salassie's throne on behalf of the British, "Gideon Force," after his favorite Biblical guerrilla leader. Wingate, the

youngest Major General in the British army, died an honorable death at the height of his military success under somewhat suspicious circumstances in an American B-24 Liberator with an American crew, and for that reason is presently buried in a communal grave at Arlington National Cemetery.

I therefore said to Strugnell, "I drank to whomever you asked, will you now drink to whomever I ask?" He nodded his head: Certainly. "All right," I said, "I want to drink to Orde Wingate."

Strugnell was mortified: He knew who Wingate was. A wave of trapped anger swept across his face. "No," he said, slamming his glass down on the table, "I will not drink to that traitor!" The words, which with him were instinctive, stung me. He had not even had to think about them.

Presumably in his view it was right to toast Kurt Waldheim, who, inter alia, had in 1943 been involved in the transport of Jewish deportees from Greece to Auschwitz, not to mention his connection with the interrogation and death of both British prisoners of war and Yugoslav partisans. But Orde Wingate, whose only crime was that he tried to help Jews, was branded a traitor.

This insult offended me more than the toast to Kurt Waldheim, not to mention Strugnell's unwillingness to honor his commitments. I took note of the mindset these views entailed and the distorted view of history they testified to, particularly when I was to hear in the wake of his later newspaper interviews that people harboring this particularly virulent Church-oriented brand of antisemitism could be efficient historians, as opposed to mere philologists, or for that matter knew anything about history at all — Waldheim the greatest man of the latter part of the twentieth century?

They particularly rang in my brain when I heard Israeli colleagues in positions of responsibility ignore such views and opine that opinions of this kind did not matter where scholarship was concerned! Presumably the Institute of Historical Review's opinions in America didn't matter either where its scholarship was concerned. Plus, I made a mental commitment to see to it that the travesty I was witnessing, particularly where the Scrolls were concerned, would not long endure, and that Strugnell and his confreres would not long retain their monopoly of the process.

That year too before leaving Israel, a copy of the computer printout of the official catalogue of the Dead Sea Scrolls at the Rockefeller Museum was handed me. I had indeed seen this classified catalogue myself when visiting the Rockefeller the previous year, but never expected a copy of it to come into my possession. After our interview with Magen Broshi, Davies and I had thought of circulating a petition among concerned Qumran scholars to try to bring pressure to free up access to the Scrolls. This petition was sent to Hershel Shanks, the editor of *Biblical Archeology Review*, who agreed to support us. Ultimately — about two years later — this petition found its way into the pages of his jour-

nal as the Resolution of the Second Mogilany Conference in Cracow, Poland.

Where the catalogue was concerned, since it did me no good to sit on it, I determined to circulate it to anyone who wanted to see a copy of it. In the meantime Davies wrote to Strugnell asking him about the existence of such a computer printout catalogue. Strugnell denied it existed, even though 1) I had seen it at the Department of Antiquities in 1985 and 2) we were at that very moment holding a copy of it.

In the fall of 1988 I finally sent a copy of this catalogue to Shanks, who had been carrying out a campaign to free up access to the Scrolls, as I did to Knesset member Professor Yuval Ne'eman, so that they could see how much of a corpus still remained to be published.

Ne'eman had at my prompting raised the issue of the Scrolls in the Knesset in 1985, when I set forth for him in detail what the problems were. For his part, Shanks never communicated what he thought of this catalogue. However, the explosive impact it made in his office when it arrived was described to me afterwards by one of his colleagues, who also registered surprise.

Before this occurred, in December 1988, I launched my first archeological expedition into the Judean Desert to look for new scrolls. The philosophy behind it was that if 'the international Committee' was not going to show us its scrolls — except after carefully filtering them through 'official' theories — why not find new scrolls? At the end of January, 1989, the end of our first season, I attempted to explain to the newly appointed Dept. of Antiquities Head, Amir Drori, matters such as these and the mindset that led to Strugnell's eventual dismissal from the position of head of the international committee and the editorship of the Scrolls. It was rumored that it was difficulties with the Kahane Commission that led Drori, who had formerly been the commander of troops in Lebanon, to leave the army and take up the impressive position with the Dept. of Antiquities.

Drori, a strong, bull-necked man, looked very stubborn, but was not very intelligent. In the course of the conversation, which was introductory and wide-ranging, Drori told me he was on the verge of signing a contract with Strugnell and the team he represented. For me, such a contract spelled disaster, since it implied official recognition of the present situation, in particular, the barring of large numbers of researchers from access to the remaining Scroll materials, as well as the filtering of those materials through the veil of 'official' theories — not to mention more of the cajoling and blackmailing we had experienced up until that time. In addition, I pointed out to him the worrisome aspects of allowing someone with the mindset of Strugnell and his Ecole Biblique colleagues full control over the central core of Qumran texts — what are widely referred to as 'the sectarian texts.' These fears have since been fully realized, and the public generally has perhaps finally come to appreciate the reasons behind them, but at the time they made no impression on him.

It was on leaving my talk with Drori that I hit upon the idea of a request to the Israel High Court of Justice

to gain access to the remaining corpus of unpublished materials for all scholars without distinction or qualification. This led to the letter I wrote with Philip Davies, who had accompanied me to see Magen Broshi three years before, to John Strugnell in March 1989 to see the Qumran versions of the famous Zadokite fragments.

We had always heard that there were copies of this document in the unpublished corpus, but no one had ever shown them to anyone, nor, as it seemed, had anyone ever asked to see them! Scholars in the field, and indeed the public at large, still talked as if the document found in the Genizah in Cairo was an actual Qumran document, but there was no way to be sure until we saw the fragments. We calculated that a request to see the Qumran parallels to this document could not legitimately be rejected, since the situation regarding them was patently so absurd and nothing had been done for 40 years.

Having been informed by counsel that in order to pursue such a request in the Israel Supreme Court, we needed actual documentation of being refused access — our previous contacts with members of the International Committee had all been oral — our letter was the result. We wanted to be turned down; we expected to be turned down. In it, we stated the obvious and ended by pointing out:

We and *many others* feel that 35-40 years is enough time to wait for these materials to become generally available on a scientific basis to the scholarly community as a whole for research, if not editorial purposes.... We appreciate the time and energy you or your colleagues may have put in over the years, but you too must appreciate the time and concern we have put in unable to pursue productive research in this field in a normal, thoroughgoing, and comprehensive manner .... You and the others involved have already been adequately compensated for the time you have put in by unilaterally being able to work on these materials undisturbed for some 35-40 years. No scholars have ever received or asked for more from their peers.

So — we *were* turned down. Characteristically, Strugnell responded dismissively, claiming we had our plate numbers wrong, even though this was impossible, since we were operating from the official government printout. He ended on an abusive note, commenting on our lack of manners, etc. In my response of 15 June 1989, I, therefore, took the opportunity to remind him of his Kurt Waldheim toast three years before and added,

I will not take this from you, even if other Jews and my Israeli colleagues will. Nor, if the decision were mine, would I leave someone with such a distorted view of world history in control of this precious national and international heritage.

Since his dismissal, the issue remains, i.e. the practical effect the warped mindset — centering in the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, where high Church antisemitism from the Middle ages would still appear to be flourishing — had on research on the Scrolls. Magen Broshi, for one, had made it clear that he knew of "Strugnell's antisemitism for twenty years" (*The Independent*, 12/December/90). On other occasions he had also

cited similar opinions held by Roland De Vaux, the first editor and as a Dominican priest, head of the Ecole — and yet how pleasant it was to work with such persons!

I categorically reject this position. The issue is not whether people like Strugnell have opened up research to Israeli scholars or not — which would appear to be the main Israeli concern — nor quid pro quo agreements allowing designated Israeli scholars access, but opening up the field to all scholars regardless of point of view. Where the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem is concerned, I was one of the first to draw attention to it and the pivotal role it has played since the early fifties, pointing out that a coterie of scholars connected to it have always controlled the key new texts, i.e., those non-Biblical, 'sectarian' ones never seen before.

I also pointed out in the article about the Scrolls scandal in *The New York Times* on 30 June 1989 how such scholars have used this control to promote their own theories regarding the meaning and origins of the documents, not to mention, placing their own students in key positions around the world — this is still going on. As I explained — in a follow-up letter to the one Davies and I wrote to Strugnell — to Amir Drori on 2 May 1989 when discussing with him my suggestion to use modern methods of carbon dating to upgrade our chronological understanding of Qumran documents:

We are not the only ones to feel this need (for Carbon 14 testing). Perhaps the whole of the scholarly community outside the select inner circle do. The committee and their designees do not, because they are the beneficiaries of the process.... They have used their control over these materials for forty years to control the field of endeavor in Qumran studies, control graduate research, and therefore to place their people in the few existing chairs of research in this field, thereby controlling it for another generation.... Your publication schedule will help, but it will not change the more subtle aspects of the situation to any great extent. In fact, it will help set up a new generation of scholars for 40 more years of dominance as the first were initially set up.

I summed this position up more succinctly to various journalists over the next two years in the event that, as usual, we were frozen out of the process.

In the introduction to my book: *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran: A New Hypothesis of Qumran Origins*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1983, I put it a little differently, but perhaps more tellingly:

Various preconceptions have dominated Qumran research. A small group of specialists, largely working together, developed a consensus which was used to press the provenance of the most important Qumran sectarian texts back into the first (and sometimes even the second) century B.C. Primarily these stemmed from an animus towards and derogation of the Maccabean family and the additional underlying motive (albeit at times unconscious) of trying to distance the materials in question as far as possible from Christianity's formative years in Palestine.

This position was represented by an article in *The Jerusalem Post* in 1989 July as meaning that hostility towards Pharisaic cum Rabbinic Judaism in the Scrolls has been a factor inhibiting Israeli authorities from publishing them. This was not my position, nor do I believe it, though the sectarian thrust in the Scrolls has until

recently contributed to a relative paucity of Israeli interest in them from the 1960's to the 1980's. But officials in Israel for personal reasons of their own used this issue to divert public attention away from the real problem, i.e., that of the Ecole Biblique and their own questionable relations and lack of sophistication in dealing with it.

I don't think the Israeli authorities were even aware that this anti-Rabbinic hostility existed in the Scrolls — otherwise why would they have put these documents in the Shrine of the Book? Nor, do I believe, this was ever a factor in their decisions. In any event, the Israelis published the documents under their control almost immediately and did not, until more recently, attempt to make scholarly capital out of them. On the other hand, this hostility in the Scrolls to Phariseism cum Rabbinic Judaism may be one of the factors explaining, as I said above, why many Israeli scholars never showed much interest in them, and as a consequence neither did the Israeli public — again, until recently.

But where the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem is concerned, the situation was always more complex and far more worrisome. It would be hard for the lay person to understand the centrality of the Ecole in the whole process and the role it has played since the partition of Jerusalem and the Jordanian take-over of the Eastern areas at the end of the forties. The Ecole as an Institution was founded under Vatican auspices at the beginning of this century when Modernism was rife and the results of modern archeology were flowing in at a rapidly disconcerting rate. It has always been headed by a Dominican monk, of the order known in the Middle Ages as "the hounds of the Inquisition" — where Qumran is concerned, a particularly appropriate metaphor.

Whatever else may be said of the Ecole, it was and is not *ab initio* a disinterested or particularly objective player, nor is its activity free of the warrant of its original founders at the beginning of this century, i.e., to render the results of modern archaeology palatable to its constituency. With the discovery of the Scrolls in 1947-48 and after the Partition of Palestine following this, it was well placed to do just that and to become the chief player in the field of Dead Sea Scrolls studies. The 'Essene hypothesis' was the result. So was the almost complete lack of publication of key Qumran texts that followed (largely thanks to people like John Strugnell who were familiar with documents like the now well-known MMT as early as 1955 and which he had controlled since that time).

Until the computerized recreation of some unpublished documents from the concordance that the International Scroll Committee had privately completed in the late fifties, the opening of the Huntington Library archives, and the publication of all the unpublished plates by myself and Professor James M. Robinson of Claremont University this year — the situation had only been ameliorated grudgingly and by half-hearted responses to external pressure. For instance, Father Milik, John Strugnell, and Emile Puech, all integrally connected to the Ecole, still controlled or claimed edito-

rial rights to the lion's share of the unpublished non-Biblical or 'sectarian' texts.

Even with the more insistent interventions by the Israel Antiquities Authority in recent months, including the imposition of an Israeli editor-in-chief and the final opening of all archives without restrictions, it is usually with the approval of this troika and at their suggestion or initiative that texts are transferred to third parties for the purposes of 'official' editions. No one opposing these 'chief' editors has ever really been allowed to edit principal Qumran documents. In practice, the ongoing process of such 'official editions' means, where a docile public awed by titles and powerful institutions is concerned, the propagation of 'official theories.'

Even since people like John Strugnell, Father De Vaux, Father Milik, and now Father Puech got control of the unpublished nonbiblical documents, this has more or less been the situation. It was for this reason that we felt the need to break this monopoly once and for all and did so with the publication of the Facsimile Edition — to 'level the playing field' so to speak. Though the officially sponsored editors still enjoy their privileged positions of editing 'official' editions, now at least the Scrolls are open to all.

But what is potentially so disconcerting about the Scrolls that they have been let out so sparingly over the last 40 years? Though I am not particularly an adherent of the conspiracy theory, I have always insisted and still do that there has been a 'go-slow' policy in effect at the Ecole and the International Committee for years ever since the mid-fifties and the flap over John Allegro's

ideas and Edmund Wilson's articles in *The New Yorker* magazine — this whether all its members, particularly the younger ones, were aware of it or not. If nothing else, it can be shown that documents like MMT or the text mentioning the "son of God" or important Messianic proof texts have been known for thirty years or more. Why these went unpublished is an open question.

Such a monopoly for academic reasons is unconscionable; if, for the purpose of the management of information, even worse.

As I also put it in my introduction to *Maccabees, Zadokite, Christians and Qumran* as far back as 1983, those responsible for the publication of the inner core of Qumran documents texts have simply bored people to death, with the underlying motive, unconscious or otherwise, to make people think there was nothing interesting in them so that they would go away and follow other lines of research. In this, I think, they have been largely successful. Put in another way, since in the early years of Scroll research there was a lot of wild speculation about the connections of the Scrolls to early Christianity that upset 'orthodox' theologians, the point was to diffuse interest in the Scrolls, to send, as it were, as many people — 'these crazies' as they were called — elsewhere. I have even heard as much said by people close to the International Committee. Weirdly, those responsible lower level Israeli bureaucrats in their lack of sophistication have abetted this over the last 25 years, and still do, and for the same reasons. •

## The Burning Bush

Whoever says God's wrath  
Poured down upon our martyrs  
Is a blasphemer, a desecrator.  
I've known God's fiery people,  
His wondrous bush searing  
The eyes of transgressor nations.  
*The bush was burning,  
And it was consumed.*

Moses stumbles ... confused;  
All is ravaged, desolate,  
Destroyed and silenced.  
From the heights he hears  
God's lamentation:  
The cry, *Oye vie,*  
*Extinguished bush,*  
*My holy offerings.*

Jacob Glatstein

Translated from the Yiddish by Doris Vidaver