Et ils sortirent du paradis. Carnets d'un archéologue en Orient 1945-1996

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This work outlines the main stages of a double journey: in the Orient, more precisely, around the Mediterranean, and inside the French administrations. In effect, these memories are those of a founder who was always concerned with anchoring research in a time-span, and thus in institutions, missions, centers, journals, collections, etc. Having entered the CNRS in 1946, a student of André Parrot, sent by the Académie des Inscriptions to the École Biblique et archéologique de Jérusalem, he remained his entire life attached to this region which he knows like no one else. Director of the digs in Iran between 1968 and 1979, he discovers there, in Suse, the palace of Darius. In Israel, he conducts and participates in the most important digs between 1950 and 1975. He creates in 1952 a “French archeological mission in Israel”, modified in 1964 as a RCP, “Prehistory and proto-history of the Asian Near East”, then as a “permanent mission” in 1973; lastly, the Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem is founded in 1986. The great figures of Fathers Vincent and de Vaux, of Nelson Glueck, Yigael Yadin, René Neuville, François Bordes and Robert Braidwood appear in this work. As a setting, there is also political history and the birth, in blood and tears, of the State of Israel. Before entering the CNRS, he diversified his activities: journalist, teacher, radio broadcaster and founder the Voice of Israel (Kol Israel) in french. Then his big projects take place: Abou Matar Safadi, Hatzor, Mallaha, of which the specialists have for long recognized the importance. And as if this did not suffice him after a quick evocation of the epic of the Qumrán manuscripts and Turkey, the big adventure of Suse and the palace of Darius is recounted. Incidentally, the history of the presence of French science in Iran should some day be written. The author reflects, with a certain tenderness, on the intense joys of the profession which he speaks of with warmth and simplicity and which, for him, focuses around the major question of the origin of man in the Near and Middle East. The sometimes lyrical description of his fieldwork is interspersed by the account of his constant, arduous and repeated efforts to convince the various authorities (especially those of the CNRS and of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) of the importance of a French scientific presence in these regions. In spite of his discretion, one guesses the tenacity that he needed to obtain his demand. This book, without settling scores, is that of a scholar at peace and also, why not admit it, of a success story: from the simple “mission” to the Center, what a
road! At the beginning, a logistic base for a few archeologists, the CRFJ has as its aim today to harmonize and initiate bilateral research in the humanities and the social sciences. In fact, little by little, it welcomed prehistorians, anthropologists, and by and large, history, linguistics, and of course Jewish studies have come to diversify it, demonstrating that one can ally political and administrative caution with intellectual generosity. A lesson for the future for its undignified yet grateful heirs.

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(Translation : Lisa Antebry)