

Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies

Post-graduates in Focus Series

An Interview with Lynn Mills, second year Ph.D. candidate in the School of Religion, TCD.¹

Lynn, thank you for taking the time to share with us today. Would you mind telling us about how you became interested in the academic study of biblical literature?

I have been fascinated by biblical literature since my teens. I noticed inconsistencies in the texts of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament and could find no one to answer my questions. The notes at the bottom of the page of a study Bible only spurred my curiosity. What did it mean by “other early manuscripts read...”? It was obvious that the Bible, as I knew it, was a far more complex “book” than I had realized. I yearned to learn more about these other manuscripts. Why were they different and how different were they? Unfortunately, I was unable indulge my fascination in a structured academic study for many years. It was only after leaving a career in the business world that I was able to dedicate the time and energy to pursue degrees in this field.

When you were considering Ph.D. programmes, why did you decide to pursue an application to Trinity College Dublin?

To answer that I first have to explain why I looked for a school on this side of the Atlantic rather than in my native country, Canada. Coming to this later in life, I did not want to spend another 7 years after my Master’s degree through the North American Ph.D. model. The European research model shaved 3 years off that and did not require comprehensive exams! As for why I chose Trinity, that came down to the supervisor. The best advice I received regarding pursuing a Ph.D. was to find the best supervisor for my field of study who would be very supportive and accessible. I did extensive research into most universities in the UK and Ireland. Benjamin Wold was by far the most responsive to my enquiries and helpful in the application process. Prof. Wold’s area of expertise fit very nicely with my intended field of study and I was very impressed with his publications. His research in Israel was active and ongoing, which I hoped would lead to opportunities for me to study there. That has proven to be the case as I will be spending June and July 2019 in Jerusalem thanks to the EU’s Erasmus+ funding.

Would you mind sharing what your current project is about?

My topic of “Constructions of the Self Through Water and Spirit in the Dead Sea Community at Qumran and the Early Christian Church” follows directly on from my Master’s thesis on baptism. In my current research I argue that the Qumran and Christian rites are parallel branches rooted in the texts and culture of ancient Judaism. They are both part of a diverse Judaism in the Second Temple period. My research explores how the Qumran and Christian communities independently constructed self-identity through water and spirit. Spirit and water are frequently paired in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran literature and Christian writings, most often found in relationship to concepts of cleansing, creation and transformation. My thesis is organized into two main parts: examination of

¹ This is the first in a series of interviews with Ph.D. candidates who are members of the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies.

ancient texts and, much to my delight, archaeological evidence. Never in my wildest dreams did I dare to hope that I would be working with 2000-year-old texts (albeit in a digital format) or working on a dig!

You are currently in the second year of the four-year programme, how has the research environment at TCD influenced your project since you began?

My introduction to the research environment of TCD was in my first week of the program. Prof. Wold had organized a one-day symposium with Israeli, British and Irish scholars entitled "Reading the New Testament as Second Temple Jewish Literature." It was obvious that I had made the right choice in coming to TCD! The symposium was fascinating, the scholarship was rigorous and set the bar for me to achieve. The Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies seminars have also been beneficial, especially the very helpful feedback I received after giving my own presentation in my first year.

I meet regularly with my advisor to read and translate Biblical and Qumran Hebrew and to discuss our own projects. His generosity in sharing his experience and knowledge has positively influenced and helped to shape my own project.

I am currently an Early Career Researcher in the Trinity Long Room Hub, (the Arts and Humanities Research Institute). This is an incredible and rare opportunity to engage with researchers across many disciplines in the Humanities. Interaction with other disciplines offers fresh insight and needed challenges to hone my research. This interaction has sharpened my critical thinking and communication skills as I relate my research to peers outside my field. I presented an aspect of my research to the Hub last week and received excellent feedback and questions, which is invaluable in developing my thesis.

What are some of the highlights of your time at TCD?

The symposium, Hebrew seminars, and research seminars. The meal and social time after the research seminars has developed a close community of Ph.D. students and scholars which has greatly enhanced my experience here at TCD. Joining the Early Career Researchers at the Trinity Long Room Hub has also been an unexpected highlight for me.

Dublin does not disappoint! It is a lively city with plenty of green space to explore. Access to the Book of Kells, the Old Library, the Chester Beatty Library and the rich cultural events are significant benefits to living in this city. Dublin has the added benefit of a slower pace of life than many UK cities. The people are very friendly and welcoming; we built a network of friends quickly. The transportation system is excellent, inexpensive and reliable. We are fortunate enough to live in a flat in the city centre as Dublin is a very walkable city with most of the major sites in a 20 minutes radius of where we live. The airport is an easy bus ride away and offers frequent and very cheap flights to most cities across Europe, as well as flights to many destinations in North America and worldwide. Dublin has all the advantages without the major disadvantages of larger cities in the UK and Europe.

Do you have any advice for prospective Ph.D. students?

Do plenty of research before you narrow down your topic. Look beyond your library to others sources such as Academia.edu to get digital copies of articles, then "mine" the footnotes for sources. See who has written on what aspect of your topic, and more

importantly, what aspect of your topic has *not* been written on. Narrow down and then narrow down again!

I pass on the best advice I received and mentioned earlier. Find a supervisor who has a proven record for being accessible and supportive, one who has some interest and expertise in your chosen topic.

Dare to dream, then plan well and work hard to achieve that dream. You will be amazed at what can transpire.

Thank you Lynn, we really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us.