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EDITORIAL FOREWORD



The essays in this issue of *Mashriq & Mahjar* reflect the journal's desire to challenge prevailing accounts of migration and the Middle East. But they also attend, in different ways, to the production and circulation of people, objects, and ideas—whether holy trinkets or notions of the ancient past, definitions of community or fractured and constantly shifting understandings of self.

Far too often, Eastern Mediterranean migration is assumed to be one-directional and monolithic. It is always “Syrians” or Lebanese—in later national parlance—leaving Mount Lebanon to the Americas. However, as Jacob Norris emphasizes in his essay on Bethlehemite merchants, there are still many sites that are still elided from this narrative. His essay re-directs our scholarly attention toward Palestine, its merchants’ far-flung ties in Russia, Central Europe and East Asia, and understudied global trade in “Holy Land” artifacts and manufactures.

While most scholarship focuses on out-migration from the region, Tsolin Nalbantian’s article re-orientates the study of migration into the Eastern Mediterranean and its impact on the political landscape. Her essay centers on the Armenian community in Lebanon that had hitherto remained marginal to Lebanese historical narratives especially of the first half of the 20th century. Nalbantian uses the seemingly communal matter of electing a new Armenian religious leader in Lebanon to illustrate its national and even international ramifications. In her treatment of this episode in 1956, she shows that Armenian immigrants to Lebanon were central to a nation in formation, and to Cold War machinations.

Andrew Arsan’s intervention reconsiders modern uses of the ancient Phoenician past, heretofore considered simply a vehicle for nationalist aspirations. Most scholars uphold that contrived links to a long-past Phoenician heritage were mobilized exclusively by Christian intellectuals in Lebanon and the *mahjar* to advocate for a distinct (and

non-Arab) nationalist vision of the newborn state. Arsan presents compelling evidence that broadens and disrupts this narrow view. He shows that before WWI, the narrative of Phoenician traders plying the seas was used by many other intellectuals (Muslim as well as Christian) to explain the waves of migration that began in the 1880s. In other words, the narrative of a Phoenician heritage served not only nationalist but also diasporic structures of feeling.

The final essay in this issue, by David Wrisley, questions the explicit or implicit exceptionalism which has pervaded many studies of “Lebanese” migration. Through Rabee Jaber’s novel *Amerika*, Wrisley follows Marta Haddad and ‘Ali Jabir in their respective trajectories that culminate in their marriage to one another. These two protagonists embody contrasting narratives of migration. Marta Haddad’s story follows the typical stages of the migrant’s progress – arriving as a peddler, working hard, buying a store, becoming a success—even as it confounds the gendered assumptions that have presented this as a predominantly male tale. To a degree of contrast, ‘Ali Jabir’s itinerant journey eludes any national connection in the Americas and encounters more hardship than success, only finding “home” in his love for Marta.

Together, these essays provide a compelling case for locating work on migration to, from, and within the Eastern Mediterranean in a more fluid, dynamic framework, attentive to the complexities of circulation.