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EXPORTING THE HOLY LAND: ARTISANS AND MERCHANT MIGRANTS IN OTTOMAN-ERA BETHLEHEM

Abstract

This article explores an aspect of Arab migration in the nineteenth century that is often retold in popular memory but rarely discussed in academic work: that of Bethlehem merchants and the “Holy Land” wares they sold. Beginning roughly in the 1850s, these travelling salesmen established trading connections in all corners of the globe, constituting one of the earliest manifestations of the wider movement of Arabic-speaking people away from the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To properly contextualize the emergence and significance of this merchant activity, the article firstly offers an account of how Bethlehem came to be the manufacturing center of a global industry in religious souvenirs. It then turns to the nineteenth-century merchants themselves, exploring their multi-directional trajectories in the nineteenth century. Through these twin dynamics of production and circulation, the article questions some of the commonly held assumptions about the nature of the nineteenth-century “Arab diaspora” or *mahjar*.



The first to enter North America, in search of trade, were the traders of Bethlehem; they carried their wooden, pearl-embellished handcrafts to the Philadelphia exhibition of 1876. They returned to their country with an abundance of wealth, and prompted others to follow in their footsteps. Their migratory influence reached North Lebanon and spread throughout Syria.²

As with many diasporic groups, the origins of the Arab *mahjar* are typically associated in popular memory with the activities of pioneering merchants. As seen in the above quotation, one of the most common versions of this story emphasizes the travelling salesmen who

peddled “Holy Land” souvenirs and trinkets produced in Bethlehem. While these early traders are widely revered in popular memory, their migratory routes and the production of their wares have been afforded little attention in academic literature which tends to view them as romanticized inventions of diasporic culture, irrelevant to the bigger “push and pull factors” of Arab migration out of the Ottoman Empire.³ As a result, an uneasy lacuna exists between the “popular” and the “professional” when it comes to describing and remembering the early phases of migration away from *bilād al-shām* in the nineteenth century.

This article offers a tentative step towards bridging that divide through a description of the most influential town in the production and circulation of Holy Land goods: Bethlehem. Due to a unique combination of factors, by the mid nineteenth century Bethlehem had become the manufacturing center of a global trade in Christian (and later also Muslim) objects of religious devotion. By the end of the century this had allowed merchants from the town to branch out all over the world, many of them enjoying considerable commercial success. It is no exaggeration to claim that when the sources speak of “pioneering Syrian salesmen” trading in crosses, rosaries and other such items, it is more than likely they are referring to Bethlehem-made wares, and quite possibly to the Bethlehemites who sold them.

The article does not attempt a smooth integration of Bethlehem’s merchant community into the wider history of Arab migration to the Americas. Rather it seeks to demonstrate that the production and marketing of religious crafts in the town is a story worth telling in its own right. The literature that downplays the significance of the trade in Holy Land products to the wider movements of Syrians across the Atlantic may well be correct to do so. More systemic economic, political and social factors surely played the lead role in that process. In contrast, the value of studying Bethlehem’s merchant classes lies not only in bringing to life a rich local history, but also because it challenges some of the established wisdom on the nature of the *mahjar* itself. In particular, the migratory paths of Bethlehemites help to de-center our view of Arab migration in the nineteenth century, pushing it away from a purely American-focused perspective towards a much wider range of locales. By the 1880s, shops and wholesalers run by the town’s merchants can be found in the business directories of cities as diverse as Manila, Kiev, Port-au-Prince and Singapore.

In order to describe the conditions that gave rise to these alternative trajectories of Arab migration, this article is divided into

two sections. The first of these describes the longer process by which Bethlehem emerged as a center of production for the Holy Land souvenirs that were later marketed around the world in the nineteenth century. An important factor in this process was the Franciscan presence that had been established in the town since the early days of the Order's conception in the thirteenth century. For this reason the first section begins with an examination of the close interaction that occurred between Bethlehem and Catholic Europe, especially from the sixteenth century onwards. Equally important, however, was Bethlehem's more immediate geographical locale – the predominantly Muslim Eastern Mediterranean with its longstanding routes of trade, pilgrimage and artistic design. It is only through a discussion of these multi-faceted influences that we can properly understand the global migrations of the nineteenth century – migrations which are described in more detail in the second section of the article through two particular case studies: the Philippines and Ukraine. It is hoped this longer and more varied view of production and circulation in Bethlehem can provide a counter-balance to the American-focused studies of Arab migration. At the same time it also challenges the well-worn historical narrative that views “modernity” in the Eastern Mediterranean as a uniquely nineteenth-century phenomenon, resulting from increased western, and specifically Protestant, interest in the region. In contrast, the story of Bethlehem's emergence onto the global stage is a more fluid and long-running affair that owes remarkably little to Protestant influence. Indeed it is fluidity that best characterizes Bethlehem's history more generally, and it is argued here that the town should be viewed less as a “place of origin” for the migrants of the nineteenth century than a “staging post” where people, goods and ideas have congregated over time, later to move on to new destinations.

BETHLEHEM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE SOUVENIR INDUSTRY

Perhaps more than any other town or city in the Eastern Mediterranean, the modern history of Bethlehem is deeply entwined with that of European Catholicism. In recent years a body of historiography has begun to emerge that examines the heightened interaction between the Roman Catholic Church and the Arabic-speaking Christians of the Levant from around the mid-seventeenth century onwards, particularly in Aleppo and Mount Lebanon.⁴ But while these areas witnessed a Jesuit-led attempt to gain influence over local Uniate churches (especially Maronite and Greek Catholic or

“Melkite”), it was only in Bethlehem that a significant proportion of the town’s population directly adhered to the Roman Catholic faith.

Most of the available sources indicate the majority of Bethlehem was Roman Catholic (or *lātīn* in local terms) from the late seventeenth century onwards. This is certainly the picture presented by the Franciscan friars who provided regular updates to the Vatican’s missionary headquarters, the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, on conversions and parish numbers. While the Franciscans may have been prone to exaggerating their achievements when corresponding with their masters in Rome, other sources seem to corroborate their claims. Particularly useful are the locally recorded parish records of the Bethlehem Catholic Church that has registered every known birth, baptism, confirmation, marriage and death among the Catholic community since 1619. These records give a much more detailed picture of the Catholic population in Bethlehem, documenting a notable expansion in the late seventeenth century that is generally in line with the Franciscan reports sent to Rome. One source that contradicts this picture is the 1691 Ottoman poll tax register of non-Muslim communities in Palestine, discussed in the work of historian Oded Peri.⁵ Interestingly the register records every adult Christian male in Bethlehem as being of “*rūm*” (Greek Orthodox) denomination. But in the face of a reliable body of contradictory evidence it must be assumed either that the respondents to the Ottoman survey were afraid to declare they had switched to Roman Catholicism (perhaps linking Ottoman authority with potential Greek Orthodox reprisals), or that Ottoman officials made crass assumptions of denomination when compiling their records. Equally likely is that local residents perceived their denomination in a relatively fluid manner in this period, shifting their identity according to perceived self-interest. Whatever the reasons for the absence of “Latins” from the Ottoman survey, it seems safe to summarize that the Franciscans enjoyed far more success in tiny Bethlehem (population probably never exceeding 4,000 before 1900⁶) than in any other town in the region: throughout the years 1692-1909 they recorded a higher indigenous Roman Catholic population there than anywhere else in the entire *Custodia di Terra Santa* which included all of geographical Syria, Egypt and Cyprus.⁷

The reasons for the Franciscans’ particular success in Bethlehem are too manifold to explore in detail here. Suffice to say the town’s pre-existing majority Christian population (mostly Greek Orthodox), its proximity to the Custodia’s headquarters in Jerusalem and its well-established status as a pilgrim station, all provided fertile ground for

Catholic missionary activity. Whatever the causes, the relative freedom afforded to the Franciscans in Bethlehem meant they were able to leave an indelible mark on the town's character that would later help facilitate the migration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Spatially, the Catholic population appears initially to have been centred in *ḥārat al-tarājmeh*, one of seven districts in the town now considered the "historic quarters" of Bethlehem. As an interlinked group of families (or *ḥamūla*), the *tarājmeh* trace their origins to Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese immigrants to the town. It is believed that merchants and pilgrims from southwestern Europe settled in Bethlehem in various stages from the Crusades up until the sixteenth century. Over time these families are held to have assumed the role of guides and interpreters for European pilgrims and were thus named the *tarājmeh* (interpreters or translators). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, it is clear that growing numbers of families from the other quarters were adopting the Roman Catholic rites. In addition, the *tarājmeh* families themselves were increasingly moving out of their historic quarter, all of which produced a demographic map of Bethlehem in which *lātīn* could be found in all areas of the town.

Education appears to have played a crucial role in this diffusion of the Catholic population across the town. But unlike the Protestant-centric accounts which emphasize the nineteenth century as a period of profound rupture and modernization,⁸ the activities of the Franciscans in Bethlehem points to a longer-running story of continuity and gradual change. Established some time in the early sixteenth century, the Franciscans' Terra Sancta College was a much earlier example by which Arab Christians, and later Muslims too, acquired the tools for more intensive forms of contact with European trade and culture. A key skill obtained by the boys who graduated from Terra Sancta, and later the girls from the Saint Joseph school, was language, especially Italian. As early as 1598, a Dutch pilgrim, Johannes van Cootwijk, remarked that, although most of Bethlehem's inhabitants still observed the Greek Orthodox rites, "all of them are skilled in the Italian language" [*omnes tamen italicam callent linguam*]. This was, explained van Cootwijk, thanks to the work of the Terra Sancta College that "teaches them the language by heart so they may serve the Franciscan elders and work as interpreters for foreigners from the West."⁹

Van Cootwijk appears to have spent the majority of his time in the Franciscan convent and the *tarājmeh* quarter and thus formed a distorted view of the number of Bethlehemites who could speak Italian.

Nevertheless the available sources indicate a sizeable number of Bethlehem's population could speak the *lingua franca* of Catholic Europe by the early seventeenth century and therefore interact more intimately with the rising numbers of pilgrims visiting the town. Indeed the growing volume of visitors to Bethlehem cannot be separated from the locals' increasing ability to communicate with European travellers. While van Cootwijk's assertion that all Bethlehemites spoke the language must be inaccurate, there is good evidence to show the growing influence of the Terra Sancta College. Records of enrolment in the school begin in 1692 showing that some 50 boys studied there in that year – no small number given that the total number of *lātīn* in the town was 385 and that the town's entire population cannot have exceeded 1,000.¹⁰ Comparative figures from 1699 also show that more pupils were enrolled in the Bethlehem school (35) than in any other Terra Santa school, including Damascus (2), Aleppo (9), Cairo (25) and Jerusalem (30).¹¹ Numbers in the Bethlehem school continued to grow steadily over the following two centuries to the point where more than 300 boys were enrolled in 1898.¹²

The links between Franciscan education and the ability of Bethlehem merchants to market their products abroad can be glimpsed as early as the seventeenth century. Contained in the *Propaganda Fide* archives are letters written by Bethlehemites in 1690 requesting permission for "fundraising trips" to Rome.¹³ These requests appear to have been frustrated by the Franciscan leadership in Jerusalem, but it is indicative that they chose to target Italy and that they wrote their letters in an imperfect yet accomplished Italian. Equally important is the nature of their intended business. Although the letters do not directly address the issue, they do mention earlier, failed attempts to leave Palestine in which relatives carried with them "crowns from the Holy Land and crosses that those in Bethlehem are accustomed to making [*croci che questi di Bethlemme sogliono lavorare*]"¹⁴ This points the way forward to the later migrations of the nineteenth century: already in the 1690s Bethlehem merchants were trading in locally produced religious devotional objects and had identified their potential value in foreign markets.

Tracing the emergence of this craft industry, the Franciscans again appear to have played a key role. This is most evident in the models of Holy Land shrines in Palestine the Franciscans commissioned from local artisans, beginning in the late sixteenth century. As Michele Piccirillo has documented, the production of these models was given major impetus by the work of Bernardino Amico

who served the *Custodia di Terra Santa* between 1593 and 1597 and produced the first scale drawings of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Nativity Church in Bethlehem.¹⁵ We will probably never know the identities of the Bethlehem artisans who worked on Amico's models, but their labors produced some of the most exquisite works of art to emerge from the Eastern Mediterranean in the early modern period. Today examples of these models, crafted from olive wood with mother-of-pearl inlay, can be found in museums and stately homes all over Europe, from the Palazzo Pitti to the British Museum.

Underneath these works of fine art were the thousands of smaller devotional objects which constituted the staple sales of the



Figure 1: Bethlehem-made rosary, olive wood and mother-of-pearl. Thought to be from 18th century. George Michel al-A'ma collection.

Bethlehem industry—crucifixes, rosaries, reliquaries, crowns, candlesticks and many others. Like the models, they were mostly carved from locally harvested olive wood and inlaid with stones or mother-of-pearl. Sources suggest that by the mid seventeenth century the Franciscans were operating a sizeable export business out of Bethlehem, sending the wares to Jerusalem from where they were shipped via Acre to some of the major ports of Catholic Europe, and particularly Venice.¹⁶ Precise figures of the sales and shipping routes are hard to come by today, but travellers' accounts give occasional glimpses of the scale of the enterprise. Among the earliest to mention the export trade is Michel Nau, a French Jesuit missionary stationed in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1660s and 70s. After stating that every member of the fifty or so Roman Catholic families in Bethlehem spoke Italian and served the pilgrims as interpreters and guides, Nau went on to state: "Their profession, like that of the other Christians, as well

as the Muslims, is that of making rosaries [*faire de Chappelets*] which are blessed in the holy sites and sent to Europe [*qu'on benit sur les saints Lieux qu'on envoie en Europe*]."¹⁷ A little under a century later Fredriech Hasselquist, a student of Linnaeus at Uppsala in Sweden, confirmed the continued expansion of the trade in a description of his journey around the region, published in 1769: "The procurator [the financial officer of the Franciscan convent in Bethlehem] informed me that 15,000 piasters-worth [of religious souvenirs] were held in the Jerusalem convent which seemed almost unbelievable. They are sent to all the Catholic countries of Europe [*on en envoie dans tous les pays catholiques de l'Europe*] but above all to Spain and Portugal."¹⁸

At times production appears to have outstripped demand in the industry as an increasing number of men (and later women too) took up the profession. Most notoriously in 1771, one of the Bethlehem artisans presented himself at the Convent of St Saviour (the Franciscan headquarters in Jerusalem) demanding payment for an array of handicrafts he had brought with him. According to Giovanni Mariti, an Italian writer who spent time with the Franciscans in Bethlehem, the friars informed the man they were unable to purchase his wares, as the storehouse was already full of unsold goods. In response the man is said to have thrown his own son into a cistern where he drowned, and then blamed the incident on the friars. In the resulting legal case, the "Pasha of Damascus" (presumably the Ottoman governor or *wāli* of the Damascus Eyalet which included Jerusalem and Bethlehem) ordered the Franciscans to pay "3,000 zecchini" (Venetian gold coins), although the fee was later returned to the Custodia by the Ottoman authorities after the decision was overturned.¹⁹

Whoever was to blame for this tragic incident, the crisis of supply and demand appears to have been a temporary setback for the industry, most likely caused by a relatively brief dip in pilgrim numbers to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the early 1770s.²⁰ Indeed Mariti himself emphasized the continuing importance of the souvenir industry to Bethlehem's economy after visiting the town in 1776:

In the town of Bethlehem no other trade is known than that of making wooden crowns and crosses, ornamented with mother of pearl...From such work they take a great part of their subsistence, and this is the only branch of commerce that supports that town. The European merchants of Acre are the ones who purchase the majority of those works that

are packed into boxes and transported to Venice [*riposti in casse vengono spediti a Venezia*] from where they are sent to Germany.²¹

The reason for Mariti's emphasis on Germany as the final destination for much of this merchandise remains unclear, but the basic features of the industry are in no doubt. All the available sources describe Bethlehem as the manufacturing center of an expanding trade in religious souvenirs, carved mainly from olive wood but increasingly adorned with mother-of-pearl sourced mostly from the Red Sea.

The skills and access to markets gained through interaction with the Franciscan community is an important aspect of Bethlehem's history, but it only provides part of the explanation for the shift towards global patterns of migration in the nineteenth century. As a town under Islamic rule for the majority of the past millennium and a half, Bethlehem has been indelibly shaped by Muslim art, trade and political governance. From an artisanal perspective, the town's status as a center of production far predates the sixteenth-century church models, as testified by an elaborate Quranic manuscript recently sold at Christie's, London, signed by the scribe Mir Hajj ibn Sheikh 'Ali al-Husayn al-Iraqi, and dated 1401 CE "in the town of Bayt Lahm."²² The existence of such fine Mamluk-era Islamic artwork from Bethlehem helps explain why the Franciscans commissioned their church models in Bethlehem, drawing upon a pre-existing concentration of skilled craftsmen. More specifically, the Franciscans did not introduce the art of mother-of-pearl inlay and carving to Bethlehem; rather it was an evolving and well-rooted local practice, as witnessed in the interior mosaics of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock (691 CE), or the Byzantine and Crusader-era mother-of-pearl mosaics in Bethlehem's Nativity Church.²³

This sense of interconnectedness with the wider Muslim world was not only external: a substantial Muslim minority has been present in Bethlehem for many centuries, forming another factor in the development of the trade in religious wares. From around the sixteenth century onwards the town's Muslim residents were concentrated in the so-called *ḥārat al-fawāgreh*—today one of the seven historic quarters, named after the nearby village of Faghur whose inhabitants settled in Bethlehem at various stages during the Ottoman period. The Shari'a Court records in Jerusalem and the Waqf Archives in Bethlehem give insights into the integral role played by the *fawāgreh* in the town's

development.²⁴ Until the mid-nineteenth century, two of the *fawāgrēh* families, the Shakhur and the Showkeh, were routinely appointed by the Ottoman district governor as the town sheikhs (*shuyūkh*), acting as mediators between the imperial state and the local population on issues such as tax collection, military service and land sales.²⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century these families were prominent among those who migrated to the Americas, many of them selling the same Holy Land devotional objects as their Christian compatriots.²⁶

As well as this locally based Muslim community, an array of non-European travellers' accounts provide viewpoints onto the diversity of Bethlehem society and the influences that impacted upon its souvenir industry. Some of the great Muslim geographers and travel writers such as Ibn Battuta and Evliya Çelebi included the town in their itineraries and made brief mention of its characteristics.²⁷ Other travellers like the Sufi scholar and mufti of Damascus, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641–1731), provided more detailed descriptions which give us a distinctly Muslim interpretation of Bethlehem's religious significance at that time. Al-Nabulusi described the Nativity Church as the "site of the palm and the manger," in reference to the Quranic description of Mary giving birth under a palm tree, and related his awe upon visiting the birth place of "the impeccable profit" [*al-nabi al-ma'sūm*].²⁸ He also wrote a poem about the town's mystical tranquility and the way in which the Franciscan monks sent him into rapture with their singing and playing of the *urghūl* (a local wind instrument) – a sound he compared to the song of blackbirds and nightingales.²⁹ This emphasis on Bethlehem's spirituality is a reflection of the particular significance ascribed to Jesus and his birth in Bethlehem by Sufism³⁰ and is confirmed by the visit of another Syrian Sufi, Mustafa al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, who travelled all over the region in the mid eighteenth century. In his account, al-Siddiqi gave a rare description of a mosque in Bethlehem that far predates the only current mosque in the old city (built 1860) and hints at a much longer tradition of Muslim worship in the town that runs back to the original Muslim conquest of 637 CE under Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.³¹ He also claimed that "one half of the town's inhabitants are Muslims and the other half are Christian, and one of their customs is to produce rosaries from olive wood [*masābih maṣnū'a min khashab al-zeitūn*] and shape it into different forms and sell them to visitors."³² While al-Siddiqi's estimates of the size of the Muslim population seem to be exaggerated, such descriptions nonetheless give a sense of the town's religious diversity as well as an alternative perspective on the souvenir industry.

More generally, the interest these writers showed in Bethlehem hints at the multifarious nature of pilgrimage to the town, rather than the often-assumed unidirectional flow of western visitors. The annual Hajj caravans that made their way southwards from Damascus towards Mecca passed a short distance east of the Dead Sea, prompting many of the pilgrims, merchants, and artisans to make stops in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, or simply to perform a shorter pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to Jerusalem itself.³³ On a smaller but perhaps not less significant scale, an annual Christian pilgrimage also made its way southwards to Jerusalem via Damascus, typically setting off in Aleppo and stopping at various monasteries and holy sites along the way such as Ma'lula, Saidnaya and Mar Saba.³⁴ Scholars such as Oded Peri and Bernard Heyberger have highlighted the ways in which these pilgrimage routes created intimate bonds of commerce and culture between the northern and southern portions of Ottoman Syria, and Bethlehem's artisanal production must also be viewed in this light.

Through his analysis of the Ottoman regulation of the Christian pilgrimage, Peri has provided valuable data on the pilgrims themselves, demonstrating that, at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so-called "Eastern" Christians made up the majority of the pilgrimage traffic to Jerusalem and, by extension, Bethlehem.³⁵

Heyberger sheds light on some of the cultural and religious aspects of the Jerusalem pilgrimage, including the various shrines visited and rituals performed by the pilgrims upon their arrival.³⁶ Among the most interesting is the practice by which both Christian and Muslim women visited the site in Bethlehem known as *maghārat al-ḥalīb* (the Milk Grotto) – still a feature of pilgrimage to Bethlehem today. It was here that a drop of Mary's



Figure 2: Late nineteenth-century Bethlehem-made mother-of-pearl carving. Depicts Muslim shrines (clockwise from top left): Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque, Tomb of David, Mosque of Abraham (Hebron). George Michel al-A'ma collection.

milk is said to have turned the cave walls white when she and Joseph stopped to nurse the infant Jesus when fleeing Bethlehem. Female pilgrims, Christian and Muslim, would thus consume the chalky white stone of the grotto walls (mixed with food or water) in the hope of improving their fertility. The shared sense of Christian-Muslim significance was later reflected in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century artwork produced in Bethlehem, which was sometimes tailored to Muslim sensibilities through the inclusion of Islamic inscriptions.³⁷ By the early twentieth century this had diversified further to include large-scale, mother-of-pearl replica models of nearby Muslim shrines such as Rachel's Tomb (just outside Bethlehem), the Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem) and the Mosque of Abraham (Hebron).³⁸

FROM THE PRODUCTION OF CIRCULATION—MIGRATION IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

The ritual of pilgrimage is just one of a multitude of ways in which Bethlehem has long been connected to circuits of migration and trade that incorporated large portions of western Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and southern Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century this process had become so accelerated that Bethlehemites themselves had usurped the Franciscans as the principal exporters of their handicrafts, establishing new trading posts all over the world.

A key factor in this process is the gradual emergence and expansion of a merchant middle class in Bethlehem. As the souvenir industry expanded in the late eighteenth century, some of the senior figures in the various Bethlehem clans began to establish makeshift stalls (and later their own shops), rather than hawking on the street to pilgrims or



Figure 3: Bethlehem mother-of-pearl workers, between 1934 and 1939. American Colony (Jerusalem) photo collection, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

selling direct to the Franciscans. Vital to their success was the increasing use of mother-of-pearl in the wares they sold. Taken from the lining of certain types of oyster shells, this iridescent material became increasingly fashionable in both European and Asian tastes in the nineteenth century,³⁹ a fact not lost on the artisans of Bethlehem who were able to import increasing quantities of the shells. By the middle of the century new workshops were appearing all over the town, representing another shift in the industry: previously the work had largely been carried out in the home and passed down from father to son. Now as many as 50 workers (increasingly including women) might be recruited to the bigger workshops where they were trained specifically in the painstaking techniques of mother-of-pearl carving.⁴⁰

In the nineteenth century, detailed information on the local population becomes more readily available through surviving memoirs, as well as the Catholic parish records that provide valuable biographical notes on all of the town's Roman Catholic families from around 1700 onwards. In addition to these written sources, some of the families who set up workshops in the nineteenth century are still operating today or at least were doing so within living memory. At times these sources overlap, as in the case of Jadallah Sammur who left behind memoirs of his life and whose grandson George is still resident in the town today and has published a book on the town's history.⁴¹ Born in 1857, Jadallah learnt the art of mother-of-pearl from the Franciscans who at that time still taught local boys basic craftwork in their monastery compound. Typical of his generation, Jadallah initially used to take his products to Manger Square, lay down some cloth and sell to passers by. Through increased sales to the Franciscans, however, he managed to raise enough money to open his own workshop some time in the 1880s which, at its peak, employed around 40 workers.⁴²

An important figure in this process was the Italian (but non-Franciscan) priest Antonio Belloni who established an orphanage in Bethlehem in 1864 with an adjoining technical school that trained the orphans in mother-of-pearl and olive wood carving. Over time Belloni, known locally as "Abulyatama" (Father of the Orphans), bought increasing quantities of handicrafts from local producers which he in turn sold to various European outlets to raise money for the upkeep and expansion of his orphanage. By 1891 Belloni had incorporated his institution into the Salesian Society – an Italian Catholic group founded in the 1840s to care for disadvantaged children which was taking an increasing interest in the Eastern Mediterranean at that time. This allowed Belloni to further increase his purchases from local artisans as

well as construct a gleaming new church whose spire still dominates the skyline of Bethlehem's old city today. The existing records of the Salesians give a rare glimpse into the way the town's handicrafts were marketed and sold abroad. In the society's newsletters from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, numerous entries document the gifting of religious items to dignitaries and benefactors as a means of encouraging further assistance. There are also more specific bulletins addressed to institutions with which Belloni had established connections for selling the Bethlehem products. One of these was the Roman Catholic cathedral in Tournai, Belgium, to whom he sent "objets de piété et de fantaisie fabriqués à Bethléem". This included "toutes sortes de chapelets [all kinds of rosaries]" and "crucifix en nacre pour oratoire [mother-of-pearl crucifixes for use in prayers]", and they were sold at a certain "dépôt de ces objets chez M. Decallonne-Liagre" in Tournai's Grand Place.⁴³ Among the few remaining mother-of-pearl artists in Bethlehem today, Belloni continues to be revered as a patron of their profession who encouraged merchants to begin marketing their own products abroad. George Sammur, for example, attributes his grandfather's step up from Manger Square hawker to workshop owner in the 1880s to the sales contacts he established through Belloni.⁴⁴

While the likes of Jadallah Sammur achieved moderate success in this period, the aristocrats of mother-of-pearl production in Bethlehem were the Mikel and Zoughbi families. According to local historians, Butrus Mikel (b. 1748) was the very first Bethlehemite to establish a fixed shop selling mother-of-pearl in 1818 in a building belonging to the Armenian monastery near Manger Square. As part of the *Tarājmeḥ* clan, the Mikel family traces its roots back to Venetians who came to the town at the beginning of the seventeenth century. While this type of family memory preferences European connections over other types of ancestry, the Mikel family has certainly profited from its connections with Catholic Europe, selling their wares to various outlets over the decades and still operating a shop today on Milk Grotto street, run by Butrus' great great grandson, Luis. The Zoughbis, meanwhile, reached the pinnacle of mother-of-pearl artistry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The founder of the family business was Bishara Zoughbi (1863–1934) who established a workshop, also on Milk Grotto Street, in the 1880s and quickly gained a reputation as one of the town's most skilled mother-of-pearl craftsmen.⁴⁵ He was later joined by his brother Yousef (1878–1964) and together they achieved dizzying success, expanding their repertoire to produce enormous, richly detailed replica models of churches as well

as Muslim monuments such as Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, carved entirely from mother-of-pearl.⁴⁶ The workshop was later maintained and expanded by Bishara's son Gregory who, like his father and uncle, sold his pieces to religious and political dignitaries all over the world including the Shah of Iran, the Vatican, the Sheikh of Kuwait, the Jordanian royal family and the second Turkish president, Mustafa İsmet İnönü.⁴⁷

The remarkable success of these artists is testament to a much wider mother-of-pearl industry that was thriving by the end of the nineteenth century,



Figure 4: The Jacir Palace, Bethlehem. Photo by the author.

providing employment for hundreds, if not thousands, of workers. It was against this backdrop that some men in the town, particularly among the *lātin* families, began to specialize exclusively in marketing the products, gradually forming a distinct class of merchants whose reach had become truly global by the beginning of the twentieth century. The small fortunes amassed by a number of families in this period is reflected in the ostentatious, pink-stone mansions that sprang up around the town from the 1890s onwards, embodied most dramatically by the Jacir palace, built to house the merchant (and later town mayor) Suleiman Jacir in 1910, and today home of the Intercontinental Hotel.

These mansions are also testament to Bethlehem's other great source of male employment, stone cutting, which is frequently alluded to in both secondary literature and primary sources.⁴⁸ But it was the merchants of mother-of-pearl who appear to have constituted the town's first discernible group of trading migrants, beginning around the 1850s and reaching the peak of their success between 1880 and 1930, after which time the Great Depression sent many of their enterprises into decline and even bankruptcy. Family names such as Mansour, Handal, Dabdoub, Hazboun, Jacir and Kattan are still today associated with the accumulation of unprecedented wealth in this period through

the sale of Bethlehem-produced mother-of-pearl ornaments and later branching out into a bewildering array of import-export businesses. The full extent of their global journeys is too wide to cover in detail here; rather individual examples of families settling in the Philippines and Ukraine will be used to illustrate the broader patterns of migration.

Most commonly in the early stages of Bethlehem migration, young male members of merchant families established new shops or trading centers in locations deemed to be both lucrative markets for their religious wares and potential sources of goods to bring back to the Bethlehem area. As the parish records testify, these early stages of migration were largely circular and transitory. Bethlehem remained “base camp” as they mostly married, had children and died in the town, at least up until World War I when economic hardship appears to have pushed many families to emigrate on a more permanent basis.

In popular memory the initial breakthroughs for Bethlehem’s merchants commonly came in the form of international exhibitions, particularly those in the United States. First among them is held to be the 1853 Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in New York, attended by the brothers Jiries and Ibrahim Handal who are today celebrated as the first Bethlehemites to sell mother-of-pearl abroad. From this point, the subsequent world’s fairs in Philadelphia (1876), Chicago (1893) and St Louis (1904) are said to have provided a springboard for establishing sales outlets all over the world and particularly in the Americas. While there is documentary evidence showing that at least some of these fairs were attended by Bethlehem mother-of-pearl merchants,⁴⁹ their influence should not be overstated. The Ottoman exhibits at these shows were above all a staged performance designed for an American public eager to consume images of an ‘exotic Orient’. As such Sarah Gualtieri is most likely correct in her assessment that their impact on American Orientalism was greater than their influence on patterns of Syrian migration.⁵⁰ Indeed the mother-of-pearl merchants should not be viewed as the early pioneers of a uniform pattern of Arab migration to the Americas; rather they were an early subsection of migration within a wider trend that is more complex and multi-centred than has previously been documented.

Without doubt the international exhibitions were useful for the early Bethlehem merchants, but it is equally instructive to note that, in the same period, many of the same names are found in immigration records in far more diverse locations. The two brothers, Gubra’il and Mikha’il Dabdoub, for example, are well remembered in Bethlehem

today for their success at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 at which they were awarded a medal for the quality of the mother-of-pearl products they exhibited. But their names also appear on several occasions in steamship passenger lists and immigration records for the Philippines and Singapore. Gubra'il first appears in this context in October 1881 when he was granted access by the Spanish authorities to re-enter Manila (from Singapore) and continue his business activities. These activities, the report states, consist of a shop in the Binondo district of Manila that sold "efectos de su pais" (goods from his country).⁵¹ Several family members joined Gubra'il in both Manila and Singapore later in the 1880s, including his brothers Mikha'il and Hanna (listed in the Manila archives as Miguel and Juan), and his nephew Jiries (Jorge). The Dabdoubs became one of the most successful merchant families of their time, as can be gleaned from a number of new residences they built around Bethlehem, the most impressive of which is situated a short distance south from the Jacir Palace along Hebron Road. Built in 1923, the palatial house is today used by the Bethlehem Bible College, but it still bears the initials GJD (Gubra'il Josef Dabdoub) on the elaborate wrought iron gates – a testament to more prosperous times for Bethlehem's merchant community.

In the Philippines the Dabdoubs were among the first in a wave of migration that saw at least a dozen Bethlehem families establishing businesses all over the archipelago and particularly in the northeastern reaches of Luzon Island.⁵² The available evidence points to their presence there being linked to the mother-of-pearl trade and in particular the need to establish new sources of raw materials. Those who still work in the trade today in Bethlehem describe an important shift in the industry when new types of oyster shells from the south Pacific began to be imported to Bethlehem. The thick, whitish coating of these shells, belonging to the *pinctada maxima* species, allowed a more detailed and elaborate form of relief carving.⁵³ While this acted as a major spur for the expansion of the Bethlehem industry from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the increased cost of importing the raw material (from the Pacific rather than the Red Sea) appears to have sparked a search to cut out the middlemen and buy direct from the source.

Once these early inroads into the Philippines markets were made a host of other Bethlehem families followed the Dabdoubs to the archipelago. Many of them enjoyed considerable success in a range of import-export businesses. At least fourteen Bethlehem family names can be identified in the Manila archives, many of them sending

numerous siblings, cousins and other male relatives to the Philippines during the early stages. The story of one of these families, the Salems, demonstrates the extent to which this particular migratory route had become a more permanent destination for Bethlehemites by the 1920s. After Elias Salem had first established a trading base in the Philippines in the late nineteenth century, several of his children chose to settle there in the 1910s, raising families in Manila as well as the more southerly towns of Tacloban and Dumaguete.⁵⁴ Interviews with the descendants of these children reveal a much more locally rooted upbringing, rather than the transitory experiences of earlier generations. Samir Salem, for example, today recalls how his father Elias (born in Manila, 1925) was raised by a Philippine maid and consequently spoke Tagalog as a first language. His Arabic, by contrast, was far from perfect as he would frequently confuse pronouns and was unable to read or write in the language. Elias is also remembered as an aficionado of the then-popular Philippine sport of cockfighting, something his mother (of the older, Bethlehem-born generation) tried to forbid him from attending – apparently with little effect, as testified by the painting of a cockfighting scene still hanging in the Bethlehem family home today.

Sustaining this longer-term presence in the Philippines for the Salem family was a series of successful business ventures. As with the Bethlehem migrants more generally, the early focus on trading in Holy Land souvenirs quickly diversified to include new lines of import-export. Manila business directories list a number of Salem family enterprises operating in the 1920s and 30s, dealing mostly in cloth and jewelry.⁵⁵ The success enjoyed by Bethlehemites in the Philippines has, however, largely been forgotten in Bethlehem today where migration is almost exclusively associated with Central and South America. This is in part due to the Philippine community's sudden departure following the Japanese invasion of the islands in 1941, an event which caused the departure of virtually the entire Bethlehem population overnight, often in dramatic circumstances. The children of Elias Salem, for example, describe how he and his family were forced to jump from a third-floor apartment set on fire by the advancing Japanese forces in Manila.⁵⁶ But the existence of a thriving and relatively settled Bethlehem diaspora in the Philippines before 1941 should alert our attention to the multi-centered nature of the *mahjar* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before it became more focused on the Americas.

The implications of these earlier migrations to the south Pacific stretch beyond the confines of Bethlehem's own history. Listed alongside the Bethlehem names in the Manila archives is a larger number of 'Syrian' family names, especially from the Mount Lebanon region, as has been documented by William Clarence-Smith.⁵⁷ This is confirmed in the family histories of Lebanese communities in Australia, some of whom trace their presence there through traders in the late nineteenth century who passed through the Philippines selling Holy Land souvenirs. One such example is the Malouf family whose presence in Australia is held to date back to Frank Moses Malouf. Frank is said to have left his hometown of Zahlé in the 1880s, travelling first to the Philippines where he "moved from island to island making reasonable money in the sale of rosary beads and other religious articles", before later following the Australian gold rush to Queensland.⁵⁸ It is probable that the goods peddled by the likes of Frank Malouf were produced in Bethlehem given that the mid and late nineteenth century was also a time of considerable migration within the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. This is certainly the case with another Australian-Lebanese family, the Nashbis from Bsharri, whose origins are traced to Massoud al-Nashbi, said to have arrived in Australia in 1880 where he was "very successful in selling souvenirs he obtained from the Holy Land and for which the Australians paid large sums of money."⁵⁹ It is also likely that Lebanese and Syrian traders were able to purchase and sell the Bethlehem-produced wares once they arrived in the Philippines. For example, one Bethlehem family that ran several shops in Manila, the Abu Hamamehs, are frequently listed in the Philippine immigration records as 'guarantors' (*fiadores*) for arriving Syrian migrants. One of the Abu Hamameh shops was named "El Belen" (Bethlehem) and it is likely that as *fiadores* they provided credit to some of the new immigrants in the form of Holy Land souvenirs to sell.⁶⁰

The connections between the Bethlehem traders in the Philippines and Australia may well run deeper. One of the major sources for the *pinctada maxima* shells were the pearling towns in northern Queensland, especially Thursday Island, an area where both Bethlehemite and Lebanese families are known to have traded in the early twentieth century, and some of the Syrians arriving in the Philippines in the 1890s were listed as resident in Australia.⁶¹ Looking beyond the pacific sphere, however, it is clear that the search for new sources of oyster shells does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the migration routes of Bethlehem's merchants. They were equally

well established by the 1890s in cities such as Kiev, Paris and Port-au-Prince where the trade in oyster shells was most likely not a factor. A less precise but perhaps more nuanced explanation of the destinations they chose is that they simply followed their business noses. A remarkable adaptability and acumen for business is displayed by the Bethlehem merchants in this period as they probed new markets and took advantage of any available openings. Many of them seem to have begun by tapping into the old Franciscan trading routes and later using these as a basis for expansions into unchartered domains. Alongside the need for mother-of-pearl sources, this can help explain the early prevalence of Catholic strongholds in their list of trading countries – France, Italy, the Philippines, Haiti – thus echoing the earlier attempts of merchants to reach Rome in the 1690s.

At the same time Bethlehem traders were constantly alert to new possibilities, as demonstrated by the rapid rise of the Kattan family in the Russian Empire. This particular enterprise was started by Elias Kattan who is said to have opened a small shop in Bethlehem in the 1870s, dealing mainly in mother-of-pearl souvenirs. Family history relates that in 1879 Elias travelled to Istanbul where he met a Russian businessman who encouraged him to sell his wares in Kiev.⁶² After investigating the matter further, Elias commissioned a series of mother-of-pearl and olive wood souvenirs that would appeal specifically to Russian markets through the use of Orthodox motifs and the mimicry of Russian traditions of icon painting. Thus, in a classic display of Bethlehemite versatility, the Roman Catholic Elias Kattan was able to establish the first known Arab souvenir shop in Orthodox Kiev in 1880. For the location of his shop he chose to apply the Bethlehem recipe for success to Kiev, opening his business on one of the streets that leads up to the Pechersk Lavra, or “Cave Monastery” – one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in the Russian Empire. In the early years of the shop’s existence Elias followed the typical pattern by leaving his wife and family in Bethlehem, returning once or twice a year to collect more merchandise and attend important events, including the birth of his children, all of whom were born in Bethlehem. His eldest son Yaqub (born 1885) displayed a keen interest in the Kiev business and spent increasingly long periods of time there as a teenager. After marrying Farida Kattan (of the same extended family) in 1900, Yaqub moved permanently to Kiev and by 1914 had taken over management of the business after Elias decided to live out his retirement in Bethlehem.

In keeping with a wider shift in the migratory patterns of Bethlehem merchants, Yaqub settled more permanently in Kiev in the

1910s, as reflected by the birth of three of his four children there. He also followed the trend by which the initial focus on selling Holy Land souvenirs was greatly expanded into a global import-export business, with a particular specialization in glasses lenses and fabrics purchased from a wide range of countries, including France, Poland, Lithuania and Greece. Another lucrative line of business was opened up around 1914–15 when Yaqub secured a series of contracts to supply Orthodox churches all over the Ukraine region with incense he began importing from Alsagoff and Company, the well-known Hadhrami Arab trading dynasty in Yemen and Singapore.⁶³ This further underlines the need to draw connections between the various spheres of Bethlehem migration in order to better understand the reasons for its success: the first Bethlehemites to arrive in the Philippines came via Singapore and it is not unlikely that they helped establish trading links with the Alsagoff firms that were later utilised by the Kattans in Kiev.⁶⁴ Numerous similar examples of the Kattans tapping into a 'worldwide web' of Bethlehem traders can be found in the family's private archive, such as a series of transactions in 1917 in which rosary beads were purchased from a fellow Bethlehemite in Bulgaria, Jadallah Maria.⁶⁵

As this last example suggests, the original trade in religious souvenirs continued to be a staple of the Kattan family business in Kiev. A company catalogue, printed in Russian in 1914, underlines the extent to which this trade had diversified beyond the purely Bethlehem-produced wares. Introduced as 'a wholesale price-list of goods from Jerusalem and Mount Athos', the first five pages alone are dedicated to a bewildering variety of rosaries (*chetki*), made not only from mother-of-pearl but also coconut, bone and different types of wood, and available in a range of colours that bore little resemblance to the typical Bethlehem styles.⁶⁶ The most expensive of these were 'black, finely chiselled and smooth', and described as *sotennyia* ('worth a hundred [roubles]').⁶⁷

Without doubt, then, the Kattans were enormously successful in Kiev between the years 1880 and 1919, after which time they fled the city in fear of the confiscation of their assets at the hands of the Bolsheviks. They also paved the way for a handful of other Bethlehem families to settle in the city such as the Sa'ades who have been

documented in Kathy Kenny's account of her grandmother's life which includes details of her childhood in Kiev. Here a new kind of integration has occurred by the 1910s: Bethlehemite children growing up speaking Russian as their first language, with family



Figure 5: The Sa'ade family, Kiev, c. 1913. Kathy Kenny private collection

photographs documenting their adoption of local styles of dress and mannerisms.⁶⁸ The flight of these communities from the city during the years 1917–1920 and subsequent loss of large sums of money (particularly in the case of Yaqub Kattan) is suggestive of the merchants' reliance on certain political conditions in order to flourish, foreshadowing in some ways the exit of Bethlehemites from Manila in 1941.

CONCLUSION: BETHLEHEM AS "STAGING POST"

The Kattans were one of dozens, if not hundreds, of merchant families from Bethlehem who embarked on global journeys in the nineteenth century in an attempt to find new markets for the religious crafts produced in the town. The complex ways in which these journeys intersected with each other and built upon pre-existing networks of trade deserve more detailed scholarly attention. This article has highlighted some of the general features of those migrations and the social context within Bethlehem that enabled them. With its strong connections to the Franciscan community, as well as the commerce and culture of the predominantly Muslim Ottoman Empire, this context reminds us that not all change in the nineteenth-century Eastern Mediterranean was the product of very recent encounters with western "modernity". In the case of Bethlehem, the local inhabitants had long been taking advantage of the town's access to all manner of influences. If the region's heightened incorporation into the world economy in the nineteenth century allowed Bethlehem's merchants to begin travelling

abroad, they could only do so because of an impressive range of skills they had been acquiring since at least the early sixteenth century.

As well as complicating historical explanations of modernization in the Eastern Mediterranean, Bethlehem's history also allows new perspectives on the nature of the *mahjar* itself. The claim that the large array of Syrian communities across the Americas owe their origins to the peddling of Bethlehem-made Holy Land products is both implausible and difficult to verify. Instead, the Bethlehem merchants should be seen as one small element of Syrian migration in the nineteenth century. The real significance of migrants from Bethlehem lies in their ability to decenter our view of this migration. They remind us that the early stages of these movements of people were truly global in dimension and characterized as much by circular routes of travel as by one-way tickets across the Atlantic. Nor should this analysis be confined to Arabs. The term "Syrian" can be sufficiently inclusive to allow discussion of Jewish, Armenian and Kurdish merchant migrants within the same historical framework, as testified by the appearance of Syrian Jews in the Philippines immigration records at the same time as the early Bethlehemites.⁶⁹

All of this amounts to a view of production and circulation that defies an easy demarcation between "West and East" or "homeland and diaspora." An example of this is the way family histories in Bethlehem today are connected to the seven historic quarters (*hārāt*) of the old city, each inhabited by a group of families or "clan" (*hamūla*, plural *hamā'il*). This allows the longer-established families to claim the status of "original Bethlehemite" in the face of new waves of migration to the town in the twentieth century. At the same time, however, each of the seven *hamā'il* trace their family lineages through a decidedly foreign blend of influences. These range from the fifteenth-century Italian and Portuguese forefathers of the aforementioned *tarājmeh* clan, to *hamūlat al-najājreh* and *hamūlat al-farahīyyeh* who claim their ancestry via the Ghassanid tribes which began to migrate from southern Arabia to Greater Syria in the third century CE and were among the earliest Arabic speaking groups to adopt Christianity. The *fawāgreh* clan, meanwhile, is a Muslim group of families originating from the nearby village of Faghur, as already mentioned. Within this one clan alone, a range of stories are told regarding the origins of its various families. One of the most commonly held beliefs is that a number of the families are descended from Kurdish tribes settled in the area by Salah al-Din following his conquest of Jerusalem in 1187.⁷⁰ In this way historical events such as the Crusades, so often considered to be a polarizing

force between “West” and “East”, take on a highly integrative function in Bethlehem’s history. Research conducted by Bethlehem’s vibrant community of local historians has produced a view of the Crusades in which an eclectic mix of “outsiders” – Latins, Armenians, Kurds and Shia Muslims – intermingled with Bethlehem’s population.⁷¹ Soldiers, clergymen, merchants and noblemen are all held to have married women from Bethlehem in this period, producing “hybrid offspring” (*hujanā*) who spoke Arabic as a first language and called themselves *talḥamī* (Bethlehemite).

The connecting thread that runs through this *mélange* of influences and origins is migration. Since its very earliest days Bethlehem has been shaped by migration from all over western Asia and Europe. In this light, the town’s status as a “place of origin” for the migrants of the nineteenth century begins to appear inadequate. As an alternative, the notion of “staging post” seems more appropriate: a place where travellers stop for rest and gather new supplies. Throughout its history Bethlehem has proved highly open to outsiders, absorbing their cultural and linguistic traits, and equipping them with skills that later allowed them to move on to other locales. The *fawāgrēh* are a good example of this: as they gradually relocated to Bethlehem, they used their former village, Faghur, as grazing ground for their livestock while adopting a more “urbanized” lifestyle in Bethlehem.⁷² As the sources remind us, these Muslims too began to work as artisans in the olive wood and mother-of-pearl workshops from at least as early as the mid-seventeenth century, and many *fawāgrēh* families were among the nineteenth-century *émigrés* to the Americas.⁷³

By the 1920s Bethlehem’s status as “staging post” in circular routes of migration was beginning to wane as the new British colonial state imposed much stricter immigration and nationality laws, while the Great Depression took its toll on global commerce.⁷⁴ This in turn heralded a new era in which the town’s residents would find themselves increasingly restricted in their movements as the twentieth century wore on, culminating in today’s “cantonization” of the West Bank under Israeli occupation. The more fluid sense of space that persisted in the Ottoman period stands in stark contrast to this: an era in which Bethlehem’s identity was constantly being refashioned by new waves of migration, both outward and inward. Successive governments in Istanbul attempted to restrict emigration in the nineteenth century, but the fundamentally multi-ethnic nature of an empire spanning three continents made this inherently difficult. Within this wider context, a unique set of socio-economic conditions in

Bethlehem produced one of the earliest migrant groups from nineteenth-century *bilād al-shām*: not necessarily the pioneers of a Syrian-American diaspora, but certainly an indication of the eclectic nature of the *mahjar* in that period.

NOTES

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Jack Kattan, George Michel al-A'ma, Kathy Kenny, William Clarence-Smith and Anne Monsour for their kind help with various aspects of this article.

² George Hanna Malouf, *Malouf: the Ghassani Legacy* (Dallas: Malouf Publications International, 1992).

³ For a recent example see Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 33–7.

⁴ The seminal work in this field is Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens Du Proche-Orient Au Temps De La Réforme Catholique* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994). More recent contributions include Akram Fouad Khater, *Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in the Christian Middle East* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); and Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: the Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵ See Oded Peri, "The Christian Population of Jerusalem in the Late Seventeenth Century: Aspects of Demographic Development," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39, no. 4 (1996): 398–421.

⁶ Among the many population estimates I have come across (Franciscan reports, travellers' accounts, Ottoman censuses), none puts the figure above 4,000 before 1900.

⁷ The second largest Roman Catholic population in this period was always found in Jerusalem. From 1692 (Bethlehem 385, Jerusalem 297) to 1909 (Bethlehem 5,172, Jerusalem 3,491) Bethlehem retained the largest "Latin" population. See *Acta S. Congregationis De Propaganda Fide Pro Terra Sancta* (vols. 1–2).

⁸ One of the earliest such accounts was George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: the Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938). Much of the subsequent work on Protestant education in the region has followed Antonius' focus on Beirut and in particular the Syrian Protestant College. For a recent example see Betty S. Anderson, "Liberal Education at the American University of Beirut (AUB): Protest, Protestantism, and the Meaning of Freedom," in Christoph Schumann, *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: Late 19th Century until the 1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For the application of this approach to the Palestinian

context, see Ruth Kark, Dietrich Denecke, and Haim Goren, "The Impact of Early German Missionary Enterprise in Palestine on Modernization and Environmental and Technological Change, 1820–1914," in *Studien Zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte*, 39 (2006), 145–76.

⁹ Johannes van Cootwijk, *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum et Syriacum* (Antuerpiæ: apud Hieronymum Verdussium, 1619), 139.

¹⁰ See Oded Peri, *Christianity Under Islam in Jerusalem: the Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 16.

¹¹ Giuseppe Incelli, "Le Scuole di Terra Santa," in *Custodia di Terra Santa, 1342–1942* (Jerusalem: Tipografia dei Padri Francescani, 1951), 158–9.

¹² According to the Franciscan website: <http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/sites/TSbtbrlek.html>, accessed 16 March 2012.

¹³ See *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi, Terra Santa e Cipro*, 3, 158–9, Archives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide (SCPF), Rome.

¹⁴ Letter written by "Marco figlio di Pietro," August 1690, *Scritture Riferite*, 3, 158–9, SCPF.

¹⁵ As discussed in Bellarmino Bagatti, "L'Industria della Madreperla a Betlemme," in *Custodia di Terra Santa*, 133–52; and Michele Piccirillo, *La Nuova Gerusalemme: Artigianato Palestinese Al Servizio Dei Luoghi Santi* (Bergamo: Edizioni Custodia di Terra Santa, 2007), 28–9.

¹⁶ For examples not cited elsewhere here, see Don Rocchetta Aquilante, *Peregrinatione di Terra Santa ed altre provincie* (Palermo: Alfonzo dell'Isola, 1630), 252; and Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some Other Countries, Volume II, Part I* (London: W. Bowyer, 1743), 39–40.

¹⁷ Michel Nau, *Voyage Nouveau de la Terre-Sainte* (Paris: A. Pralard, 1679), 396.

¹⁸ Fredriech Hasselquist, *Voyages dans le Levant, dans les Années 1749, 50, 51 et 52* (Paris: Saugrain, 1769), 217.

¹⁹ Giovanni Mariti, *Viaggi Per l'Isola di Cipro e Per la Soria e Palestina, Fatti dall'Anno 1760 al 1768* (Lucca, 1776), 32–3.

²⁰ A possible explanation for such a dip in pilgrim numbers is the political and economic turmoil caused by Zahir al-'Umar's attempts from 1772 onwards to challenge Ottoman power from his stronghold in Acre. See Thomas Philipp, *Acre: the Rise and Fall of a Palestinian City, 1731–1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 111.

²¹ Mariti, *Viaggi*, 31.

²² I am grateful to George Michel al-A'ma for bring this to my attention. See <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/quran-copied-in-bayt-lahm-ah-3894648-details.aspx?intObjectID=3894648>, accessed 9 May 2013.

²³ See M. Van Berchem, "The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem", in K. A. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I, (New York: Hacker Art Books,

1979), 213–323; and Lucy-Anne Hunt, “Art and Colonialism: the Mosaics of the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem (1169), and the Problem of ‘Crusader’ Art,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991).

²⁴ Some of this archival material is discussed in the work of Bethlehem historian Khalil Showkeh. See *Qariat Faghur wa-Harat al-Fawaghreh fi Bayt Lahm* (Bethlehem, 2009); and *Tarikh Bayt Lahm fi-l-’Ahd al-’Uthmani* (Bethlehem, 2005).

²⁵ See Showkeh, *Qariat Faghur*, 86–102.

²⁶ Based on conversations with various Shakhur and Showkeh family members resident in Bethlehem today.

²⁷ See Ibn Battuta (abridged, introduced and annotated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* (London: Macmillian, 2002), 26; Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: the World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 114.

²⁸ ‘Abd Al-Ghani Al-Nabulusi, *Al-Haqiqa wa-l-Majaz fi Rihlat Bilad al-Sham wa Misr wa-l-Hijaz* (Damascus: Dar al-Ma’rifa, 1989), 365.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 366.

³⁰ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 41–3.

³¹ For a brief discussion of this longer Muslim tradition of worship see Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae (CIAP), Vol. 2* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 181–2.

³² Mustafa al-Bakri al-Siddiqi, *Al-Khamra al-Hasiyya fi-l-Rihla al-Qudsiyya* (Manuscript in the German National Library, No.466 Mq 6149), 243.

³³ For the Jerusalem *ziyāra* see Hunt Janin, *Four Paths to Jerusalem: Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Secular Pilgrimages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 78–82.

³⁴ Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens Du Proche-Orient*, 169–72.

³⁵ Peri, *Christianity Under Islam*, 166.

³⁶ Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens Du Proche-Orient*, 169–72.

³⁷ My thanks to George Michel al-A'ma for allowing me to view his private collection of Bethlehem artwork from that period.

³⁸ Enirque Yidi; Daccarett Daccarett, Karen David; Angarita, Martha Lizcano, *El Arte Palestino De Tallar El Nácar* (Barranquilla, 2005), 72–5.

³⁹ For the effect of this increased demand on the Red Sea pearling industry see Jonathan Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 102–12.

⁴⁰ Based on multiple conversations with Bethlehem families still active in the mother-of-pearl profession. For a written account of this process see George Sammur, *Bayt Lahm ‘Abr al-Tarikh* (Bethlehem: Wiam, 2007), 76–82.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Based on conversations with George Sammur and readings of the unpublished memoirs of Jadallah Sammur.

⁴³ Collection of the Bethlehem Salesian Church, *Bulletins de Tournai sur l'Oeuvre de Bethleem, de 1873 à 1880*. See for example entry for 15 May–15 June 1873, page 5. I am grateful to Don Mario Murru for allowing me to see these records.

⁴⁴ Sammur, *Bayt Lahm*, 76–7.

⁴⁵ Yidi et al, *El Arte Palestino*, 69–75.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 80–2.

⁴⁸ Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, for example, claims that by 1908 there were around 1,000 stone-cutters from Bethlehem. See Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century: the Emergence of the New City* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 400.

⁴⁹ See Adnan Musallam, *Folded Pages from Local Palestinian History in the 20th Century: Developments in Politics, Society, Press and Thought in Bethlehem in the British Era, 1917–1948* (Bethlehem: WIAM, 2002), 44.

⁵⁰ Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 33–7.

⁵¹ Philippines National Archive (PNA), Manila, SDS 1716, Radicacion de Extranjeros, 17 October 1881 and 13 December 1881.

⁵² See William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Middle Eastern Migrants in the Philippines: Entrepreneurs and Cultural Brokers," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 32, no. 3 (2004), 436–7.

⁵³ Yidi et al, *El Arte Palestino*, 45–8.

⁵⁴ My thanks to Samir and Grace Salem for sharing their family history with me. The information on the Salem's in the Philippines that follows is provided by them as well as details provided in the Bethlehem Latin Parish Records and the Philippines National Archive, Radicacion de Extranjeros.

⁵⁵ Rosenstock's Directory, Manila Firm Names (1927–8, 1935 and 1938), National Library of the Philippines (NLP), Manila.

⁵⁶ As related in an interview with Samir Salem, 23 September 2011.

⁵⁷ Clarence-Smith, "Middle Eastern Migrants," especially pp. 434–7.

⁵⁸ "History of the Malouf Family in Australia," Australian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, September/October 1986.

⁵⁹ As detailed on the Australian Kfarsghab Association website: http://www.kfarsghab.com.au/documents/the_first_exodus.html, Accessed 12 August 2013.

⁶⁰ Salim Yusuf 29 December 1891; and unknown to GG, 6 September 1889, in PNA, Radicación, SDS 1755; and 11 January 1882 and Carlos Abú Hamame to GG 16 February 1898, in PNA, Radicación, SDS 1756.

⁶¹ See for example *ibid.*, visas issued 15 December 1893.

⁶² My thanks to Jack Kattan, great-grandson of Elias Kattan, for sharing this information with me.

⁶³ The contracts are recorded in Omar al-Saqqaf (Alsagoff) to Yaqub Kattan, 10 Aug., 1921, Jack Kattan private collection, Amman. The standard history of the Alsagoff family in Southeast Asia is Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, *The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia: A.H. 1240 (A.D. 1824) to A.H. 1382 (A.D. 1962)* (Singapore: Mun Seong Press, 1963). The family also features prominently in Ulrike Freitag's study of the Hadhramaut in the Indian Ocean sphere that examines the trading connections between Southeast Asia and southern Arabia. See Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut; Reforming the Homeland* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Other works confirm that incense and sandalwood were among the goods exported by Hadhrami firms from Singapore to the Arabian Peninsula. See W. Harold Ingrams, *A Report on the Social, Economic and Political Conditions of the Hadhramaut* (London: HMSO, 1937), 150.

⁶⁴ For the arrival of the first Bethlehemites in Manila via Singapore, see PNA, SDS 1716, Radicación de Extranjeros, 17 October 1881.

⁶⁵ Jadallah Maria to Yaqub Kattan, 12 July 1917, Jack Kattan private collection, Amman.

⁶⁶ Kattan and Sons wholesale catalogue, 1914, Kiev (Jack Kattan private collection). I am grateful to Professor Simon Dixon for translating the document.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁸ Kathy Saade Kenny, *Katrina in Five Worlds: A Palestinian Woman's Story* (Five Worlds Press, 2010), 16–19.

⁶⁹ See Clarence-Smith, "Middle Eastern Migrants in the Philippines," 437.

⁷⁰ Based on conversations with Khalil Showkeh as well as information provided in his book, *Qariat Faghur*, 86–7.

⁷¹ For examples, see Jiryis al-'Ali, *Bayt Lahm: al-Medina al-Khalidah* (Bethlehem, 1990); Sammur, *Bayt Lahm*; Showkeh, *Qariat Faghur*; and Hanna 'Abdullah Jaqaman, *Jawla fi Tarikh Bayt Lahm min Aqdam al-Azmina Hatta al-Yawm* (Jerusalem, 1984).

⁷² Showkeh, *Qariat Faghur*, 86–9.

⁷³ Based on conversations with current residents of the Fawaghreh quarter.

⁷⁴ See Mutaz M. Qafisheh, *The International Law Foundations of Palestinian Nationality: a Legal Examination of Nationality in Palestine Under British Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 75–112.