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“CITIZENS OF THE WORLD . . . WHO STOPPED ON EVERY SHORE”: EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION, SOCIAL THOUGHT, AND THE DIASPORIC USES OF THE PHOENICIAN PAST, C. 1880–1940

Abstract

The Phoenician past, historians have long argued, was the preserve of Lebanese nationalists who sought to trace the genealogy of their darling state into the distant past in order to articulate a distinctive identity for Lebanon reflecting their religious particularism and socio-economic interests. By contrast to this diachronic and often teleological approach, tracking the evolution of national consciousness, this article suggests a synchronic reading of the ways late Ottoman literati used the ancient past as an instrument of political debate and social reflection. The region’s public men, this article contends, found in the Phoenician past a soothing precedent for the massive migrations the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean witnessed from the 1880s onwards – movements which prompted much fraught debate and discussion. Contemporary displacements, in such a reading, were but the product of ancient predispositions. Only in the wake of the First World War was the ancient past pressed into national service.



Nationalism, the Scottish thinker Tom Nairn once remarked, is a Janus-faced thing. It looks at once backwards, into a past time of mythical glory, and forwards, to a bold future of glossy achievement, of “industrialisation, prosperity [and] equality.” As Nairn put it, “nationalism stands over the passage to modernity;” as successive peoples traipse under the arch of this “strait doorway,” they “look desperately back into the past, to gather strength wherever it can be found for the ordeal of ‘development’.”² It is, in other words, a sort of retrospective progressivism, whose practitioners pick through the ruined vestiges of the past to find the materials with which to build the future. The nation, then, resembles those Umayyad or Crusader fortresses in which one spies Roman plinths and capitals. Like Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, the nationalist wants nothing more than to “awaken

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the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" —or, rather, to conjure something distinctively new out of the mangled, misplaced pieces of the past.³

Such a vision powerfully evokes the appeals and anxieties of nationalism, its uncertain promise of a better future, but also its factitiousness—its deep reliance upon the "selection, reformulation and, if necessary, invention of symbols and narratives."⁴ However, it says nothing of the ways in which the past—with its rich supply of exemplars and correctives, justifications and explanations—can lend itself to a variety of political schemes and social theories not wedded to the realization of a national state. Furthermore, it concentrates upon varieties of political thought trained upon a horizon situated far away in a distant future, rather than those focused upon their immediate surroundings—conjectural, incidental forms of theory, born of the contemplation of context. More than simply a "fleeting moment in a . . . teleology connecting past and future," the present often occupies a prominent place in the thoughts of political theorists and practitioners, who devise varying visions of community, population, and territory with an eye upon the exigencies of the moment.⁵ The past is not simply a rich cloth from which can be crafted glorious garb for a nation in becoming. Rather, it is also a resource to which political actors and thinkers might resort to resolve the pressing strains and stresses of the here and now.

This article examines one such attempt to find some present use in the past: the growing exploitation of the ancient history of the Eastern Mediterranean seaboard by the public men of this region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their marked propensity to draw connections between the Phoenician inhabitants of this littoral and their own contemporaries. It will ask two deceptively simple questions: for what reasons did early twentieth-century literati resort to the Phoenician past? And in what ways did they cite, present, evoke, and invoke this past? Scholars have hitherto answered these questions with reference to the nation-state. Ancient Phoenicia, they have argued, provided a powerful precedent for those Lebanese nationalists who wished to articulate a cohesive and distinctive national identity, which could both unite the citizens of a putative Lebanese state around a common myth of origin, and serve to differentiate them from their neighbors. More than just an unbroken connection to a glorious past, the assertion of ties of descent linking the inhabitants of this narrow strip of land hemming the middle sea to their Phoenician forebears provided Lebanese Christians—so this

historiographical story goes—with the means to buttress their exceptionalist delusions. On the one hand, it offered a means of insulating themselves from the sweeping flood of Arab nationalism, an island of indigeneity amidst the tides of interlopers who had flowed into the eastern Mediterranean in the centuries after the birth of Islam. On the other, it gave justification to their claims to a Lebanese *Sonderweg*—a special path to modernity born of a longstanding disposition for civilization. This, then, was genealogy as both programmatic pursuit and myth of progress.

Thus, Asher Kaufman has argued that a historicist evocation of Phoenicia provided “Lebanese nationalists” with a means of justifying the “existence of Lebanon as a viable national community.” As Anthony Smith put it in a passage that serves Kaufman for an epigram: ‘there can be no identity without memory . . . no collective purpose without myth.’ But, aware though Kaufman is of the careful craft nationalist narratives demand, he cannot help but shape his own tale into a teleological arc. He is careful, it is true, to acknowledge that the marked “preoccupation” of early twentieth-century literati “with the Phoenician past” was not initially born of a desire to craft a particularistic discourse to mark off the Christian denizens of Mount Lebanon and Beirut from their Muslim neighbors. Nevertheless, his undertaking remains driven, to the end, by his enduring wish to understand how this fascination with Phoenicia hardened into the exclusionary expressions he heard on the lips of the Phalangist fighters he encountered as an Israeli soldier serving in Lebanon in the early 1980s. His is a tale that travels full circle: beginning with an account of his own encounters with Christian militiamen, it ends with an account of the writings of Sa’id ‘Aql and Etienne Saqr, the ideologues who provided these hardened figures with their fighting words.⁶

Michelle Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti have been more severe still in their assessment of the ways in which a single figure—the dilettantish if influential Lebanese banker and author Michel Chiha—put the Phoenician past to work. In their view, Chiha did not just seek to buttress Lebanon’s “Christian particularism” through his vision of a constitution founded upon confessional representation. More than this, he engaged in a “hegemonic project,” which would protect the interests of his own class through fostering broad ideological consent among the “subordinate groups” upon which it relied; manipulating a “set of symbols and ideas current in his day,” he remolded them to “fashion a Lebanese identity matching the political and economic program” of the “financial-mercantile bourgeoisie.” For Chiha, the

natural features of their native land had left the modern Lebanese with few options but commerce, just as they had forced their Phoenician ancestors to become restlessly peripatetic traders. Geography, not ethnic essence, underlay the continuing mercantile inclinations of the inhabitants of this little corner of the earth. Lebanon could not help but be a "merchant republic" – and one whose economy should be shaped to fit the needs of its entrepreneurial elite, of whom Chiha was such a prominent member. In Hartman and Olsaretti's terse words, "the self-image of one class is proposed" in Chiha's writings "as the image of the entire nation and an economic and political blueprint" presented as "accomplished fact."⁷

Now, it would be wrongheaded to suggest that such interpretations are entirely wide of the mark. There is no denying that the Phoenician past was pressed into service by ideologues eager to buttress their exclusionary visions of Lebanon as a Christian homeland, and to promote a particular economic path for the country. Indeed, there was nothing unusual about such practices: while Egyptian nationalists sought, until the 1930s, to root their claims in the rich loam of the Pharaonic past, their Iraqi counterparts of the interwar years wrote evocatively of ancient Nineveh and Babylon.⁸ However, their authors' underlying preoccupations lead these accounts astray: written in the long hangover of the Lebanese civil war, they seek to edify, laud, and castigate as much as to explain; taking past actors to task for their nationalist delusions and capitalist mystifications, they cannot help but treat their words and thoughts as troubling portents, whose "ostensible failure" to paper over the cracks in Lebanese society paved the way for the conflict to come, or as potential salves providing a "legitimate" underpinning for a new "national consciousness."⁹ Even as they seek to find the causes for the emergence of the discourses they anatomize, they cannot entirely keep their consequences out of mind. These are proleptic histories, running ahead of themselves in their eagerness to make the past account for the present.

This article takes a rather different tack. Synchronic rather than diachronic in its approach, it suggests that we are best served by situating the various ways in which early twentieth-century public men used the tropes and tales of the ancient past against the backdrop of the fraught political debates and disputes in which they engaged. Rather than folding their accounts of antiquity into a teleological narrative of evolving national identity, or regarding them as a direct reflection of their socio-economic status, we should attempt to grasp what they sought to achieve in calling upon such antecedents, mapping

the rhetorical territory they strove to stake out, and reconstructing the claims they made.¹⁰ Invocations of the Phoenician past served several overlapping purposes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But none, this article argues, was more important than providing some soothing explanation for the “successive displacements . . . and journeys” upon which they, and their compatriots embarked. Confronted from the 1880s onwards with the departure of migrants in their hundreds of thousands, the literati of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean searched for the causes of this seemingly sudden eruption of movement, and sought to devise “structures of feeling” capacious enough to accommodate the unsettling facts of large-scale movement.¹¹ Many, to be sure, found answers in contemporary conditions, blaming this exodus upon present-day rulers who, in their arbitrariness, cruelty, and ineptitude, curtailed liberties and sapped livelihoods, driving men and women away from their native lands. But, even as they did so, some also turned towards a truncated version of the Phoenician past, which offered not just a historicist explanation for this seemingly unfathomable phenomenon, but proof of the potential for progress of the region’s contemporary inhabitants.

To be sure, the Phoenician past did figure in wider accounts of the history and origins of the “Lebanese” or “Syrians.” Whether written to support the claims to whiteness of Eastern Mediterranean migrants living in the racially splintered United States of the early twentieth century,¹² or to educate their Ottoman readers in the ways of modernity,¹³ these texts sought to instill in their audiences a sense of the grandeur and significance of past civilizations, the better to prepare them for present progress. But it is interesting that the Phoenicians were often minor figures in such narratives, only one of the many strands their authors drew upon to make their claims. It is only when they came to the problematic matter of migration that the literati and public men of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean assigned particular importance to these ancient figures. In the years before 1914, the Phoenician past lent itself not so much to the fixed certainties of nationalist ideology as to a kind of “travelling theory” – a series of attempts to take stock of migration, and conceive of society as a mobile construct, set upon foundations that were no less stable for having shifted about. Though this past was used to buttress claims to national self-determination in the years after World War One, older associations with diaspora did not altogether disappear. Rather, they were folded into seemingly conventional encomia to the nation and its glories,

lending them a disconcerting ambivalence towards displacement, which was at once embraced as a sign of progress, and castigated as a dangerous escape from the tender clasp of the territorial state. In the following pages, I will put these uses of the Phoenician past in their place. Situating them amidst the often anxious ruminations of a host of authors overcome by modernity and the movements it brought in its wake,¹⁴ I will examine the ways the latter sought to use the past to make sense of the present. The cast of characters I will consider includes figures as varied as the Maronite priest Yusuf al-'Amshiti and the liberal lawyer and Ottoman official Bulus Nujaym, in Mount Lebanon; the erstwhile functionary and socialist journalist Khayrallah Khayrallah, in Paris; the Lebanese patriot and political entrepreneur Yusuf al-Sawda, in Cairo; the historian Philip Hitti, in New York; the religious scholar, educator, and political reformer Shaykh Ahmad Tabbarah and the quixotic entrepreneur, poet, and dandy Charles Corm, in Beirut.

The very dispersion of this cast of writers is significant. Political and intellectual historians of the Middle East have long worked within the confines of a neat "methodological nationalism," producing studies framed by the borders of the states that came into being through the region in the years after the First World War.¹⁵ Only recently have scholars ventured further afield, to consider the thoughts, sentiments, and actions of ordinary migrants, publishers, writers, and political entrepreneurs who settled throughout the *mahjar*—the lands of migration.¹⁶ Revealing the far-reaching lines of communication that wound their way from one node of migrant life to another, they have begun to reconstruct the conversations and debates that unfolded through this expansive political space. In doing so, they suggest that we might be better served by viewing the intellectual history of the Middle East not so much as a series of *tableaux vivants* set upon the stage of particular territories, but as a moving affair. Seen through the prism of movement, figures like Philip Hitti who left the region seem as much a part of its history as those who stayed put, like Ahmad al-Tabbarah or Charles Corm.

But this article goes further than many recent works that have sought to integrate the lands of migration into the history of the Middle East. For while their authors have adopted a broader spatial purview than many of their predecessors, most have remained focused upon nationalism, whose various permutations and strands continue to exert a magnetic pull on scholars, just as they once did on historical actors. By contrast, I seek in these pages to revise our understanding of the

intellectual history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, moving away from teleological narratives centered upon the emergence and consolidation of various forms of nationalist thought, to consider the range of social, economic, and political concerns that animated authors of the period. More than simply a feature of the social history of these decades, I suggest, migration came to be a subject of anxious and earnest intellectual contemplation, working its way into the writings of contemporaries concerned with underlining their own capacity for progress and finding their place in the modern world.

TALES OF PROGRESS—OR, THE RELATIVE INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHOENICIAN PAST

One might assume that the Phoenicians offered tempting material to those who sought to assert the historical importance of Syria, and the capacity for progress of its denizens. These, after all, became familiar claims in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rehearsed by a succession of men of letters who considered themselves contributors to the *nahda*, or linguistic and cultural revival, of their native land. However, the Phoenicians occupied no special place within this historicist scheme. This is evident from a work like Yuhanna Abkarius' 1877 *Kitab qutf al-zuhur fi tarikh al-duhur*, or history of the ages. As its author explained, this was designed to provide a "short account of the history of man, to give schoolchildren and the general masses"—*al-'amma*, a term which had hitherto designated the populace, but which was now increasingly used to evoke the public—a sense of "what had happened in earlier days, and of events that deserve recollection." For "the art of history and the science of geography," he hoped, could serve as a "means" of advancement, which would help "the Syrian land"—*qutr al-sham*—to "move forward year after year, growing in progress and order." Organized into five sections of varying length and comprehensiveness, each recounting the history of one continent, this was effectively a universal history that sought to establish implicit comparisons between the various civilizations that had left their mark on world history. Though it gave pride of place to Europe, to which it accorded almost four hundred of its seven hundred-odd pages, the work began with a detailed account of the history of the cultures of Asia, organized into chapters on the Assyrians; the Hebrews; the "Madeans and Persians;" the "kingdom of China;" the Arabs; the "history of Syria," which focused on the Seleucids, and "queen Zaynab, known to the Greeks and Romans as

Zenobia," and a short "account of Lebanon;" the Phoenicians; the Crusades; Asia Minor; India; and "the other states of Asia, like the Tatars, Japan, and Armenia."¹⁷

What is striking here is the way in which Abkarius hived off Phoenicia from both Lebanon and Syria, and from its ancient counterparts like Assyria. Far from being granted primacy, it was only given the ninth chapter, squeezed in anachronistically between accounts of Hellenistic and late Roman Syria, and of the Crusades and the Latin Kingdom. Moreover, Abkarius aimed not at glorification but at scrupulous objectivity. He acknowledged that "they had invented the art of shipbuilding and been the first to travel the seas, and the world's sea trade had been in their hands." Moreover, "their kings had sent multitudes to faraway places, which they settled and built up, so that the traces of their industry spread, and the reach of their language and learning extended in all directions." Thus, it was "generally agreed that they had given the Romans and Greeks the letters of the alphabet and their earliest learning."¹⁸ But, by the same dint, he sought to detail the "bestly, barbarous" nature of the religious beliefs and habits of a people who venerated idols," making them sacrificial offerings of small children. Phoenicia, in such an account, figured neither as a precedent to be appreciated by Abkarius' contemporaries, nor as an analogy upon which they might draw to buttress their own claims to civilization. Rather, it was but one of a number of exemplars, a state whose "rise and fall" stood as a cautionary tale from which they might learn how to better move forward in the ways of progress. We should be wary, then, of assuming that Phoenicia came to occupy an exceptional place in the historical accounts and civilizational schemes of men of letters like Abkarius. Likewise, we should not presume that it underpinned the racial claims of Eastern Mediterranean migrants to North America, eager to find a comfortable berth within the fraught racial hierarchies of their new abode.

Asher Kaufman has argued that Eastern Mediterranean migrants to North America came to stress their Phoenician antecedents "in an attempt to define their identity in a society that, on the one hand, despised them as Arabs or Turks and, on the other, forced all immigrants to be labeled according to nationality and race." Such a strategy served a double purpose, allowing them both to express their "support for the existence of Greater Lebanon as a non-Arab state," and to assert their place on the "American social ladder," taking up a rung "higher than the Arabs or the Turks and equal to the Caucasian majority."¹⁹ Kaufman is not wrong to point to the attempts of migrants

from the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean to present themselves as “Syrians” or “Lebanese,” and to claim whiteness. Ottoman migrants in the years before 1914 “litigated their racial status” in a succession of naturalization hearings across the United States, in which they asserted their right to American citizenship by arguing that they were ‘members of the white race.’ As Sarah Gualtieri has noted, these claims to whiteness did not rest so much upon phenotypic assessments as upon a complex calculus of culture, religion, geography, and civilization.²⁰ While these attempts to secure citizenship were not always successful, “Syrian” claimants and journalists, lawyers, judges, and federal officials all came to accept the whiteness of Eastern Mediterranean migrants. For the most part Christian, these men and women hailed from ‘Western Asia.’ And, most importantly, they were Semites – and, as such, members of the Caucasian ‘or . . . white race,’ as the Eastern Mediterranean man of letters Jurji Zaydan explained in his work of racial typology, *Tabaqat al-umam*. The Phoenicians were, to be sure, included amongst the many antecedents cited to support such a claim. Thus, the physician H.A. Elkourie, the president of the Syrian Young Men’s Association of Birmingham, Alabama, insisted that the ‘Semitic was the original civilizer, developer and intermediary [sic] of culture and learning,’ from the Phoenicians to Jesus Christ. Crucially, though, Elkourie placed the emphasis far more upon the latter, and the common moral and religious heritage Syrians and Americans held in common, than upon the glories of pre-Christian civilization.²¹

The same was true of Philip Hitti. In the opening sentence of his 1924 work *The Syrians in America*, Hitti adamantly insisted: “the Syrians are neither Turks, as the United States census would take them, nor Arabs as some of them would take themselves to be.” “Nor,” he added, were they “Assyrians;” the latter, “domiciled in certain areas of Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, and Northwestern Persia . . . should not be confused with the modern inhabitants of Syria, the Holy Land, on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.” Once again, faith and geography were put forward as distinctive features, marking Eastern Mediterranean migrants off from the rather more suspect peoples for whom they were sometimes mistaken. But while the Phoenicians were mentioned in Hitti’s account of the origins of the “Syrians,” he did not accord them primary importance as a single source of ancestry. Rather, they were cited as just one of a succession of peoples who had contributed to the hybrid nature of the “Syrians,” whose blended blood was the result of many centuries of settlement, conquest, and cultural

encounter. As Hitti put it, "the modern Syrians are the remnant of the ancient Phoenician-Canaanite tribes who entered Syria about 2500 B.C., the Aramean Israelite hordes who arrived about 1500 B.C., and the Arabs who have drifted, and still drift, from the desert and gradually pass from a nomadic to an agricultural state." To this "Semitic stock," he continued, should be added the contributions of "the Greek settlers and colonists of the Seleucidae period," "Frankish and other European Crusaders," and "Kurdish and Persian invaders and immigrants." The Syrians, then, had no single origin. Rather, they were a "highly mixed race."²² Admixture, not purity, was paramount to this account.

Hitti repeated much the same claims in a series of lectures he gave to the *jam'iyya tahdhibiyya fi niuyurk*, or New York Educational Society, in late 1925 and early 1926. Speaking against the fraught background of the great Syrian revolt, he proclaimed that his "was not simply a historical inquiry, but a live social inquiry, of great pertinence to some of the most important problems our people and our old country are presently facing." For Hitti sought to confront Arabism, "founded upon the principle that the Arabic-speaking peoples, including the Syrians, are Arabic in blood and origin." The "modern Syrian," he insisted, while of "Semitic blood," was born of the "mixture of numerous peoples, each of differing stock, and speaking distinctive languages." These included, he now declared, "the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, the Hebrews, the Phoenicians, the Aramaic and the Arabs." Once again, the Phoenicians were mentioned as just one of the many peoples that had met, fought, and intermarried on Syrian soil, eventually coming to forge the Syrian, that distinctive racial alloy. Nor did Hitti see it fit to mention the Phoenicians in the account of the ways in which "the West benefited from the East" that followed this many-branched racial genealogy. Rather, he focused upon the Crusades, and the intellectual and cultural debt the Frankish knights and colonists of the Latin kingdoms had accrued to their autochthonous inhabitants, and the Umayyad period, when Syria had been at the "peak of its glory."²³

Only in attempting to account for the peripatetic ways of his contemporaries did Hitti come to rely upon the Phoenician past. In a pamphlet published in 1919, and based upon a series of articles that had first appeared in the Cairo-based scientific monthly *al-Muqtataf*, he set out to craft a travelled history for his fellow Eastern Mediterranean migrants to the United States. In these pages, Hitti did not just draw a direct connection between the "ancient Syrian – the Phoenician – whose travels in the world of colonization and migration were written in

water of gold upon the pages of the sea," and the "modern Syrian," the "descendent" of these "lords of the seas," who had "travelled far and wide" through the earth. More than this, he attempted to recover those intervening passages lost to history, recounting the movements of his forebears in late antiquity and the Middle Ages; these pages, he argued, "do not separate, but join together, the succession of migrations that began with the Phoenicians and finished with the migrants of today." Leading his readers through the Seleucid, Roman, Venetian, and modern ages, he sought to show the signal role Syrian colonists – *musta'mirun* – and migrants – *muhajirun* – had played in the progress of world history. Whether as "soldier[s], merchant[s], priest[s]" or even "slave[s]," Hitti's forebears had "laid the path of . . . civilization" for the "Roman people;" instilling in the latter "a new political, philosophical, scholarly, literary, artistic, and religious spirit," Syrians had left a deep "influence" upon the Roman culture that Europeans and North Americans claimed as their intellectual heritage.²⁴

Furthermore, the Phoenicians were the first in a long line of "colonists" who had forged the ways of the west. Followed in antiquity by the "Carthaginians, the Greeks, and the Romans"; in the Middle Ages by Syrians and "Italians from Florence, Genoa, and Venice;" and in modern times by "Portugal, then Spain, Holland, France, England" –and perhaps, in the "future," by "American, then Japanese and Chinese" "traders and colonists" –they had been pioneers of the overseas expansion which still stood, in the second decade of the twentieth century, as one of the ultimate marks of political strength and civilizational progress. However, the colonies of the Syrians – ancient and modern – had distinguished themselves by their exclusively mercantile character. For Hitti, "the colonies of the Romans were the result of their victories, and those of the Greeks that of the failure of political factions, which were then forced to leave the country, and the colonies of Portugal and Spain in America, Holland in southern Africa, and England in Australia, were for the most part agricultural and sometimes military." But "Syrian settlements," alone, were "in the main commercial." Some had been, in ancient times, the result of "demographic overcrowding" and Syria's "geographic position," and others, more recently, of "political and religious decline" and "economic pressure." Some were the work of the state, others of "independent individuals" who belonged to the "people." But those Syrian colonies that had proved most enduring were those that had "held on to their [commercial] identity." "On the whole," then, "the history of Syrian migration was . . . rich in benefits," showing as it did

the "energy and intelligence of the Syrians, their readiness for progress, and their desire for success."²⁵ This, it is clear, was a narrative designed to give encouragement to Hitti's fellow migrants to the United States – instilling in them a sense of the longstanding historical disposition of their forebears for migration and mercantile activity. It attempted not so much to provide a blueprint for a body politic framed within the fixed borders of the territorial state, as to make sense of the churning waves of movement in which Hitti and his contemporaries were engulfed.

LOSSES AND GAINS: MIGRATIONS PAST AND PRESENT IN THE BALANCE

And churning waves they were. Contemporaries like Ahmad Tabbarah and the Zionist emissary Arthur Ruppin estimated that between 500,000 and 550,000-odd migrants left Ottoman "Syria" between the 1880s and the First World War – a figure with which latter-day scholars like Kemal Karpat have largely concurred.²⁶ Most headed for the United States, Argentina, and Brazil or for other New World destinations like Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, or Ecuador, though some also found their way to colonial French and British West Africa, South Africa, Australia, and the Philippines. These men and women hailed from across Syria – a geographical expression that encompassed, for Tabbarah, the Ottoman provinces of Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo, and the governorates of Jerusalem and Mount Lebanon.²⁷ However, there can be no doubt that the last of these administrative entities, an autonomous enclave created in the wake of the sectarian strife which tore through its escarpments in 1860, experienced exceptionally high rates of migration.²⁸ Around a quarter of Mount Lebanon's 400,000 or so inhabitants had left its exiguous territories by 1915, according to Ottoman functionaries.²⁹ The historian Akram Khater has gone further still, estimating that more than a third of Mount Lebanon's inhabitants lived beyond the confines of the Ottoman empire on the eve of the First World War.³⁰ In certain localities, the proportion of migrants was even higher: migrants represented some 42 percent of the resident population of Zahleh and its immediate environs.³¹ Such rates of departure can surely account, in large measure, for the acute anxiety migration occasioned in the literati of Mount Lebanon and the neighboring provinces in the years before the First World War.

But such movements could also bring undeniable benefits. Albert Naqqash, the Ottoman public works inspector of Mount Lebanon, thus estimated in the run-up to the First World War that the

90,000 francs migrants remitted each year amounted to some 41 percent of the autonomous governorate's revenues. Much the same pattern was replicated at the local level: the mayor of the seaside town of Batrun, for instance, told a visiting Ruppin that the 200,000 francs its denizens received annually from their relatives "in America" accounted for 43 percent of its "income." This money was particularly welcome in the years before the First World War, helping to make up for the marked decline in European demand for the silk on which the mountain's economy had come to depend. But Mount Lebanon was not alone in reaping such vicarious benefits; around 30 million francs in remittances entered Syria each year, much of it through the banks and clearing-houses of Beirut, whose economy increasingly relied on the profits of human movement.³²

It is no surprise, then, that contemporaries should have viewed migration as both a demographic hemorrhage, draining the land of its native children, and as a potential boon, which might restore some strength to a region suffering, in their eyes, the consequences of straitened economic circumstances and the depredations of misrule. Some could move between these seemingly contradictory positions as circumstances dictated. This was the case of Bulus Nujaym, whose doctoral dissertation, *La Question du Liban: étude d'histoire diplomatique et de droit international*, a long and learned disquisition on the geography, history, and shifting legal and administrative status of the Lebanese mountain, appeared in early 1908. "Emigration," noted Nujaym, had become a "regular and permanent sociological phenomenon in Lebanon" in the course of the nineteenth century. For, "despite the intelligent activity of the Lebanese to develop constantly their small country's economic resources, it could no longer feed its population". The continuing departure of so many of the mountain's native sons and daughters was, for Nujaym, profoundly "worrying" on two grounds. On the one hand, that so many should have been "obliged" to leave was a stark reminder of Lebanon's deep-seated economic and social ills. On the other, these departures could only lead to further deterioration in its living conditions, as the mountain lost ever-growing numbers of its best and brightest for good. There had been a time when "emigrants" had been able to "buy a small plot of land with the capital they had amassed abroad" "upon returning to the homeland they love so intensely". Through their economic activities, the "returnees"—a word that fails to capture the striking, eerie connotations of the French term Nujaym used, *les revenants*, an expression which conjured up images of these men and women as

spirits, who left behind the social death of migration to return to the world of those living in the homeland – had once “made the Mountain participate in the general movement of civilization and its progresses” and “widened the intellectual horizons of their compatriots”. That time, though, was now passed. “[U]nfortunately”, migrants could now leave “only with the hope of returning one day to die in the mountain; to come back to work, to contribute to the greatness and prosperity of their patria, they are now almost prohibited from doing.” The transition was dramatic: where migrants had once brought life to Mount Lebanon, serving as agents of development whose movements had helped to pull the region into the modern world, they now went there only to die, their demise a stark reminder of the dashed hopes of those who stayed behind.³³

However, this elegiac narrative was more than just a conventional meditation upon the enduring losses of migration, that endless flow slowly draining away the vital forces of the social body. Rather, it served to underpin the fiercely anti-clerical politics of Nujaym, a self-declared member of the *ahrar* or “free men” of Mount Lebanon.³⁴ The name of this faction denoted its members’ self-conscious liberalism and attachment to “liberty, progress, and democracy” – values that, Nujaym argued, were deeply rooted in the native institutions of Mount Lebanon, if threatened by the base appetites of the traditional notability and the venality and petty despotism of Ottoman administration. But it also hinted at their sense of themselves as *libre-penseurs*, free thinkers hostile to the Maronite church and its deep involvement in the political and economic life of the province. The “Lebanese congregations,” Nujaym alleged, had “since their origins, one principal goal, which they have pursued tirelessly: to increase their material power.” In seeking to realize this ambition, they had accumulated “immense domains,” while remaining blind to the nefarious effects of such a policy upon their flocks, whose members, deprived of their ability to live off their native land, had been left with no other option but flight. In turn, Nujaym’s call for an end to the clerical privileges which had allowed the congregations to rob Lebanon of a third of its best lands formed but one plank of a wider raft of “agrarian and economic reforms”, ranging from the opening of a seaport at Juniyyeh to the creation of commercial tribunals for the province. These were designed to improve the living conditions of Mount Lebanon’s inhabitants – and, in a neat cyclical move, to stem the tide of “emigration,” a “problem” on whose “resolution” hung the “future” not just of Lebanon, but of all Syria.³⁵

Nujaym told a rather different tale ten years later in the long “note on the history of Lebanon” he contributed to a volume of “scholarly and social studies” commissioned by Isma’il Haqqi Bek, the wartime governor of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. This encyclopedic gazetteer, with its succession of articles on the industry and agriculture, geology and topography, archaeology and sociology of Mount Lebanon written by a “committee of men of letters,” stood as a veritable monument of progress amidst the wreckage of the First World War, whose turmoil and destruction were coolly excluded from its calm, positivistic descriptions. Accordingly, Nujaym presented migration as a symptom of the advancements the reforming Ottoman state had brought to the “Syrian coast.” Amongst the “first Ottoman regions” to receive “telegraphic lines for the transmission of news not just to the centers of the state, but also to foreign lands,” this area had also benefited more recently from the laying of “telephone cables between the towns of the coast and Lebanon.” Beirut and Damascus, meanwhile, now “glowed” with the “majesty” of “electric and gas” belvederes whose “lights reached into every corner of the night.” The “result” of these changes was a “visible improvement in the condition of the Lebanese, who “awakened energetically” to the potential of the age, and “strove for the material and moral progress of their mountains.” Migration, Nujaym suggested, was but a natural progression from this remarkable domestic revival, born of the Eastern Mediterranean’s engagement with Europe, whose “ships” visited “our ports every day, enriching our lands . . . and bringing considerable profits to our national coffers.” As the mountain was engulfed in this “general movement,” some of its inhabitants began to travel, “first towards Egypt, then to Europe, America, and Australia.” Having grown rich in the lands of migration, they “returned to their homeland, and spent their gains in improving” its economic potential. “Since that time” when the first migrants had returned, the mountain had come to be covered in “welcoming, solid buildings,” whose “structure” these figures worked to improve, covering their roofs in “red tiles.” The villages they hailed from had come to take on a “majestic appearance,” their “pretty buildings” surrounded by gardens of “trees and flowers.” Some migrants, Nujaym continued, had put themselves to “agriculture, planting trees and forests,” and digging channels to irrigate them, so that “parts of Lebanon that had once lain barren were now covered in greenery.” Others had taken an interest “in industry and crafts, establishing silk factories in various regions,” building upon the long engagement of the inhabitants of villages like Zuq and Bayt Shabab with handicraft.³⁶

In this narrative—written in the last, bitter, years of the First World War, which brought widespread devastation to the Eastern Mediterranean—Nujaym presented progress as a movement—a process founded quite literally upon the circulation of commodities and information, and upon the travels of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon, first outwards in concentric circles extending through the world, and then back to their homeland, where their hard-won gains could be put to good use. In doing so, he appeared not just to echo the official imperial script of benevolent reform, but also to renege upon his bleak earlier account of migration, its causes, and consequences. All was not, however, as it seemed. On the one hand, even as he skillfully deployed Ottoman rhetoric, he undercut its tropes by pointing to the beneficial effects of foreign trade, at a time when the Sublime Porte had revoked the Capitulations and the seaports whose activities he lauded were blockaded by French and British warships, their docks emptied of life. On the other hand, his vision of Lebanon as a verdant Arcadia transformed by the deft touch of returning migrants was no disingenuous attempt to disavow his earlier stance. Rather, it reflected the deep-seated ambivalence of many Eastern Mediterranean literati towards migration—which they could view as at once a symptom of a social disintegration it only helped to aggravate, and as a boon, which brought prosperity and progress to the region.

Indeed, some could move between these seemingly contradictory positions within the confines of a single text. This was the case of the Maronite priest Yusuf al-'Amshiti, whose short meditation on "migration, its benefits and disadvantages" appeared in 1911 in *al-Mashriq*, the staunchly clerical journal of the Jesuit seminary of Beirut. It was increasingly necessary, 'Amshiti argued, to consider "all sides" of the question—whether "moral" or "material," beneficial or detrimental, for migration "had become one of the most significant questions preoccupying the majority of the Syrian people, and not least the Lebanese." On the one hand, its corrosive effects upon society were plain to see. Perhaps most obvious was the "neglect of [agricultural] lands, which suffer from the paucity of labor, so that before too long they will yield only thorns and thistles, and our settlements will become havens for the retired and the aged." But also of ill portent were the "detrimental effects" of migration upon the "offspring" of those who departed, caused by the "loss of fatherly tenderness and filial feelings, weakened by years of distance and separation." Moreover, movement also had deleterious effects upon migrants themselves: taking on "work contrary to religion [and] morality," and indulging in

the "company of the lower classes," they received an "education in the ways of evil," and were exposed to "a variety of illnesses the Lebanese did not previously know." It was therefore "no surprise" that the "Syrian's standing" should have "declined," and that the "American should have been led to look at him askance, till his condemnation grew stronger and he forbade him many of the rights he had once enjoyed."³⁷

On the other hand, the benefits of migration were undeniable. Thus, "whoever had studied the condition of the new world and examined its cities and capitals, its urbanity and learning and inventions, the progress of its peoples, and the causes of its peace and tranquility," and who had "compared our schools, our sciences and industries and comportment to those of the lands of migration ... would realize that migration ... is one of the most important means of attaining riches and success." But its effects were not confined to those who had departed. Without migration, "most of the people of Lebanon would be without shelter," and their "wearisome labors" could hardly provide for their "numerous" offspring, for there was "neither crafts, nor industry or [commercial] activity in Lebanon." Migration had changed all that, effecting a veritable social revolution: "he who knew our past condition, and our present state, could hardly keep in check his wonder and bafflement at this rapid turn-around." The "poor man, who had not a penny to his name, imitates the civilized countries and erects high buildings and fills his house with sumptuous furnishings he could not once have dreamed of." Could it ever "have crossed his mind that he would buy his master's lands and lend him money, were it not for migration?" But this social transformation had not just benefited the poorest of Lebanon's inhabitants; the rich, too, had profited thanks to the "rise in the prices of properties and lands." Moreover, migration had had beneficial effects upon the state of society and economy alike: not only had the "presence" of "currency" in greater quantity "lightened the burden of the moneylenders," who had once been so rampant; what is more, "migrants had created a vital movement in commerce and industry, which had put the builder and the craftsman, the blacksmith and the merchant, to work." The intellectual effects of migration were perhaps more palpable still. Amongst its "most visible benefits" was its capacity to "transport" many from their spot "under the oak tree," where they had languished in the care of the "village schoolmaster," to "institutions of higher learning," where they thrived under the stewardship of "famous professors . . . nourishing their minds with the finest of sciences" After

all, migration had been a source of progress throughout the ages. How else had the first men, who "knew nothing of agriculture, save sowing seeds in the ground, and no other tools but the axe and the spade," first "extended their knowledge"? And how could "our peasant have conceived of the telegraph, the products of steam power, the exchange of speech between two people, one in America and the other in Europe, and other inventions besides . . . had he not witnessed them with his own eyes, and examined their secrets?"³⁸

To be sure, migration presented moral dangers. But these could be reined in by "temperance, moderation, and reliance upon [certain] exemplary rules." For instance, men should maintain their mastery over their women, and "neither should leave the other." Should they have children, they should "take every care to place them in religious schools," and to "instill in their hearts the spirit of faith and love for the homeland." Those who "built dwellings in foreign lands should not allow greed . . . and covetousness to make them forget that they had, beyond the seas, an aged father who waited patiently . . . for their return, a mother who complained of their behavior, children whose eyes stung with harsh tears, and a little house amidst mulberry and oak trees." And, finally, all should "remember incessantly the need that compelled them to travel to a far-off country, different in race, language and nationality, in food and drink and faith;" keeping in mind that they were the "sons of a patria that had protected its religion with its blood," they should remain wary of "any tradition foreign to it." All of these sermon-like rhetorical questions and admonitions belied the profound disquiet migration provoked among Maronite clergymen, anxious that their flock might slip out of their grasp and fall into immoral ways in the lands of migration. Despite such worries, 'Amshiti could not resist the conclusion that, so long as migration was kept properly in check, its benefits could not be dispensed with. For it was – as he put it in a striking turn of phrase – a movement from the "shadows of night into the light of day."³⁹

Concern for migration, though, was by no means confined in these years to the denizens of Mount Lebanon and its Christian clergy, so intent upon keeping their congregations to the straight and narrow. "Migration from, and into, Syria" – a question that encompassed both the departure of so many men and women for the diaspora, and the disruptive arrival of Zionist settlers and refugees fleeing the Ottoman empire's war-stricken European provinces – was deemed significant enough a social and political phenomenon to be one of the four main topics tabled for discussion at the "First Arab congress," a gathering of

notables drawn, for the most part, from the reformist circles of Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and Paris which met in the city of light in mid-June 1913. It is a sign of its importance that the other issues its delegates debated were the most significant political concerns of the day: “national life and resistance to occupation” – a constant source of anxiety in the wake of the Austrian annexation of Bosnia in 1908, the Italian occupation of present-day Libya in 1911, and the Balkan War of 1912-1913; the “rights of the Arabs in the Ottoman state;” and “the need for reform on the basis of decentralization,” which might counteract the overweening centralizing drive of the Committee of Union and Progress, and provide the Arab provinces with a cherished measure of autonomy.⁴⁰

Addressing the question of migration, Shaykh Ahmad Tabbarah regarded it as intimately tied up to broader debates on the shape and purpose of the state. As he put it: “migration is the result of constraints upon living conditions, and [these] are the products of arbitrariness and administrative wrongs.” Where ‘Amshiti had accounted for large-scale movement in essentially economic terms, Tabbarah regarded it as the ultimate consequence of political ineptitude and oppression. The country, with its “bursting springs and gentle winds and excellent soil,” had a great deal of potential, and had known prosperity under first the Romans, then the Arabs. What is more, its present-day inhabitants had shown an admirable “readiness for progress” and a “great appetite for ... success in all marches of life.” No further evidence of this was needed than their ability to “reach, through their wits, the highest peaks” of professional success; in places such as Egypt, where Syrians like Khalil Pasha Hamada and Saba Pasha “held positions like the Europeans,” they stood “shoulder to shoulder” with citizens of the “most advanced nations.” But all this was no use without good rule. As Tabbarah noted laconically, “experience had proved” that “no vital questions” could be dealt with by any “nation” if “a political life” had first not been “established.”⁴¹

It is in the context of these discussions of the causes, costs, and benefits of migration that we must situate evocations of the Phoenician past. ‘Amshiti and Tabbarah sought to make rather different points. The former attempted to maintain departing men and women within the fold of a Maronite Catholicism defined as much by an attachment to the native soil of Lebanon as by piety and moral constancy. Though he was by no means entirely suspicious of materialism, whose achievements he vaunted repeatedly, his paternalism was driven by a deep concern to preserve the bonds of family in the face of the crisis of

patriarchy provoked by male migration, and to stave off the forces of unbelief and turpitude. It is no coincidence that he should have ended his piece with one, final, prohibition – against joining “secret societies, not least the Masons,” who preyed upon the “guilelessness” of the Syrian – echoing the vitriolic campaigns of his Jesuit patrons against Freemasonry and its atheistic proponents.⁴² Tabbarah, meanwhile, saw in the outflow that sapped, year after year, the vital force of the body politic the clearest vindication of his calls for a “veritable political life,” founded upon “common participation in rule and . . . decentralization,” the principles for which he had campaigned as a member of the Beirut Reform Society throughout early 1913, and which he had come to Paris to defend.⁴³

Both, however, made use of the Phoenician past, evoking the peripatetic tendencies and mercantile abilities of these illustrious forebears to buttress their arguments. Intent upon demonstrating the “necessity” of migration, ‘Amshiti asked whether “anyone could deny the state of barbarity in which the Greek lands lay until the Phoenicians brought their gifts unto them” – not least that most visible mark of civilization, writing, which Cadmus had introduced, bringing with him the alphabet. The influence of the Phoenicians, then, was still plain to see in the “names of [Greece’s] peoples, in its cities, religions, and the principles of its culture.” Indeed, the Phoenicians, who had “crossed the seas,” laying “down the routes” of navigation, had “civilized all the states and peoples to which they migrated in Asia, Africa, Europe and even in America.” There was, to be sure, some measure of patriotic pride in ‘Amshiti’s selection of this particular example. Nevertheless, it served not so much to provide a basis for present-day identity, as to bolster his contention that “whoever should explore the condition of . . . peoples . . . will realize at first glance a propensity, whether voluntary or coerced, for migration.” Thus, he continued in a comparative vein: “were we to examine all the kingdoms” that had left their mark upon world history, and the causes of their rise and fall, “we should find the cause for migration from them and towards them.”⁴⁴ The entire run of human history, the life and death of states and civilizations, ‘Amshiti intimated, hung upon the movement of peoples. This was no boastful claim to an exceptional destiny, designed to mark off one people from its neighbors and peers. Quite the contrary – ‘Amshiti sought to soothe and alleviate the anxieties of his contemporaries, by reminding them that their compatriots’ displacements had nothing unusual about them, but fitted into the general pattern of human behavior.

Tabbarah, for his part, drew a clearer connection between past and present. To do so, he quoted from *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui*, the travel account published in 1884 by the French medical doctor, botanist, zoologist, and archaeologist Louis Lortet, who had noted that the 'commercial nature' of 'the Syrian' – that 'energetic Arab trader who knows no weariness or strain' – 'reminds us that he descends from the Phoenicians, whose trading fleets sailed to the furthest lands known in those days.' Such words served several purposes. Of course, they provided the contemporary Syrian with a past of which he could be proud, neatly placing him in the lineage of distinguished forebears both ancient and Arab, with their heritage of 'strength and nobility.'⁴⁵ This was in line with a more general tendency on Tabbarah's part to make no distinction between Syria's Islamic and pre-Islamic past, assembling instead a vision in which his native patria was at once a separate, clearly-defined, entity, with a history all its own; an integral part of a broader Arab whole; and a significant contributor to the progress of world history, which had long served as a "link between the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Europe."⁴⁶ But this was only part of it. On the one hand, Lortet's words provided Tabbarah with an alternative, and perhaps less disquieting, explanation for his contemporaries' wanderlust: 'travel' was quite simply in their 'nature,' an inherited feature passed down from generation to generation. On the other, it underscored his central point. For, Lortet continued, 'should [the Syrian] only be allowed a veritable political life, he would attain a remarkable condition, and play an important role in the history of the world.' That a Frenchman should have made the point only lent further credence to Tabbarah's insistence upon his compatriots' readiness for progress, demonstrating that it was no vain delusion but an impression shared by Europeans. And, most importantly, it underscored his central contention: were the Ottoman state to acquiesce in the "reform" required to furnish Syria with an "honourable political life," its inhabitants would rapidly make "advances to confound understanding."⁴⁷ Once again, the Phoenician past was not treated as a point of origin, a justification for the existence of latter-day polities and a source of solidarity for their denizens, but rather as a rhetorical tool, used to support a wider social and political inquiry and argument.

The Phoenician past provided figures like 'Amshiti and Tabbarah with ready explanation for the discombobulating movements of their contemporaries. But it could also furnish the material to craft more utopian visions of the political future, even as it

continued to be used to make sense of the migrations of the present. This is evident from the Paris writings of the socialist and Lebanese patriot Khayrallah Khayrallah, who had been forced to flee Mount Lebanon and his life as an Ottoman functionary after organizing a rally in celebration of the 1st of May on the beach at Dbayyeh. In a long essay on the social and intellectual state of Syria published in 1912 in the French Orientalist *Revue du monde musulman*, Khayrallah recounted the history of his homeland in diasporic form as a tale of successive departures and returns, like those of the scholars employed in the Maronite College of Rome and the Bibliothèque du Roy, established by Louis XIV. Brokers who had brought Oriental learning to the courts of Europe and transferred European knowledge to their own land, these figures perhaps reminded Khayrallah of his own fate—a man who expounded upon the past and present of his native land to a European audience even as he sought to explain the concepts of capitalism and class to an Eastern Mediterranean audience.⁴⁸

Khayrallah's evocation of the Phoenicians was perhaps the culmination of this vision of physical movement, untrammelled intellectual exchange and cross-cultural understanding. For the legacy of these forebears' voyages, he suggested, lived on in the "Phoenician traditions" of travel the contemporary Syrian carried in his bosom. The latter's inherited capacity to "venture without fear" onto "Western beaches" only enhanced his exposure, growing "stronger day by day," to the "wonders of Western civilization." This "contact," in turn, was increasingly giving rise "to new ideas and conceptions, leading to efforts and aspirations which have begun to suggest the contours of a future Syria" born of intellectual hybridization between East and West. Furthermore, the past offered up not just precedents, but also exemplars. While Palestine had remained "theocratic and hierarchical," and its children "saw in each foreigner an enemy", the Phoenician—the son of a "democratic, republican" land—was a "citizen of the world" who "mixed with every people, and stopped off on every shore, carrying everywhere, along with the products of his industrial genius, the seeds of civilization and the great brotherhood of peoples." This was a mixed message. At once exclusionary and expansive, it marked Palestine off from Syria even as it underscored the latter's openness to the world. The Phoenician past, then, provided Khayrallah both with the confines of a territorially circumscribed political community and with the tools to craft a manifesto for a better future, founded upon the cosmopolitanism, democratic spirit, and civilizational comity to which his contemporaries should aspire.⁴⁹ But

few, I have suggested, shared Khayrallah's sense of the potential of displacement to mold new subjects, to craft new, more open selves. Rather, men like Tabbarah and 'Amshiti sought solace, and found explanation, in the ancient past. Theirs was a travelling theory of sorts, a form of social thought which attempted to track and make sense of movement, as much as it was an attempt to build a common identity from the ruins of the past.

EMBATTLED USES: CLAIM-MAKING AND PATRIOTISM IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

But such evocations of the Phoenician past could themselves migrate into new discursive contexts, finding novel uses in the years after the First World War, when Eastern Mediterranean literati mobilized in numbers to press their varying demands for self-determination upon the international community. Thus, Khayrallah Khayrallah reprised his earlier engagement with the ancient past to buttress his claim that the contemporary "evolution of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon" was "deserving" of the "attention" of the "governments of the civilized world." For not only had the "Arab element of the Ottoman empire spontaneously sided with the Allies," suffering the "martyrdom" of "physical and moral torture, conscription, mass executions, prison, famine, [and] epidemic illness" for its decision. More than this, "this land whose fate is currently in play is the most venerable of all, as it is the cradle of humanity, and civilized humankind cannot, without seeming ungrateful, fail to respect its origins." For it was in "the Levant" that "humanity first became conscious of itself," and that the "great philosophical and religious ideas that . . . constitute the universal patrimony were born." "Darkness," it was true, had since passed over these lands: "Babylon, Nineveh, and Palmyra are ruins, Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon small towns, Damascus and Baghdad pale reflections of the cities of the Caliphs." But, he went on, "from the midst of . . . this decrepitude rises a new spirit, and this anxious soul comes to ask of the civilized world its right to life." There was nothing untoward about such expectations, Khayrallah insisted. After all, "the modern era" had already "witnessed great resurrections: Athens has regained its place in the sun of freedom; Rome sees once again the solemnity of the Capitol. Why then should Tyre and Byblos, Damascus and Baghdad remain slaves?" The "direct heirs of these civilizations," he concluded, only asked to create "in this antique land, witness to their ancestors' glories, a new life and civilization."⁵⁰ Khayrallah operated in such passages in two modes – one deeply diachronic, the other synchronic

and explicitly comparative. On the one hand, he depended upon an ecumenical invocation of the succession of civilizations that had blossomed in the Levant—the Babylonians and the Seleucids, the Phoenicians, the Umayyads and Abbasids—to press his demand for self-determination on the international community. On the other, he argued that the latter should take heed of this rhetorical move on the basis of recent precedent, appealing to the aesthetic and political sensibilities of the European states that had helped first Greece, then Italy realize their national ambitions.

However, even as it came increasingly to be used in the years after the First World War to lend support to the idea of a Lebanese polity founded upon ancient antecedents, the Phoenician past did not lose its unsettling, ambivalent association with diaspora. This uncertainty found its way, for instance, into the lines of *La Montagne inspirée*, the long, eulogistic poem published in 1933 by the businessman and intellectual Charles Corm, often regarded as one of the most important ideologues of the new Lebanese nation-state. Thus, Corm sang the praises of his ancient forebears, whose language—"the tongue of the golden age"—was the "genesis of all alphabets," the "figurehead" which had coursed through the waves to the "horizons of the ancient universe," filling "with pride the sails . . . of the Phoenician." Moreover, he drew an explicit parallel between these ancient travels and the movements of his contemporaries, "who continue this beaming expansion/ through which our ancestors, moving from one Cyclades to another, searched the continents," laying claim before the "entire universe" to "our place in the sun." Beneath the entirely conventional evocation of the Phoenicians as the progenitors of the written script and the inventors of the sail—tropes of equal importance to Corm, who juggled his poetic passion with another, more lucrative, life as the Middle Eastern agent of Ford motors—lay a diasporic justification for the Lebanese nation-state: the achievements of its constituents scattered through the lands of migration, Corm intimated, served to justify its existence and spread its reputation, lifting high the name of Lebanon before the nations. But Corm could not wholeheartedly embrace migration, which threatened to leave such gaping holes in the fragile fabric of Lebanese society. He anxiously urged his compatriots, those keepers of the ancestral blood, not to "lose it under a foreign sky," but to "return and rest after your hard battles, beneath the flowers of our orange trees," to "come and live and die in your old ramparts,/ come back to us, a hundred times welcome,/" rather than die abroad like "unknown soldiers," whose

services to the nation were destined to remain anonymous.⁵¹ In such passages, Corm hovered uncertainly between two visions of the nation: one encompassing migrants, wherever they might be, as integral members of a body politic unbound by territorial confines, a polity whose reach was global even as its attachments remained profoundly local; and another of the nation-state as an intimate, bucolic space, defined by its gentle flora and its rugged mountainous escarpments, which had served to protect the Lebanese from the depredations of invaders for so long. For all his lyricism, Corm could not altogether resolve these ambiguities.

CONCLUSION

To speak of an ideological construct labeled “Phoenicianism,” I have suggested, is to impose confines upon historical inquiry. There was no single use for the Phoenician past, and it was not the preserve of Lebanese nationalists who eagerly strove to trace the genealogy of their darling state into the distant past, and to imbue its novel structures with the sheen of ancient glory. For even as its more unsavory aspects were conveniently lobbed off, and its tropes – the alphabet and the sail, travel and trade – came to be fixed, taking on a rote quality as they were repeated by successive literati, the Phoenician past retained a flexible, pliable quality. It came to be used in a variety of ways and contexts. But perhaps the most salient of these in the years before 1914 was that of migration from the Eastern Mediterranean. Looking to find an explanation for these vast displacements, and to craft a vision of society and polity that might accommodate these movements, the region’s literati resorted to a number of strategies, one of which was recourse to the ancient past: the traveled ways and trading disposition of the Phoenicians, they argued, might account for the peripatetic tendencies and mercantile bent of their contemporaries. This was history not as the delimitation of national borders, the definition of a people through a fixed chain of descent, but as a diasporic pursuit, a narrative centered upon movement. Only in the years after the First World War did the Phoenician past come to be pressed into the service of nationalist claims, and to be used as a standard to buttress demands for self-determination. But even as it came to be deployed as a justification for political projects and a source of patriotic pride, it could not altogether shed its earlier diasporic associations, and the ambivalence that came with them.

NOTES

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² Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," *New Left Review* 94 (1975): 18.

³ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, transl. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 249.

⁴ Fred Halliday, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2000), 37.

⁵ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 222.

⁶ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (London: IB Tauris, 2006), 1–2, 8, ix.

⁷ Michelle Hartman and Alessandro Olsaretti, "The First Boat and the First Oar: Inventions of Lebanon in the Writings of Michel Chiha," *Radical History Review* 86 (2003), 38, 43–5.

⁸ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: the Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁹ Hartman and Olsaretti, "The First Boat," 56; Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 250.

¹⁰ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82–3.

¹¹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1994), 111, 3.

¹² Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Arab American Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

¹³ Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004).

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- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 346–47.
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- ⁴⁸ K.T. Khairallah, *La Syrie: Territoire. Origines Ethniques et Politiques. Evolution. Esquisses: La Vie Sociale et Littéraire. La Vie Politique au Liban et en Syrie* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1912), 33–8; see also Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 102.
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