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ORIENTALIST INFOTAINMENT AND THE US LECTURE TOUR OF GREGORY M. WORTABET (1828-93)

Abstract

This article studies the US lecture tour of Gregory M. Wortabet (1828-93), a forgotten Syrian intellectual of the Arab Nahda ("Awakening" or "Renaissance"), to examine the production of knowledge about the Middle East in America in the mid-nineteenth century. A biographical sketch focusing on his Syrian Protestant identity and his association with the American Protestant missionaries in Beirut set the stage. Next, his 1852-54 lecture circuit in America as "the Syrian Traveller" illustrates that he designed his lecturing business to provide both information and entertainment. A review of his lectures draws attention to the stereotypes he proliferated, while an examination of his analysis on social and political changes in his homeland reveals that Americans learned of the Nahda as it unfolded. Lastly, a section on his critics shows how his misrepresentations of "the Orient" were not blindly accepted but rather open to scrutiny. Wortabet's noncanonical voice in the historical archives demonstrates that America in the mid-nineteenth century was a site of Orientalism and that a man from what we now called the Middle East was among its contributors.

خلاصة

يدرس هذا المقال جولة المحاضرات التي أجزاها غريغوري م. ورتبات (1828-1893) في الولايات المتحدة، وهو مثقف سوري غير معروف من النهضة العربية ("الصحوّة" أو "النهضة") للبحث في إنتاج المعرفة حول الشرق الأوسط في أمريكا في منتصف القرن التاسع عشر. يمهّد هذا البحث بسيرته الذاتية التي تركز على هويته البروتستانتية السورية وارتباطه بالمبشرين البروتستانت الأمريكيين في بيروت. بعد ذلك، توضّح دائرة محاضراته في أمريكا في الفترة من 1852 إلى 1854، والتي ألقاها تحت اسم "الرحالة السوري"، أنه صمم عمله في مجال المحاضرات لتوفير المعلومات والترفيه. ودراسة محاضراته تلفت الانتباه إلى الصور النمطية التي نشرها، في حين يكشف فحص تحليله للتغيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية في وطنه أن الأميركيين تعلموا عن النهضة وهي تنمو وتبلور. وأخيراً، يُظهر القسم الذي يركز على منتقديه كيف أن تحريفاته عن "الشرق" لم يتم قبولها بشكل أعمى، بل كانت مفتوحة للتدقيق. يُبين صوت ورتبات في الأرشيفات التاريخية أن أمريكا في منتصف القرن التاسع عشر كانت موقعاً للاستشراق، وأن رجلاً من المنطقة التي نسميها الآن الشرق الأوسط كان من بين المساهمين فيه.



INTRODUCTION

On 11 May 1852, the *New York Herald* reported: "Among the thousands of strangers now in New York, are Mr. Gregory M. Wortabet, of Beyrout [*sic*], Syria, a native missionary in that quarter of the world, who intends to give lectures."² Who was this man from Syria? What compelled him to cross the Atlantic Ocean and deliver public lectures in the United States? What firsthand information did he have about "that quarter of the world" that the average middle-class American in cities and frontier towns would find interesting?

Gregory M. Wortabet (1828–93) was among the first Syrians to come to America.³ Between May 1852 and January 1854, he visited nearly 85 percent of the country and spoke on his homeland, the customs and practices of its people, and its role in fulfilling biblical prophecy. "The Syrian Traveller," as the newspapers dubbed him, was a business entrepreneur and showman whose lecture tour simultaneously enlightened and entertained audiences. Wortabet's travels and orations present an opportunity to examine the production of knowledge on the Middle East in nineteenth-century America by an itinerant spokesman from the region.

In *Orientalism*, Said overlooked the presence of Orientalist discourses in early American history. Consulting primarily British and French academic, intellectual, and literary sources, he explained how Europe historically imagined, emphasized, exaggerated, and distorted differences between "the Orient" and "the Occident" to exploit the former militarily, economically, and culturally.⁴ The United States, however, was not unaware of the Middle East and North Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An American variety of Orientalism formed through the nation's cultural, diplomatic, commercial, and missionary engagements and exploits in the region. Strong Protestant ideologies underwrote the cultural fabric of God's new city on a hill as well.⁵ In the nineteenth century in particular, a mania for the Holy Land, or the Bible Lands as they were popularly known in the American imagination, swept across the country.⁶ Grafton explained that this "American Biblical Orientalism" created an Orientalized place constructed more by the Bible and evangelical piety than by reality. In light of Protestant beliefs in the authority of the Scriptures, the timeless nature of events recorded therein, and the sacrality of the land where those events occurred, "indigenous peoples [in nineteenth-century Ottoman Syria] were not portrayed as real people in their own right but rather as representatives of biblical characters and themes."⁷ Orientalizing attitudes, fantasies, and images

are part and parcel of the American cultural, political, and religious landscape.

A community of texts crafted “the Orient” in the imagination of the new nation. The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, remained the quintessential source on the Middle East,⁸ while missionary periodicals provided rich descriptions direct from the nineteenth-century Bible Lands. For example, the *Missionary Herald*, a monthly magazine issued by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (est. 1810), circulated widely and kept readers abreast of evangelical efforts.⁹ Peppered with lively personal experiences, travelogues also advanced a Protestant interpretation of the region.¹⁰ Edward Robinson (1794–1863), the “Father of Biblical Archeology,” famously weighed the historical authenticity of sacred sites against the Bible in *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea* (1841), and William McClure Thomson (1806–94), an American Protestant missionary, described the “Syria” where he resided through a biblical lens in *The Land and the Book* (1858–60).¹¹ These scriptural-scholarly travelogues were bestsellers with updated editions published to satisfy customer demand.¹² No travelogue, however, could compete with Mark Twain’s (1835–1910) satirical and acerbic views of religion, politics, and society in North Africa and the Middle East in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869).¹³ The book was his greatest blockbuster, selling 70,000 copies within the first year. Literature from “the Orient” was likewise a mainstay of the American national library. *The Arabian Nights* (or *A Thousand and One Nights*), with its tales of Aladdin, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and Sinbad the Sailor, was popular throughout the United States in the nineteenth century, as Nance demonstrated, captivating the American imagination and inspiring national dreams of prosperity and expansion.¹⁴ For over a century the printed word played a key role in reifying an image of “the Orient” in the mind of American readers.

According to Said, Orientalism “was a textual universe by and large.”¹⁵ Texts, however, were not the only way that the United States learned about the Bible Lands. In his research on the nineteenth-century public lecture system, Scott pointed out that Americans “were both hearers and readers, and what they read influenced how they listened as well as what they heard, and vice versa.”¹⁶ Public speeches helped animate stories, characters, and descriptions of the Holy Land. Preachers spoke weekly about the birthplace of the Bible, and Protestant missionaries delivered farewell sermons and fundraising updates on God’s hand at work in the hallowed “over there.” Through lecture circuits, capitalizing travelers too, like Bayard Taylor (1825–79),

made careers giving audiences fresh information on the region.¹⁷ Orality complemented textuality in the American production of knowledge on the Middle East.

American clergymen, scholars, and tourists did not have a monopoly on representing “the Orient.” Lecturers and entertainers from the Middle East and North Africa played a role in “provid[ing] highly detailed representations of the people and institutions of the eastern Mediterranean, formulating and disseminating a remarkably consistent and coherent image of the East.”¹⁸ These elite and popular performers were “purveyors of Orientalism,” as Jacobs stylized them,¹⁹ and promoted cross-cultural encounters at world-fair exhibitions, formal lectures, circus acts, and on the vaudeville stage.²⁰ While ubiquitous in the last quarter of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, they were not the first cultural informants to visit the United States. Moroccan acrobats came in the 1820s; Christopher Oscanyan (1815–96), an Ottoman Armenian from Istanbul, gave a handful of lectures around New England in the late 1830s; and the Greek Catholic Monsignor Flavianus Kfoury, accompanied by his dragoman Nasif Shedoody (c. 1826–1906),²¹ gave talks between 1849 and 1851 in the American Northwest and Canada to raise money to rebuild St. John’s Monastery of Choueir at Khenchara.²² The US lecture tour of Gregory M. Wortabet in the early 1850s contributed to this infotainment industry of Orientalism.

The story of Gregory M. Wortabet is entangled with the history of the American Protestant missionaries in Syria. They arrived in the region in 1820, and in 1825 his father, (Jacob) Gregory Wortabet (1798–1832), an Armenian ecclesiastic, became one of their early converts.²³ When the elder Wortabet died unexpectedly, the missionaries informally took the four-year-old Gregory M. under their wing. At their Boys’ School in Beirut, they provided him with an education and spiritual direction, as well as room and board. He was grateful for their generosity but disliked how they capitalized on his father’s memory, propagandistically touting him as one of their “first fruits.”²⁴ Gregory M. Wortabet was determined not to be conflated with his father, Gregory Wortabet. When the young Wortabet left Syria in the early 1850s, he kept the surname Wortabet—an honorific title his father earned for being a highly educated clergyman in the Armenian Orthodox Church—and consistently started using his middle initial “M.,” which stood for Moorjan, or the Anglicized Morgan, as if to assertively signal his individuality and newfound independence.²⁵ The son of the convert worked hard to create an existence (and legacy) for himself beyond the missionary sphere.

Gregory M. Wortabet was also a child of the Nahda (“Awakening” or “Renaissance”), which El-Ariss described as “the project of Arab cultural and political modernity.”²⁶ An epicenter of the Nahda, Beirut underwent profound social, cultural, economic, and political transformations in the nineteenth century which Wortabet experienced firsthand.²⁷ He worked as a merchant for the local Lloyd’s of London agent and participated in the first theological and literary-scientific societies, where he socialized with thinkers and scholars, such as the public intellectual Butrus al-Bustani (1819–83) and the master philologist Nasif al-Yaziji (1800–71), who had financial, spiritual, and communal ties of their own to the missionaries. Having unparalleled opportunities to interact with leading intellectuals and merchants, Wortabet thrived in the early days of the Nahda in Beirut.

In the 1850s, Wortabet proclaimed to be “of Bayroot [*sic*], Syria,”²⁸ even though there was no geopolitical entity named Syria until 1865. The reality that he underplayed was that since 1516, the Arab heartlands—the geographic space of “Syria” that encompasses the modern nations of Lebanon, Syria, Israel/Palestine, and Jordan—were an integral part of the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ The High Porte customarily called this area al-Sham or Arabistan and divided it into provinces named after their capital cities. In the nineteenth century, the term “Syria” increasingly entered the imperial lexicon, due to its usage by European powers, American missionaries, and Arab intellectuals.³⁰ In 1865, “Syria” became a geopolitical entity, when the Ottoman state created the Province of Syria. This brief digression on how “Syria” was reactivated in the Ottoman political arena sheds light on why Wortabet operationalized it for his lecturing business. He was a subject of the Ottoman sultan; yet he chose to foreground the legally vacuous term of “Syria” to emphasize the purported timeless nature of his homeland to Americans hopeful for proof that the Bible Lands still existed.

The Arab Nahda unfolded alongside the Ottoman Tanzimat (1839–76), a period of social, economic, legislative, and administrative reforms promulgated by the sultan, whose edicts aimed to modernize the empire and create Ottoman citizens out of the various religious, ethnic, and social groups domiciled therein.³¹ The sultan’s 1856 *Hatt-ı Hümayun* was the foundational edict of the era, promising equality regardless of creed. 1850, however, was more noteworthy for the Ottoman Protestants because in that year, the sultan recognized their community as a distinct *millet* (religious community), enabling the fledgling group of Ottoman subjects who had embraced Protestantism “to administer its own affairs and to worship freely,” as Makdisi eloquently stated.³² Prior to this edict, when an Ottoman subject

converted to Protestantism, the individual became a member of an unrecognized and unprotected religious group. Gregory M. Wortabet began touring the Anglo-American world in the early 1850s, a most opportune time for the Ottoman Protestant from Syria. While growing up, he was an Ottoman subject but religiously a *persona non grata* due to his parents' decision to adopt Protestantism. Thanks to the creation of a Protestant *millet*, he traveled knowing that that he was no longer an outsider within the imperial state because of his religious identity.

The US lecture tour of Gregory M. Wortabet invites us to explore how information about the Middle East was orally produced and aurally received in mid-nineteenth-century America. A biographical sketch first explores his Syrian Protestant identity and the American missionary impact on his life.³³ Next his lecture tour shows how "the Syrian Traveller" ran his business and played "the Oriental" card to bring in the crowds. An analysis of his stories reveals that he espoused Orientalist stereotypes, either because he held them to be true or recognized that they were popular with his listeners. Here his remarks on the unfolding Nahda complicate a prevailing scholarly assumption that mostly reports of a static "Orient" reached the United States. Lastly, public rebukes of his religious, cultural, and political biases illustrate that Orientalism in the nineteenth century was open to voices hoping to correct misrepresentations of "the Orient." Albeit interesting, the impressions of "the Syrian Traveller" on American culture, society, and politics will not be discussed.³⁴

The extant sources were written for public consumption; thus, the Gregory M. Wortabet presented in this article is a media persona. Historical information and reviews of his lecture tour were culled from newspaper clippings, while a "phonographic report" from his course of lectures in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1856 invite him to speak directly to a twenty-first-century audience.³⁵ Since the Halifax report mirrors what newspapers said he talked about in the United States, it seems justified to use this transcript to determine what Americans heard him say. His two-volume *Syria and the Syrians* (1856) was also utilized but lightly, because the genre of travel writing differs from the art of public speaking. Through the press and his writings, Wortabet's noncanonical voice in the archive communicates that nineteenth-century America was a site of Orientalism and that an Ottoman Syrian was among its active contributors.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gregory M. Wortabet (Krikur Wurtabat) spent his formative years as a member of the Protestant community in Syria. According to missionary

records, he was baptized in 1828 on Malta, where his parents resided with the missionaries.³⁶ His parents, (Jacob) Gregory Wortabet and Susan Laflufi (b. 1814), married in 1825 after the elder Wortabet left the Armenian Orthodox Church and embraced Protestantism.³⁷ The social, financial, and spiritual futures of the newlyweds were tied to the American Protestants. In 1828, fearing a military conflict between England and the Ottoman Empire, the Wortabets and the missionaries fled to Malta, where (Jacob) Gregory Wortabet helped the American missionary William Goodell (1792–1867) translate the New Testament into Armeno-Turkish (Ottoman Turkish written in Armenian script).³⁸ In 1830, the Wortabets returned to Syria, and the family patriarch became a merchant in Sidon.³⁹ When Gregory M. was four years old, his father died, leaving behind an eighteen-year-old widow and four children.⁴⁰ Feeling a moral obligation and wanting to raise the children as Protestants, the missionaries established a fund to care for Gregory M. and his siblings.⁴¹

The missionaries hoped that the Wortabet children would grow up to be enlightened Syrian Protestants. From 1835 to 1842, Gregory M. and his brother John (Yuhanna) (1827–1908) were educated at their Boys' School in Beirut.⁴² Gregory M. was an exemplary pupil but prone to troublemaking. The missionaries feared that he would not mature into a respectable God-fearing man. One of his schoolteachers described him as "a very roguish boy but uncommonly fine scholar. His mind acts like lightening. . . . If he should become a sincere discipline of Christ, he might accomplish wonders. Pray for him."⁴³ After his schooldays, he participated in the local social and intellectual scene alongside several missionaries and Nahda luminaries, such as Butrus al-Bustani and Nasif al-Yaziji. He was a member of the theological group Majma' al-Tahdhib (the Refinement Committee; est. 1846) and the literary-scientific association al-Jam'iyya al-Suriyya li-Ktisab al-'Ulum wal-Funun (the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences; est. 1847).⁴⁴ Gregory M. Wortabet benefitted greatly from the educational upbringing, spiritual direction, and social opportunities that the American Protestant missionaries provided him.

Wortabet was an intrepid young man and in his twenties pursued opportunities to make money and see the world. In the late 1840s, he worked for a Mr. Heald, the Lloyd's of London agent in Beirut, and engaged in trade and commerce in Alexandria.⁴⁵ He spent the 1850s mostly in the United Kingdom and the United States.⁴⁶ First he worked as an interpreter for the Syro-Lebanon Company, "a quasi-theatrical troupe of Syrian ladies and gentlemen" that produced tableaux of Syrian life at the Egyptian Hall in London during the Great

Exhibition in 1851,⁴⁷ and afterwards comanaged a short-lived traveling version.⁴⁸ From May 1852 to January 1854, he operated a US lecture tour capitalizing on his business expertise, cultural knowledge of the Middle East, and oratory skills. He entered the lucrative market of Holy Land travelogues in 1856 and published *Syria and the Syrians*, in which he detailed his trip to Syria (December 1854–April 1855).⁴⁹ He then launched a lecture tour in England, Ireland, and Scotland (1854–56), and another in the American Northeast and Halifax, Nova Scotia (1856–57).⁵⁰ Wortabet was a self-made man and became a celebrity in the Anglo-American lecturing world.

“We are all Turkish subjects in Syria,” Wortabet proclaimed.⁵¹ He acknowledged that he was a subject of the Ottoman Empire, yet he intentionally foregrounded Syria instead. The title and subtitle of his travelogue, *Syria and the Syrians; Or, Turkey in the Dependencies*, poetically illustrate how he prioritized Syria yet recognized its geopolitical position within the imperial realm. Wortabet never renounced his allegiance to the sultan, unlike some of his counterparts at the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences who became naturalized subjects of the British monarch.⁵² A prolific spokesman on behalf of Syria, Wortabet was an Ottoman too.

Wortabet chose to underscore his Syrian Protestant identity. He claimed Syria as his homeland and declared himself to be “a Presbyterian—a pretty staunch one too.”⁵³ Being a Syrian Protestant was professionally advantageous because in the United States the term “Syrian” implied Christian, and Americans used the term “Syrian” in juxtaposition to the term “Turk”—that is, Muslim.⁵⁴ Matrilineally, Wortabet was a Syrian. His father, however, was ethnically and religiously an Armenian, born and raised in Bolu (a town in modern-day Türkiye).⁵⁵ Wortabet invoked his Armenian ancestry only insofar as it supplied a moneymaking backstory and helped endear him to Anglo-Americans. Personally he attached little value to his ethnicity, wittily explaining his lineage in the “re-re-re-conquered” land of Syria as such: “Suppose an Englishman marries a French woman, and a boy is the result,—that boy marries a Swedish woman, and a boy is the result and so on through half-a-dozen different nations, and at last I am the result.”⁵⁶ It was a smart business decision to spotlight his Syrian Protestant identity.

A deep rift developed between Wortabet and the American missionaries. Their ward had grown into a free-spirited and strong-willed man. They disapproved of his moneymaking schemes but, as his older brother noted, their objections were irrelevant for “he is bent on the thing.”⁵⁷ They questioned his moral compass too, as Lindner

mentioned, specifically his collaboration with the Syro-Lebanon Company in London which “engaged a number of *dancing* women from Damascus . . . [who] of course are bad characters,” according to one missionary wife.⁵⁸ The missionaries were staunch proponents of temperance and, whether they knew it or not, Wortabet imbibed and smoked.⁵⁹ He appreciated what the missionaries had provided him in his youth but despised how they exploited his father’s conversion to Protestantism. In his travelogue, he emphasized that the elder Wortabet was a successful merchant in Sidon who supported the missionaries merely as a “teacher and helper” and remained “financially independent . . . [was] *not* a pensioner . . . [and] *never in their pay.*”⁶⁰ Their onetime pupil had become a confident outspoken man.

Although Wortabet made his own way in the world, his post-lecturing career closely resembled that of his brother John Wortabet, a physician and the first Syrian Protestant pastor.⁶¹ In the late 1850s, he briefly pursued theological studies at Presbyterian Western Theology Seminary in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania (now part of Pittsburgh), before enrolling at the University of Pennsylvania in 1857, where he earned his MD in March 1859.⁶² Afterwards he settled in London and worked for the sultan as a medical inspector in modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.⁶³ Wortabet died on 19 July 1893 in London.⁶⁴

“THE SYRIAN TRAVELLER” AND HIS INFOTAINMENT BUSINESS

Like many young men in the nineteenth century, Wortabet was an entrepreneur “forced to try to carve a career out of the possession of some kind of knowledge rather than from soil or craft.”⁶⁵ He arrived in New York City on 27 April 1852,⁶⁶ and less than a month later commenced his first US lecture tour. Between 25 May 1852 and 8 January 1854, he spoke to audiences throughout the country, going as far west as Minnesota and Missouri and south to Georgia and Louisiana.⁶⁷ He intended to visit California;⁶⁸ however, there is no evidence that he went further west than the Great Plains. He spoke at secular and religious venues, addressing audiences in community spaces such as Montague Hall in New York City and, during his second US tour, the Musical Fund Hall in Philadelphia.⁶⁹ According to a Scottish newspaper, he “twice addressed Congress by special invitation” during his first US tour,⁷⁰ which, if true, presents an exciting image of a Syrian Protestant from the Ottoman Empire discussing Middle Eastern society, religion, and politics with American lawmakers during the era of national expansion. His lectures predominantly took place in churches, which were the center of

community life and usually the largest congregational spaces available. Wortabet was a hardworking entrepreneur who singlehandedly launched a lecturing business and provided educational entertainment about the Holy Land in American cities and towns.

Newspapers called him “the Syrian Traveller” and described his appearance and behavior in terms of Orientalist tropes.⁷¹ Physically he was “a young man of average height, with pleasing features, dark flashing eyes, and black moustache.”⁷² Observers were impressed that he was also “a gentleman of fine abilities and education” and “of large intelligence and pleasing address.”⁷³ His confidence was most intriguing: “All were surprised to notice his self-command, somewhat unusual in so young a man.”⁷⁴ Although sufficiently cultured, he remained a dashing handsome, Orientalized subject to Americans given his “simple and unaffected manners” – that is, not civilized or Western enough, and thus a worthwhile living curiosity to see.⁷⁵

Wortabet welcomed the epithet of “the Syrian Traveller.”⁷⁶ He adopted it as his professional persona and dressed the part, even when he was not standing at a lectern (Figure 1). Appareled in Syrian garb, he was a walking advertisement for his lecturing business whenever he rode a coach, took a train, crossed a street, or dined in a restaurant. He was “a sight strange to behold at the Capital of the Buckeye State [Ohio]” and attracted “a good deal of attention . . . [being] a fine looking [*sic*] personage in Eastern costume” in the Badger State [Wisconsin].⁷⁷ Wortabet’s apparel consisted of

a loose skirt or petticoat of light drab cloth, drawn in round the ancles, and fastened around the waist with a broad girdle or sash, a short jacket of the same material with the sleeves cut open half way [*sic*] to the elbow and trimmed with braid, and a light blue flowered vest and neckerchief.⁷⁸

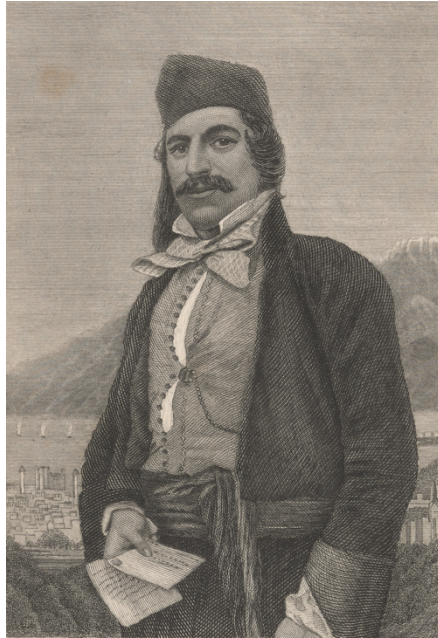


Figure 1: Portrait of Gregory M. Wortabet in *Syria and the Syrians* (London: James Madden, 1856), 1:page before the frontispiece. Courtesy of the Columbia University Libraries.

What most Americans in the nineteenth century thought a person from “the Orient” looked like was based primarily on biblical illustrations and black-and-white sketches in newspapers and travelogues. Wortabet, in his multipiece ensemble, was the first and probably only contact that the average middle-class person would ever have with someone from the Holy Land. Both visually and physically, he served as a “substitute for a real encounter,” as Jondot surmised, with “his firsthand knowledge as a native and his bookish knowledge.”⁷⁹ Many lecturers and performers from the Middle East and North Africa created their professional personas around exotic epithets and vibrant clothing. These men and women from “the Orient” strategically “play[ed] East,” as Jacobs called it, to drum up business and build their individual brands.⁸⁰ Astute entrepreneurs, such as “the Giant of Lebanon” – that is, Elias Zreik – and “Princess” Rahme Haidar (b. 1886) profitably played the Orientalist card to American audiences.⁸¹ American and British nationals recognized the commercial power of sartorial appropriation as well. The American lecturer Bayard Taylor frequently appeared in “Oriental” garb,⁸² as did the legendary British officer T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935), popularly known as Lawrence of

Arabia. “The Syrian Traveller” cleverly marketed his business both on stage and the streets.

Wortabet also impressed audiences with his mastery of English. By effortlessly speaking the language of Anglo-American civilization, he performed his role as a refined “Oriental.” Reports about the “eloquent and interesting foreigner” who “speaks English fluently” testify to the unexpected quality of his oratory.⁸³ Having studied at the missionary-run Boys’ School in Beirut, where English was the only permissible language “between sunrise and sunset,”⁸⁴ he explained to his American audiences how he felt completely at home in their language: “English was the first tongue in which I learned to read, write, and express my ideas. I think, feel, act, and even dream in English.”⁸⁵ His solid command of the language, however, caused some consternation. Several newspapers accused him of being a scam artist from either the US Northeast or Eastern Europe “palming himself off upon the public” for financial gain.⁸⁶ Despite the accusations, his linguistic abilities bore witness to his civilized nature.

“The Syrian Traveller” was a showman who artistically controlled his voice and body to engage the auditory and visual senses of his audience. His talks were “quite pleasing in embellishments,” and his rhetorical “style [was] vehement rather than forcible, and engage[d] the attention by its novelty.”⁸⁷ Thanks to italicization in the primary sources, his intonation can still be heard: “I cannot tell you *what* I felt, or *how* I felt,” and “I want every heart to say, ‘I *love* Syria.’”⁸⁸ His physical movements heightened the theatrical nature of his lectures. A stenographer noted Wortabet’s total body performance, speaking in an “exceedingly animated manner . . . and the ideas enunciated being forcibly and graphically expressed by appropriate gestures.”⁸⁹ Like all entertainers, Wortabet undoubtedly “use[d] the audience’s applause or boos, laughs, or unconformable silences to discover which clichés, narratives, costumes, accents, or patter made sense to the audience then and hopefully again in the future.”⁹⁰ Despite generally positive reviews, some observers preferred less flair and more substance. “His gestures,” one critic wrote, “were not good, exhibiting too much of a Theatrical [*sic*] performer.”⁹¹ Wortabet orchestrated spectacles of sight and sound, mostly striking a balance between communicating information and delighting audiences.

Wortabet adjusted the structure of his lecture series to sustain business. He quickly condensed his course of four lectures to three and often delivered stand-alone lectures.⁹² He also changed his pricing scheme. Initially, admission to all four lectures cost \$1.50 (approximately \$60 in 2023) or \$0.50 per lecture (approximately \$20 in

2023).⁹³ Presumably attendance was thin, so he started lecturing for free and called for donations instead “to assist in defraying traveling expenses.”⁹⁴ He cycled through a repertoire of topics about Syria and the Holy Lands, a subject of considerable interest to the largely Protestant population of nineteenth-century America. He spoke on the “Progress of Civilization” and “Marriages in the East” in New York City, New York; the “Manners and Customs of Syria” in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; “the Holy Land” in St. Paul, Minnesota; and the “Fulfillment of Prophecies on Syria” in New Orleans, Louisiana.⁹⁵ “Marriages in the East” was the most popular because of his vivid descriptions and the fetishized sanctity of the festivities.⁹⁶ One reviewer concluded that the lecture on wedding practices would appeal the most to American morality in “this age of Mormon Polygamy” and the “flare up” of Lola Montez (1821–61), whose liaisons with Ludwig I (1786–1868) brought down the Bavarian monarch.⁹⁷ As a businessman, Wortabet understood the realities of working a lecture circuit and worked hard to give customers what they wanted.

Newspapers provided vital publicity for “the Syrian Traveller.” As Scott pointed out, “[i]t was the press which established the idea in the public mind that a particular figure was a legitimate popular lecturer whom they wanted to hear.”⁹⁸ Editors announced when Wortabet was coming to town and published positive reviews, vouching for the dual benefits of his lectures. One reviewer explained that they “will be valuable to those who seek information . . . [and] amuse those who seek amusement only,” while another noted how they are “highly entertaining and instructive.”⁹⁹ As his reputation grew, media outlets across the country followed his whereabouts.¹⁰⁰ Concomitantly, endorsements assured audiences that Wortabet was a proven lecturing sensation. For example, when he started touring the United States, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that he “carrie[d] with him testimonials of the clergy of England and favourable notices of the press abroad,” having given lectures in the British Isles “with marked success.”¹⁰¹ Using phrases like “throng[s] of our people” and “a large concourse of people,” newspapers give the impression that he was exceedingly popular with audiences.¹⁰² Listeners were “highly entertained,” and Wortabet “was well appreciated by an intelligent audience” and “frequently interrupted by bursts of applause.”¹⁰³ Quantified evidence from Halifax verifies American reports. Almost 1,600 people attended his first lecture, and over the course of three nights thirty instances of audience reactions were recorded, ranging from “(Laughter.)” to “(Applause.)” and “(Enthusiastic and continued applause.)”¹⁰⁴ The press was instrumental to increasing Wortabet’s visibility and credibility.

The lecture tour was a popular form of public instruction and entertainment in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world.¹⁰⁵ In the United States, the Lyceum movement sponsored educational lecture series, mostly in the Northwest and Midwest, and became a driving force for expressing a national culture and reifying an American public, as Ray cogently explained.¹⁰⁶ Wortabet was familiar with the pervasiveness of the lecture circuit on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Through his work as an interpreter and comanager of the Syrian troupe in the United Kingdom, he acquired firsthand knowledge with public speaking. Additionally, he was likely aware that his teachers and spiritual guides, the Protestant missionaries, successfully raised money for evangelical efforts through guest sermons while on furlough in America. Wortabet drew from direct and indirect knowledge of public speaking to orchestrate his own lecture tour.

Wortabet mobilized Christianity to encourage donations to fund his travels and spread Protestantism in Syria. He quoted verses, interpreted Scriptures, bestowed blessings, and pleaded for financial support for the spiritual wellbeing of his homeland. At times, his lectures were indistinguishable from sermons. He based them on the Bible which was “the primary written source of American culture . . . that guided American language, concepts, ideals, and even desires for the future.”¹⁰⁷ To spur hearts toward charity, he leveraged his connection to Syria, Christianity, and the American missionaries. He welcomed listeners as fellow compatriots from the Bible Lands and declared them to be “natives of Syria as well as I am; for there is a patriotism in Christianity.”¹⁰⁸ Like a pastor, he related parables to reinforce his message. To induce his congregation to give money to God’s workmen in the Holy Land, he amended Jesus’ parable of the talents¹⁰⁹ to tell the story of a little boy who received a penny to buy candy but instead donated it to a missionary in Syria. “One penny cannot do much,” Wortabet admitted, “but a heap of pennies may be enough to pay the passage of a Missionary [*sic*] to a foreign land.”¹¹⁰ A fundraising genius and gifted orator, he next made the story real by weaving himself into it.

After some years a Syrian comes forth, who, with many others, has been converted through the instrumentality of that Missionary [*sic*], and who has been educated in a school established by him. He says to you, sir, I am your penny. If it had not been for your *individual* penny, there would not have been the *collected pennies*, and had it not been for them, the

Missionary [*sic*] would not have gone to my country, and I should not have become a Christian.¹¹¹

The value of money is relative, for a single penny is priceless when measured against eternal salvation and education. Wortabet blurred the line between fact and fiction, between a third-person narrative and a first-person recollection, because he – the person standing before the audience – was a Syrian brought to Protestantism through the educational efforts of missionaries who received countless pennies from generous Americans. “Pastor” Wortabet still had more to say about the boy and eternal dividends that a lone penny could accrue.

After ten years more when the little boy has become a man of thirty, another Syrian comes forth, and explains as the former one did, that he is also the fruit of his penny. Again ten years later another is brought to your notice, and at last after the little boy has left this world, he finds his penny again beyond the grave. A band of Syrians approaches the Almighty Father. They say, “here [*sic*] is the man who sent money to Syria teach us, to him we owe all our christianity [*sic*].” Then the little boy hears the heavenly greeting: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”¹¹²

In the story, Wortabet summoned “a band of Syrians” to fundraise on his behalf to tell of the boy’s wise investment in the Kingdom of God. Before God and Wortabet’s listeners, they testified to the life-changing returns that money spent on missions will bring. Wortabet concluded his story with a verse from Jesus’ parable of the talents, albeit in edited form, to demonstrate his intimate knowledge of the Scriptures and appear as an ordained authority.¹¹³ Like the boy in his parable, the audience must decide for themselves how they are to be good stewards of their money. “The Syrian Traveller” was a persuasive fundraiser who invoked religious texts to advance his own business.

The American Protestant missionaries were disappointed with Wortabet not only because of his dubious character, as discussed above, but because his moneymaking ventures encroached on their livelihood. They feared that Americans would donate to him rather than to their Syrian Mission. In private letters, they characterized him as “unprincipled” and someone “who talks too fast to talk rightly or truly.”¹¹⁴ They warned family and associates in America against him for exploiting his relationship with the missionaries merely to gain

“access to Evangelical pulpits” and solicit money to cover his travel expenses.¹¹⁵ Their admonitions were largely ineffective. Wortabet spoke predominantly in churches and gathered enough donations for sustenance, lodging, and travel throughout his lecture tour. While visiting Syria in early 1855, he purportedly “confessed [to the missionaries] that he had done wrong,” according to a missionary wife, “and said many untrue things under the influence of anger and begged forgiveness.”¹¹⁶ The sincerity of his apology is questionable, because afterwards he resumed his lecturing. A self-interested businessman, Wortabet strategically utilized his connection to the missionaries when it benefited him.

SELLING STEREOTYPES

Wortabet promoted stereotypes about the Middle East because he either genuinely believed them or realized that tropes about “the Orient” would attract audiences. Aware that most Americans memorialized Syria for its generative role in Christian history, he reinforced his depiction of a sacred Syria with statements like “Syria was the home of the Founder of Christianity” and “The Almighty . . . chose Syria *par excellence* . . . as the dwelling place of His own Son.”¹¹⁷ He also underscored the timelessness of Syria, declaring: “Our customs are just the same now, as they were in Bible times 3000 years ago.”¹¹⁸ To convey the continuation of the biblical past into the present, he remarked how “[o]ld men of 110, 120, and even 130 years, are not at all uncommon in Syria,” a reference to the patriarchs in the Old Testament, and narrated how he and his brother brought “home a bunch [of Jericho grapes] one day . . . which was so large that we were obliged to carry it home on a stick between us,” invoking the memory of God’s people exploring the Promised Land.¹¹⁹ A contemporary authority from the region, he spoke with certainty and led Americans to believe in the continued existence of a sacred Syria into the nineteenth century.

His information on the religious communities in Syria was neither novel nor nuanced.¹²⁰ Using missionary terminology, he branded all non-Protestants as “nominal Christians” who, along with Muslims, were “very indolent and ignorant,” as well as largely illiterate.¹²¹ He characterized Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox – the perennial adversaries of Protestantism – as ravenous for wealth and power who built luxurious cathedrals and exploited the faith for “political capital.”¹²² Invoking Orientalist tropes on the carnal Muslim, he announced that Islam permits “the pleasures of the flesh” and that the pious man “looks forward to meeting there [in Heaven] the

beautiful Houris."¹²³ He classified Jews to be a mercenary and miserly people, most of whom "sojourn in a strange land," as the Bible foretold.¹²⁴ Wortabet echoed the missionary grammar to explain the religious landscape of his homeland to American audiences. Regrettably, his misrepresentations were not new to his predominately Protestant listeners but confirmed the religious confusion, moral depravity, and general chaos of the Bible Lands they had heard about previously from American missionaries and tourists to the region.

Marauding Bedouins are essential to a romantic desert landscape, and Wortabet adhered to this Orientalist and scriptural grammar framing the Holy Land. He confirmed the biblical story that the Bedouins are the reprobates of God's chosen family, the progeny of Abraham's other son, Ishmael, and stylized them as untamed simpletons. The antithesis of "*Towns-people*," they "inhabit the wilds of Syria" and are "*robbers*" working to reclaim the inheritance of their forefather which "was unjustly deprived by his brother Isaac."¹²⁵ Despite committing retributive robbery, the Bedouin remained an exotic specimen embodying noble principles and racial purity. Wortabet said that the desert dweller "is the soul of honor and chivalry" and "is well made and exceedingly handsome, tall, erect, and noble looking."¹²⁶ The origin story of sibling strife and the ethnological-cum-racial characterizations enabled Wortabet to promote the idea of the wanderlust genteel Arab in the desert.

Wortabet portrayed Syrian women as oppressed and sexualized. The woman was "considered beneath education" and served as the "slave of the whole household," he said.¹²⁷ To emphasize how the female was devalued at the moment of birth, he told listeners how parents welcome condolences when a daughter is born.¹²⁸ Physical harm and malice hunt the girl her entire life, for she is constantly at risk of being beaten or even killed, according to Wortabet.¹²⁹ Through a misogynistic anecdote, he characterized women as objects for the unbridled pining of "the Oriental" man who exhibits gentlemanly behavior so as to be "*loving* . . . [with] the young girl of eighteen."¹³⁰ Through these descriptions, Wortabet hardened the Western stereotype of women in the Middle East as beleaguered and exploited bodies.

The Protestant American missionaries undoubtedly acquainted Wortabet with Orientalist perspectives on Syria, its religions, the exotic Arab, and the condition of women. The missionaries in Beirut were his schoolteachers and spiritual mentors for nearly two decades. William McClure Thomson, whose name he followed with "(and blessed be his

name)" in his lecture,¹³¹ founded the school and served as the learned society president where Wortabet was a pupil and member, respectively. Concomitantly, Eli Smith (1801-57) was the society vice president and second president, as well as a prominent missionary leader and devoted educationalist. Aside from their missionary work, Thomson and Smith contributed significantly to the library of American Orientalist literature.¹³² It is not difficult to detect missionary-inspired information in the lectures of "the Syrian Traveller."

Wortabet consulted both popular travelogues and academic publications to prove his scholarly mettle. He used Alexander Keith (1792-1880) to show that prophecy was fulfilled against ancient Tyre; John Lloyd Stephens (1805-52) for a firsthand account of suffering a burning sensation long after dipping into the Dead Sea; and Terrick Hamilton (1781-1876), whose study on the pre-Islamic poet 'Antara ibn Shaddad provided objective proof of extraordinary Arab chivalry.¹³³ By relying on Western sources and not purely on personal anecdotes, communal memory, and religious traditions, "the Syrian Traveller" infused his lectures with a whiff of impartiality and bolstered his authority as a scholar. He marshalled Western literature on "the Orient," alongside his personal experiences to present himself as an erudite lecturer of Western pedigree.

What Gregory M. Wortabet the person believed remains a mystery. While "the Syrian Traveller" might have sincerely considered Syria to be immutable, its confessional groups decadent, and its women repressed, it is also plausible that he operationalized these stereotypes to attract listeners and motivate them to give larger donations. Wortabet the lecturer drew from a repertoire of information shaped largely by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and Western cultural opinions about "the Orient." He utilized a vocabulary that was accessible to his addressees to connect with them and affirm their beliefs about the world and their civilizational status in it. By invoking prejudiced generalizations, he endorsed an image of the Bible Lands that his audience wanted to hear.

NOTICING THE NAHDA

Although Wortabet depicted Syria as a sacred and benighted Orientalist wonderland, he was not oblivious to the social changes taking place there. The Arab experience with cultural and political modernity, which historiography christened the Nahda, was in its infancy in the early 1850s, and Wortabet enjoyed telling audiences about transformations which had unfolded over the prior twenty years.

Crediting the power of the Bible and the educational efforts of the American Protestant missionaries, Wortabet informed listeners of a Syria that differed from the stagnant and timeless Syria envisioned by Orientalism.

"Beyrout [*sic*] has become mid-day compared with what she formerly was," he ecstatically proclaimed, thanks to education and social refinement.¹³⁴ Using his own life as evidence, he underscored how increased literacy caused these changes. He boasted that his alma mater, the Boys' School, grew from six to seventy-four students in seven short years and hyperbolically asserted that now there is not "a Christian boy in Beyrout [*sic*] who cannot both read and write, and also speak two or three languages."¹³⁵ The person improved internally and externally. On appearance and behavior, he stressed how he and his classmates became "nice boys" who were "now clean and gentlemanly looking."¹³⁶ It is worth recalling that after his schooldays, Wortabet pursued advanced literacy and practiced civilized comportment in town at the Refinement Committee and the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences. According to "the Syrian Traveller," women benefited as well from the improving educational and social landscape. Now "seven men are not equal to *one* woman," he remarked and given their upgraded standing, when courting, "we [men] must put on our kid gloves, straighten up our collars, etc., and make ourselves look quite smart."¹³⁷ Syria remained the homeland of the Bible, while its town of Beirut became a site and stage of cultural and societal transformations.

Wortabet attributed innovations to the youth of Beirut. This new generation preferred a streamlined approach to social interactions. In the past, friends meeting on the street were bound to a choreography of hand gestures, kissing, and bowing while "young Syria has abbreviated this process, and merely kisses the hand."¹³⁸ Similarly, marriage festivities used to last two weeks, "but young Syria has shortened the period."¹³⁹ Wortabet unapologetically belonged to this enlightened and rejuvenated constituency that abhorred excessive physical contact: "[A]fter my first visit to America, I was kissed all over my face until my cheeks were really sore," he declared.¹⁴⁰ The American public was not ignorant of the recent changes in Syria, even though some scholars and missionaries downplayed contemporary social and political occurrences.¹⁴¹ In his second travelogue, the orientalist Edward Robinson wrote about his visit to the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences in Beirut which was populated by "intelligent natives, chiefly young men, desirous of knowledge and intellectual improvement," and mentioned the formation of "other smaller circles . . . among the native young men" in town.¹⁴² Syria was not motionless,

as Orientalism holds, but dynamic thanks to the spirited younger generation.

The political arena concerned Wortabet to the extent that he felt inclined to alert listeners to the instability of the Ottoman Empire and to speculate on its future.¹⁴³ As discussed previously, he was legally a subject of the sultan. He passionately supported “*preserving the integrity of the Ottoman Empire*” and, based on a religious interpretation of European geopolitics, called for Protestant England to protect the High Porte from the current machinations of Catholic France and Orthodox Russia.¹⁴⁴ His defense of the Ottoman Empire stands in stark contrast to his contemporary, Antonius Ameuney (1821–81), who had taught at the Boys’ School and actively participated in the Syrian Society of Arts and Sciences where Wortabet had been a pupil and member, respectively.¹⁴⁵ Wortabet and Ameuney were both Protestants; yet Ameuney was an extreme Anglophile who fervently supported the creation of a British Protectorate of Syria.¹⁴⁶ Recognizing the precarious situation of the sultan, Wortabet defended the imperial right to territorial sovereignty and administrative autonomy.

Wortabet believed that poor policymaking created the current predicament of the Ottoman state. He considered the compromised position of the sultan’s autonomy to be the result of two self-afflicted interrelated wounds. First, the protégé system enabled European (Christian) powers to achieve sizeable influence within the realm which consequently led to a loss of internal sovereignty.¹⁴⁷ In his book, he judged this system “disastrous to the welfare of Turkey” and “a virtual admission of her incapacity to rule.”¹⁴⁸ Next, although Islam and Istanbul were distinct entities, he blamed the state and “the intolerance of Islamism” for pushing the Ottoman Christian subject “to seek protection out of his own legitimate government.”¹⁴⁹ In his lectures, Wortabet declared that “the glory” of state-sponsored Islam had passed and, perhaps posturing to his Christian listeners, prophesied the widespread acceptance of Protestantism within twenty years.¹⁵⁰ It seems that although American Protestants “were unable to digest the important and dramatic changes sweeping across the Ottoman Empire,” as Grafton concluded,¹⁵¹ Wortabet did not demur from telling them about the dynamic social and political conditions of his homeland.

HIS CRITICS

Newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean considered Wortabet’s understanding of Syrian society and Ottoman politics to be naive. One reviewer emphatically pointed out his “*childish manner of viewing*

things,"¹⁵² while another deemed his prognostication on "a political, philosophical, and social recuperation" in Syria to be colored with "a little of the El Dorado tinge."¹⁵³ The press likewise lambasted the homespun analysis in *Syria and the Syrians* (1856). The *Economist* concluded that "[n]early half of his pages are filled trite—sometimes almost childish moralizing," and the *Spectator* remarked that "[h]is style of observation as well as of expression is somewhat juvenile."¹⁵⁴ His listeners and readers desired more substance from the orator-cum-author.

Without any regard for potentially incendiary topics, Wortabet unabashedly expressed his affinity for Syria and Protestantism. Once, the chairman at a lecture felt obliged "to administer a sort of rebuke to Mr. Wortabet, for introducing *something* which had better have been left out."¹⁵⁵ What provocative statement "the Syrian Traveller" made to warrant the rejoinder remains unknown; nonetheless, the fact that it was made reveals the problematic nature of some of his comments to Anglo-American ears. Wortabet was widely condemned for his chauvinistic tone in his travelogue toward confessional groups and the Ottoman state. The *Economist* lamented that he "does his utmost to blunt our sympathy for his sufferings in the cause of his new faith, by the exceedingly bitter and intolerant spirit in which he speaks of all other sects and denominations."¹⁵⁶ The *Athenaeum* detected that "Mr. Wortabet has a hatred of the Turks" and warned readers to exercise judgment regarding the "information [given] on the social and political aspects of Syria under the Ottoman Sultanate," in light of his "national as well as sectarian" predilections.¹⁵⁷ Numerous scathing reviews plausibly curbed book sales and damaged his reputation. One newspaper alerted readers to his bigotry and dubious personal integrity: "He has little love for any sect or race but his own . . . giv[ing] us insight into the character of the man."¹⁵⁸ Wortabet's contemporaries remained vigilant against his religious and racial partisanship, demonstrating that stereotypes about "the Orient" did not wander entirely unmolested in the nineteenth century.

Wortabet, the author, could not replicate the success he enjoyed as "the Syrian Traveller"—that is, the lecturing phenomenon that toured America. The entertaining anecdotes and colorful embellishments in his travelogue that enthralled listeners were considered to be distracting and possibly even fictitious. One newspaper questioned whether "the book is the narrative of a real or merely imaginary tour" and criticized his "sentimental digressions and poetical quotations" as elements "which could well have been spared."¹⁵⁹ Another assessed the two volumes to be of "unequal

interest. In parts they are fresh, instructive, picturesque, — elsewhere they are didactic, extravagant, and monotonous.”¹⁶⁰ A third reviewer brutally remarked that “one half of the [700-page] work would be better than the whole.”¹⁶¹ The absence of editorial finesse is expected since Wortabet probably relied on lecture notes to hurriedly compile the book.¹⁶² In the end, he created a work that was “utterly incomprehensible” and “clumsily put together,” according to the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.¹⁶³ As a lecturer, Wortabet was able to mesmerize listeners with rich observations of Syrian life and society. Yet he did not possess the same captivating power as a writer, indicating that his storytelling talents were better suited for the lectern.

CONCLUSION

This article examined the production of entertaining information on “the Orient” in America in the nineteenth century and demonstrated that Gregory M. Wortabet was a brilliant businessman and showman who captivated audiences with stories about his homeland—the imagined Bible Lands in Syria.

Wortabet acquired the practical tools and social capital for his infotainment business from the American Protestant missionaries. At their Boys’ School in Beirut, he developed the language skills and cultural proficiency to operate in the Anglo-American world. He also cultivated his Protestant core there, enabling him to traverse the largely Protestant nations effortlessly. Lastly, from the missionaries he gleaned notions of “the Orient” and the vocabulary and grammar of American Biblical Orientalism, which would resonate deeply in the hearts of his listeners. While the missionaries provided him with the foundations, Wortabet put his linguistic, intellectual, and spiritual acquisitions into profitable use by virtue of his own accord and ingenuity.

The US lecture tour of “the Syrian Traveller” is the liberation story of Gregory M. Wortabet. A protégé of the missionaries, who had invested nearly two decades in his intellectual and spiritual development, he had the courage to break free and live life on his own terms, much to their chagrin. He was uninhibited when he spoke on stage, saying and doing whatever he wanted. The inability to dictate his actions vexed the missionaries greatly because they had diligently crafted stories from the mission field to serve their evangelical goals and financial needs. When the maverick Wortabet headed to the Anglo-American world, they lost control of the narrative. Even though much of what he said was in concert with their views of the Bible Lands, they were aggravated because a “native” of Syria had the audacity to assume control and directly access donors. In America, Wortabet could

shape his own stories about Syria, and the missionaries were powerless to stop him.

A cacophony of voices fills the discursive halls of Orientalism. This article demonstrated that, contrary to prevailing knowledge, not all representations and misrepresentations of the Middle East were generated by the West in the nineteenth century. Wortabet, an Ottoman subject raised in Syria, contributed knowledge on “the Orient” alongside scholars, missionaries, diplomats, and Holy Land enthusiasts. Regardless of whether he related accurate or inaccurate portrayals, or provided objective or subjective assessments, his views entered the public discourse and his ideas, the historical archive. Additionally, unreserved critiques of his lectures and travelogue reveal that Orientalism in the nineteenth century was not a homogenous edifice. Many in the Anglo-American world cautiously approached the information Wortabet related about the region and readily challenged his stereotypes, denounced his bigotry, and exposed his religious and cultural biases. Wortabet and his critics, both separately and in unison, enrich and complicate the discursive landscape of Orientalism.

Showmanship remains a key ingredient in the transmission of knowledge on the Middle East and North Africa. The performances of the Messoudi Brothers, Moroccan acrobats from Australia, and “The Mayyas,” a Lebanese female dance troupe, on *America’s Got Talent* echo the theatrics that made “the Syrian Traveller” a lecturing success.¹⁶⁴ These televised displays of athleticism and artistic expression tapped into American preconceptions of “the Orient” and a continued national hunger for sensualized performances. Just like Wortabet, who operationalized intriguing details, lively gestures, and a colorful costume to make a buck, these contemporary exhibitions of shirtless men with bulging muscles and scantily clad gyrating women are received with thunderous applause. Presentation is everything, and Wortabet understood this maxim well. Although history forgot about “the Syrian Traveller” until now, his lecture tour invited Americans in the nineteenth century to learn and laugh about the Bible Lands. Albeit slightly cringeworthy, the words of a judge on *America’s Got Talent* to “The Mayyas” in 2022 could have easily been said to Wortabet in the 1850s: “I want to thank you for giving us a little glimpse of your culture, which is so beautiful.”¹⁶⁵

NOTES

¹ This research was made possible by a Washington and Lee University 2022 Summer Lenfest Grant. I am thankful to Christine B. Lindner at Murray State

University and Timothy H. Horning at the University of Pennsylvania for help with primary sources and alumni records. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose feedback strengthened the article.

² “Strangers in New York,” *New York Herald*, 11 May 1852, 1.

³ Antuniyus al-Bish‘allani (1827–56) arrived in 1854 and traditionally is considered “the first Syrian immigrant to the new world.” Philip Hitti, *Antuniyus al-Bish‘allani: Awwal Muhajir Suri ila l-‘Alam al-Jadid* (New York, 1919). For more on Arab migration to the United States, see Charlotte Karem Albrecht, *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023); Linda K. Jacobs, *Strangers No More: Syrians in the United States 1880–1900* (New York: Kalimah Press, 2019); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Adele L. Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, ed. Philip M. Kayal (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 1995).

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1.

⁵ David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008); Fuad Sha‘ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham, NC: Acorn Press, 1991).

⁶ Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Stephanie Stidham Rogers, *Inventing the Holy Land: American Protestant Pilgrimage to Palestine, 1845–1941* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁷ David D. Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism: The Construction of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Nineteenth Century American Evangelical Piety* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 2.

⁸ Daniel Martin Varisco, “Orientalism and Bibliolatry: Framing the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century Protestant Bible Customs Texts,” in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2012), 187–204.

⁹ The origins of the *Missionary Herald* can be traced to the *Panoplist* (1805/6). For the digital archive of these sources, see “Missionary Herald / Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine,” Mission Periodicals Online, Yale University Library Research Guides, accessed 25 July 2023, <https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=296315&p=1976905>.

¹⁰ Rogers, *Inventing the Holy Land*; Brian Yothers, *The Romance of the Holy Land in American Travel Writing, 1790–1876* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

¹¹ Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea*, 3 vols. (Boston, MA: Crocker and Brewster, 1841); William McClure Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858–60).

¹² Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism*, 103, 147–48.

- ¹³ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1869).
- ¹⁴ Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009); Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 159–273.
- ¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 52.
- ¹⁶ Donald M. Scott, "Print and the Public Lecture System, 1840–60," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, eds. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 280.
- ¹⁷ Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 65–78.
- ¹⁸ Edward Ziter, "Teaching Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Entertainments," in *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices*, eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 224.
- ¹⁹ Linda K. Jacobs, "'Playing East': Arabs Play Arabs in Nineteenth Century America," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 2, no. 2 (2014): 85.
- ²⁰ Amanda Eads, "Rahme Haidar–The Performer," Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies News, 17 March 2016, <https://lebanesestudies.news.chass.ncsu.edu/2016/03/17/rahme-haidar-the-performer/>; Linda K. Jacobs, *Strangers in the West: The Syrian Colony of New York City, 1880–1900* (New York: Kalimah Press, 2015), 243–56, 312–33; Lhoussain Simour, "American Fair Expositions Revisited: Morocco's Acrobatic Performers between the Industry of Entertainment and the Violence of Racial Display," *Journal for Cultural Research* 17, no. 3 (2013): 295–322; Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People*, 142–66.
- ²¹ Shedoody and Wortabet attended the Boys' School in Beirut together. "Records of the Beirut Station," 8 December 1835, Syrian Mission, 1823–1871, ABC 1–91, ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter cited as ABC).
- ²² Nora Lessersohn, "A Life of Longing and Belonging: The Ottoman Armenian American Worldview of Christopher Oscanyan (1815–96)," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (2017): 261–85; Simour, "American Fair Expositions Revisited," 298–99; Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People*, 93–96.
- ²³ Rufus Anderson, *History of the Missions of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to the Oriental Churches* (Boston, MA: Congregational Publishing Society, 1872), 1:224–27.
- ²⁴ *Missionary Herald*, May 1828, 137–41; *Missionary Herald*, June 1828, 169–71; *Missionary Herald*, July 1828, 201–6. The quote is from Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 1:48.

²⁵ “Gregory M. Wortabet,” 1851 Scotland Census, accessed 1 August 2023, Ancestry.com; Gregory M. Wortabet, “Syria: Its Climate, Inhabitants, Diseases, Medical Practitioners and Native Drugs” (MD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1859), 378.748 POM 1859.4.2 Pt.1, Rare Book Collection, Kislak Center for Special Collections, University of Pennsylvania; “Wortabet, Gregory Morgan,” England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858–1995, accessed 29 March 2021, Ancestry.com; “Wortabet, Gregory Moorjan,” England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915, accessed 1 August 2023, Ancestry.com; *Missionary Herald*, May 1828, 140.

²⁶ Tarek El-Ariss, ed., *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2018), xv. For a study on broad semantics of the term, see Hannah Scott Deuchar, “‘Nahḍa’: Mapping a Keyword in Cultural Discourse,” in “Literature and Journalism,” ed. Hala Halim, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 37 (2017): 50–84.

²⁷ Hala Aujj, *Printing Arab Modernity: Book Culture and The American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Fruma Zachs, *The Making of a Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

²⁸ Gregory M. Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians; Or, Turkey in the Dependencies*, 2 vols. (London: James Madden, 1856), 1:frontispiece.

²⁹ An exception is the Egyptian occupation from 1831 to 1841. Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516–1918: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁰ Zachs, *Making of a Syrian Identity*, 248–50.

³¹ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

³² Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 184.

³³ Wortabet appears briefly in English scholarship. Louise Seymour Houghton, “Syrians in the United States: Sources and Settlement,” *Survey* 26, no. 14 (1 July 1911): 483; Jacqueline Jondot, “Gregory Wortabet ‘of Beyroot, Syria’: A Failed Encounter?,” in *Geographies of Contact: Britain, the Middle East and the Circulation of Knowledge*, eds. Hélène Ibata, Caroline Lehni, Fanny Moghaddassi, and Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2017), 31–41; Christine Beth Lindner, “Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2009), 147–48.

³⁴ For early Arab views of the United States, see Ami Ayalon, "The Arab Discovery of America in the Nineteenth Century," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 4 (1984): 5–17.

³⁵ Gregory M. Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land, Being a Course of Lectures* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Printed at the "Morning Journal" Office: 1856), [1]. Editorial emendations cannot be conclusively discounted; nonetheless, internal evidence (e.g., italicization to indicate his intonation, and parentheses and brackets to demarcate what the amanuensis inserted) suggests that the publication is a fair textual recording.

³⁶ "Records of the Beirut Missionary Church," ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8. Why Wortabet regularly counted c. 1830 as his birth year remains a mystery. He knew that his birth took place in 1828 and acknowledged it in a lecture: "I was born before she [my mother] was fourteen [in 1828]. At eighteen [in 1832] she was a widow." "Gregory M. Wortabet," 1851 Scotland Census, Ancestry.com; Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 23.

³⁷ *Missionary Herald*, July 1828, 205–6.

³⁸ The translation of the New Testament was completed in 1830. E. D. G. Prime, *Forty Years in the Turkish Empire; Or Memoirs of Rev. William Goodell* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), 110.

³⁹ Anderson, *History of the Missions*, 1:226; Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:56.

⁴⁰ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 23. Gregory M.'s siblings were Yuhanna (John) (1827–1908), Hannah (b. 1831), and Ya'qub (Jacob) (b. 1832). Ya'qub was born soon after Wortabet, the father, passed away. *Missionary Herald*, February 1833, 78.

⁴¹ The missionaries managed a fund to care for children until at least 1845. "Records of the Beirut Station," 1 September 1835, ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8; "Records of the Syrian Mission," 16 January 1845, ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8.

⁴² Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 35–36; Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:59–60.

⁴³ Postscript by Leander Thompson, in Gregory M. Wortabet to Rev. and Mrs. Eli Moody, 27 August 1841, Family and Personal Papers, Correspondence of Leander Thompson, 1840–1841, Mss A 1898, fol. 2, R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, New England Historic Genealogical Society, available online, <https://digital.americanancestors.org/digital/collection/p15869coll16/id/144>.

⁴⁴ Butrus al-Bustani to Eli Smith, 10 January 1846, Smith, Eli. (Syria, 1821–1857), Arabic Papers, circa 1826–1857, box 2, ABC 1–91, ABC 50; Butrus al-Bustani, ed., *A'mal al-Jam'iyya al-Suriyya* (Beirut: American Mission Press, 1852), [iii]. For a history of the theological group, see Anthony Edwards, "Revisiting a *Nahḍa* Origin Story: *Majma' al-Tahdhīb* and the Protestant Community in 1840s Beirut," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82, no. 3 (2019): 427–51.

- ⁴⁵ Abdoullah Ydlibi, "To the Editor of the Manchester Courier," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 31 January 1852, 59/11.
- ⁴⁶ He commenced his international travels on 16 September 1850. Gregory M. Wortabet, "Letters from the 'Syrian Traveller,'" *Weekly Wisconsin*, 6 October 1852, 2.
- ⁴⁷ "The Syro-Lebanon Company," *Morning Chronicle*, 28 August 1851, 5; "Extraordinary Novelty from the East," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 14 October 1851, 1. Italics in the original.
- ⁴⁸ The show closed in January 1852, after Wortabet and his partners were accused of mispresenting the ensemble as "persecuted [Ottoman] Christians." "The Syrian Christians," *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 31 January 1852, 5.
- ⁴⁹ Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:28, 2:336.
- ⁵⁰ "Lecture on Syria," *Caledonian Mercury*, 19 June 1854, 3; "Syria and the Holy Land," *Daily News*, 29 May 1855, 4; "Lectures on Syria and the Holy Land," *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 January 1856, 2; "Lectures of the New York Young Men's Christian Association," *New York Daily Tribune*, 10 April 1856, 7; "The Lecture at Lafayette Hall," *Pittsburg Daily Post*, 14 February 1857, 3; Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, [1].
- ⁵¹ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 32.
- ⁵² "Naturalisation Papers: Nauphal, Selim, from Tripoli," 20 May 1852, Certificate 1387, HO 1/44/1387, National Archives, Kew; "Naturalisation Certificate: Antonius Ameuney, from Turkey," 10 August 1876, Certificate A1974, HO 334/6/1974, National Archives, Kew.
- ⁵³ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 4, 35.
- ⁵⁴ Akram Fouad Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation," *Diaspora* 14, nos. 2/3 (2005): 303-4.
- ⁵⁵ *Missionary Herald*, 24 May 1828, 137.
- ⁵⁶ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 11.
- ⁵⁷ John Wortabet to Eli Smith, 13 January 1852, Smith, Eli. (Syria, 1821-1857), Papers, 1819-1869, ABC 1-91, ABC 60.98.
- ⁵⁸ Lindner, "Negotiating the Field," 147-48; Mehitabel (Hetty) Butler Smith to Sister, 1 May [1855?], box 1, fol. 23, Correspondence M. S. B. Smith to Family 1854-56, Eli Smith Group 124, Yale Divinity College. Italics in the original.
- ⁵⁹ Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:130-32, 2:78, 109; "Letters from the 'Syrian Traveller,'" *Weekly Wisconsin*, 29 September 1852, 3.
- ⁶⁰ Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:56-57. Italics in the original.
- ⁶¹ Uta Zeuge-Buberl, "Misinterpretations of a Missionary Policy? The American Syria Mission's Conflict with Buṭrus al-Bustānī, and Yuḥannā Wurtabāt," *Theological Review* 36 (2015): 38-41.

⁶² His thesis examined the state of the medical profession in Ottoman Syria. Wortabet, "Syria"; "Wortabet, Gregory M.," UPF 1.9AR: Alumni Records Collection, box 3050, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

⁶³ "Turkish Missions Aid Society," *Western Daily Press*, 9 December 1873, 3; Michael Christopher Low, *Imperial Mecca: Ottoman Arabia and the Indian Ocean Hajj* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 142; John Wortabet, "A Short Sketch of the Recent Visitation of the Plague in Bagdad and its Vicinity, 1867-1877 [Part 1]," *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, 25 September 1879, 222.

⁶⁴ "Wortabet, Gregory Morgan," England & Wales, National Probate Calendar, 1858-1995.

⁶⁵ Scott, "Print and the Public Lecture System," 292.

⁶⁶ "71 Gregory Wortabet," New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957, accessed 5 September 2022, Ancestry.com.

⁶⁷ Wortabet addressed audiences in 26 of the 31 states. Geo. T. Brown, "The Syrian Trler," *Alton Daily Courier*, 3 August 1853, 2. I can confirm that between 1852 and 1857 he visited Illinois, Indiana, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

⁶⁸ "A Stranger from an Old Country," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 10 September 1852, 1. He might have hoped to visit his younger brother Ya'qub who had immigrated to the United States, become a naturalized citizen in April 1850, and settled in San Francisco. "If Jacob Wortabet from Beyrout," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 May 1878, 1; "Jacob Wortabet," New York, US, State and Federal Naturalization Records, 1794-1943, accessed 5 September 2022, Ancestry.com.

⁶⁹ "Wortabet's Lectures on Syria and the Holy Land," *North American and United States Gazette*, 16 May 1856, 1.

⁷⁰ "Mr. G. M. Wortabet," *Glasgow Herald*, 26 June 1854, 5.

⁷¹ "The Syrian Traveler," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 23 August 1852, 1; "On Sunday night," *St. Joseph Gazette*, 20 July 1853, 2.

⁷² Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 3.

⁷³ "A Pilgrim from the Holy Land," *Weekly Minnesotian*, 2 October 1852, 2; "Syrian Traveller," *North American and United States Gazette*, 29 December 1853, 1.

⁷⁴ "The Exhibition," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 13 September 1852, 1.

⁷⁵ "Wortabet—the Syrian," *Detroit Free Press*, 1 September 1852, 3.

⁷⁶ "Letter from the 'Syrian Traveller,'" *Weekly Wisconsin*, 18 September 1852, 2.

- ⁷⁷ "A Stranger from an Old Country," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 1; "Mr. Wortabet, a native of Beyroot, Syria," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 7 April 1853, 1.
- ⁷⁸ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, [3].
- ⁷⁹ Jondot, "Gregory Wortabet 'of Beyroot, Syria,'" 37.
- ⁸⁰ Jacobs, "Playing East."
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 88; Eads, "Rahme Haidar."
- ⁸² It has been reported since the 1950s that Taylor regularly gave his lectures dressed in Arab costume, brandishing a dagger at his side. Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 76.
- ⁸³ "A Stranger from an Old Country," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 1; "Wortabet—the Syrian," 3.
- ⁸⁴ Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:59–60.
- ⁸⁵ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 36.
- ⁸⁶ "The 'Syrian Traveller,'" *Weekly Wisconsin*, 13 October 1852, 1.
- ⁸⁷ "Lectures on Syria," *New York Times*, 29 May 1852, 1; "The Religious Exercises at the various churches," *Weekly Wisconsin*, 15 September 1852, 3.
- ⁸⁸ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 9, 39. Italics in the original.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, [3].
- ⁹⁰ Nance, *Arabian Nights*, 10–11.
- ⁹¹ "On Sunday Night," 2.
- ⁹² "Lectures on Syria and the Syrians," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 20 May 1852, 2; "Mr. Gregory M. Wortabet," *Daily Picayune*, 21 May 1853, 3; "Public lecture," *Charleston Mercury*, 4 January 1854, 3.
- ⁹³ "Lectures on Syria and the Syrians," 2; CPI Inflation Calculator, accessed 26 July 2023, <https://www.in2013dollars.com>.
- ⁹⁴ "The Syrian Traveler," 1.
- ⁹⁵ "Lectures on Syria," 1; "Horticultural Society," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 11 September 1852, 1; "A Pilgrim from the Holy Land," 2; "A Syrian Traveler," *Daily Picayune*, 20 May 1853, 2.
- ⁹⁶ "The Holy Land—Syria and the Syrians—Marriages in the East," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 28 May 1852, 3; "Marriages in the East," *Daily News and Herald*, 4 June 1852, 1; "Public Lecture," 3.
- ⁹⁷ "Holy Land—Syria and the Syrians," 3.
- ⁹⁸ Scott, "Print and the Public Lecture System," 285.
- ⁹⁹ "Syria and the Holy Land," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 May 1852, 2; "Mr. Wortabet's Lecture," *Alton Daily Courier*, 3 August 1853, 2.
- ¹⁰⁰ Washington, DC, and Philadelphia newspapers picked up reports on his travels from the *Chicago Tribune*. "A Stranger from an Old Country," *Daily*

Republic, 20 September 1852, 2; "A Stranger from an Old Country," *North American and United States Gazette*, 21 September 1852, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Syria and the Holy Land," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 May 1852, 2.

¹⁰² "On Sunday Night," 2; "Wortabet – the Syrian," 3.

¹⁰³ "The Syrian Traveler," 1; "Lectures on Syria," 1.

¹⁰⁴ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, [3], 11, 14, 30. Italics in the original.

¹⁰⁵ Tom F. Wright, ed., *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum: Lecture Culture and the Globe in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2013); Tom F. Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic: Speech, Print, and an Anglo-American Commons 1830–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁶ Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Matt. 25:14–30.

¹¹⁰ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18. Italics in the original.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹³ Matt. 25:21 (King James Version) reads: "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

¹¹⁴ George Hurter to Rufus Anderson, 2 February 1852, ABC 16.8.1, vol. 5; Mehitable (Hetty) Butler Smith to Sister, 1 May [1855?].

¹¹⁵ "Records of the Syrian Mission," 29 March 1853, ABC 16.8.1, vol. 8.

¹¹⁶ Mehitable (Hetty) Butler Smith to Sister, 1 May [1855?].

¹¹⁷ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 5, 31. Italics in the original.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 23. See Gen. 5:3–32; Gen. 11:10–26; Num. 13:22–24.

¹²⁰ He overlooked the Greek Catholics, as well as the Alawites, Druze, and Shiites, in his lectures.

¹²¹ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 25. He asserted that just 5 percent of "nominal Christians and Mahometans [*sic*]" could read.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 5, 26.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12, 20.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 19. Italics in the original.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 25–26.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 25–26.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 21. Italics in the original.

¹³¹ Ibid., 35.

¹³² Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism*, 65–96, 147–80.

¹³³ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 8, 11, 19.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 35, 37.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 36–37. Italics in the original.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 37. Italics in the original.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 22. Italics in the original.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴¹ Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism*, 202–5.

¹⁴² Edward Robinson, *Later Biblical Researches in Palestine and in the Adjacent Regions* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1856), 27–28.

¹⁴³ In his book, Wortabet noted the social and political reforms of the Tanzimat but refused to comment given their recent promulgation. Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:80.

¹⁴⁴ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 30. Italics in the original. See Ozan Ozavci, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁴⁵ Anthony Edwards, “An Incomplete Journey Away from the Past: The Life and Ideas of Antonius Ameuney (1821–1881),” *Philological Encounters* 6 (2023): 322, 324.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 329–30.

¹⁴⁷ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 32–33.

¹⁴⁸ Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:348, 1:350.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:351.

¹⁵⁰ Wortabet, *Syria and the Holy Land*, 33, 38.

¹⁵¹ Grafton, *An American Biblical Orientalism*, 2.

¹⁵² “The ‘Syrian Traveller,’” 1. Italics in the original.

¹⁵³ George P. Buell, ed., “Poetry, Woman, and the Anglo-Saxon,” *Western Democratic Review* 1 (January 1854): 15.

¹⁵⁴ “Literature,” *Economist*, 19 April 1856, 424; “Wortabet’s Syria and the Syrians,” *Spectator*, 3 May 1856, 486.

¹⁵⁵ "Syria," *Morning Journal and Commercial Advertiser*, 12 September 1856, 2. Italics in the original.

¹⁵⁶ "Literature," 424.

¹⁵⁷ "Reviews," *Athenaeum*, 22 March 1856, 354–55.

¹⁵⁸ "Turkey in the Dependencies," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 1856, 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ "Reviews," 355.

¹⁶¹ "Wortabet's Syria and the Syrians," 487.

¹⁶² Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians*, 1:xvi.

¹⁶³ "Miscellaneous Reviews," *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1856, 495.

¹⁶⁴ Talent Recap, "Messoudi Brothers: SEXY Brothers with Powerful Acrobatics, America's Got Talent 2019," 4 June 2019, YouTube video, 4:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sI9VTVnKoro>; America's Got Talent, "Golden Buzzer: Mayyas' Breathtaking Audition Captivates Sofia Vergara, AGT 2022," 21 June 2022, YouTube video, 9:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD0doCSkBY8>.

¹⁶⁵ America's Got Talent, "Golden Buzzer."