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JACOB NORRIS, *The Lives and Deaths of Jubrail Dabdoub: Or, How the Bethlehemites Discovered Amerka* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023). Pp. 275. $25.00 paper. ISBN: 9781503633759.

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Jacob Norris's *The Lives and Deaths of Jubrail Dabdoub: Or, How the Bethlehemites Discovered Amerka* offers readers the opportunity to experience nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bethlehemites' travels, migrations, and economic pursuits along with their sense of place in Palestine. Their voyages occurred before the European Zionist movement began to alter and disrupt Palestinians' ability to shape their own future in Palestine as the age of empire shattered during World War I and nation-states emerged, first under European imperial control followed by national independence. Jubrail Dabdoub and his family members expanded their local trade in religious commodities, based on Bethlehem's religious significance, first to foreign pilgrims and church figures at home before launching an international effort in the 1870s. They, along with many from the Tarjameh, the Bethlehem clan that had served as intermediaries for the Franciscans in Bethlehem since the fourteenth century, set out for "Amerka," which at the time meant anywhere from the United States to Chile to the Philippines. As they made their fortunes, they returned with wealth that fueled a construction boom of elite mansions and urban structures, many of which still stand.

At the outset, the reader learns that three primary factors, namely "Palestine's incorporation into the capitalist world market . . . a reformist Ottoman state, and the commoditization of religion" (1) lay the foundation for the story of the Bethlehemites and their quest to reach "Amerka," that quintessential land of opportunity. Across eighteen chapters, we meet several generations of the Dabdoub family that lived, worked, raised families, and built a business in Bethlehem, and then traveled abroad, engaged with the world, and returned home.

Part I (chapters 1–7) introduces the notion of "Amerka" as the Dabdoub family, led by patriarch Yousef and his wife Rosa, had children and began to emerge financially from their modest life in Bethlehem during the first half of the nineteenth century having established a local business that would launch their children's business travels. Part II (chapters 8–14) leads the reader through the Dabdoubs' journeys in the mid- to late nineteenth century that took them across seas and continents. While abroad, Yousef and Rosa's sons engaged with and navigated the cultural shifts in fashion, architecture, technology, and gender relations that occurred during this period of burgeoning modernity. Their success translated into the town's success as Bethlehem's sons were groomed, along with the Dabdoub sons, to travel and sell religious commodities both made famous by the town's identification as the birthplace of Jesus and the quality of their craft. Part III (chapters 15–18) introduces the life and devotion of Sultaneh Danil Ghattas, later known as Marie-Alphonsine, a Palestinian Catholic nun who established the first indigenous Catholic order, the Rosary Sisters, in Palestine. With deep devotion, particularly to the Virgin Mary with whom she communicated, Marie-Alphonsine was seen as responsible for "the resurrection of Jubrail Dabdoub" (quoting part of the title of chapter 18) from his near death from typhoid, a miracle she writes about in her own life narrative.[1]

Tracing these stories proved quite challenging, as Norris explains in the introduction and in the extensive author's commentary at the end of the book. Not strictly a work of history, the book is a fusion of history and creative writing, "an experiment in 'magical realist' historical prose" (3), which invites the reader into fantastical episodes in Jubrail's life, among them the above-mentioned resurrection and such stories as how saints accompanied, protected, and intervened to ensure the Dabdoubs' safety and economic success during their voyages. With this unusual methodological choice for a historian, Norris creatively gives "life" to the historical facts and narrative, both revealing and crafting the ways that for migrating Bethlehemites "travel, profit, faith, and magic . . . were inextricably intertwined" (3). While readers may feel the sense of novelistic writing throughout this work, the author confirms that "there is hardly a line in the book that is not based on some kind of wider contextual evidence gleaned from over a decade of research carried out in Bethlehem and the various locations to which the Bethlehemite merchants traveled" (183). Readers thus should not ignore the voluminous endnotes, which both enrich the narrative and historically ground the events (some of which are fictional) in a wealth of primary and secondary historical sources. Based on the author's heavy reliance on a wide range of sources, the

title figure of Jubrail Dabdoub (1860–1931) represents a composite of the nineteenth-century Bethlehem traveling merchant in addition to a historical figure.

Norris's primary sources for family details are Dabdoub family members: descendants of those branches that remained in Bethlehem as well as the descendants of those who settled abroad and later adopted and adapted to foreign cultures, customs, and languages in their new homes. A contemporary of Jubrail's, Ibrahim Yuhanna Dabdoub wrote and left an unpublished memoir that Norris drew on extensively throughout his narrative. He also relied on detailed family records in the Bethlehem Latin Parish archive and business dealings recorded in the Ottoman archives. The family records not only include information on marriages, births, and deaths but also demonstrate how Palestinians from Jubrail's generation were intently focused on ensuring their rootedness to home by documenting their family lineage in local church records. The Ottoman archives include such crucial elements as to how the Dabdoubs (and other Bethlehemites) launched their international business via the spectacle and reach of nineteenth-century world's fairs in Europe and America, participation in which Ottoman subjects had to petition Ottoman officials. Those fairs put native peoples themselves on display, but as Norris's account highlights, they also allowed native peoples to participate as businessmen. Though native participants faced restrictions, their involvement in world's fairs afforded them the opportunity to enhance their foreign commercial relationships, which fostered their global curiosity and ambitions. Especially in part III, Norris relies significantly on the notebook of Marie-Alphonsine, whose story defied traditional gender and religious norms and reinforced the mysteries of life and death. And finally, Norris searched the port and migration records in several countries where Dabdoub family members arrived looking to sell Palestinian religious handicrafts made in Bethlehem, items that continue to appeal to visitors, pilgrims, and consumers of religiously meaningful items abroad. Norris's wide array of sources demonstrates the breadth and scope of the author's research across several languages.

Jacob Norris has written a deeply engaging narrative about Jubrail's life and that of the traveling and migrating Bethlehemites. The story of Jubrail Dabdoub and the Bethlehemites will resonate with many readers who may share similar family stories of ancestors leaving difficult economic circumstances for better opportunities. Their engagement with colonialism—a surreal experience at times during which life seemed unexplainable and reliance on the spirits logical—

often reads like a novel in the magical realist genre, as Norris intends, but this innovative undertaking will speak to readers across diverse fields, including migration studies, social history, the history of colonialism and capitalism, and the history of late Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine. Readers less attuned to following endnotes may lose some of the richness of the book, but, overall, it offers an unusual engagement with historical figures—men, women, and children—both deeply researched and sympathetically imagined by the author.

NOTES

[1] Marie-Alphonsine and Mariam Baouardy were recognized as the "first Palestinian Catholic saints," by Pope Francis (2).