

ANGLICAN PIONEERS OF THE OTTOMAN PERIOD: SKETCHES FROM THE CMS ARCHIVES OF SOME ARAB LIVES CONNECTED WITH THE EARLY DAYS OF THE DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM

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Abstract: Descriptions by local Arab Christians of their journeys of exploration across the areas East of the River Jordan in the late Ottoman period have often been overlooked through the use of the more widely available narratives of Western missionaries who accompanied them. This paper seeks to retrieve some of those Arab accounts and place their authors in the context of a growing Arab Anglican presence and involvement across the whole region east and west of the River Jordan in the latter part of the 19th century.

Key words: Arab Christians; Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem; CMS; Samuel Gobat; travel journals; Transjordan.

1. Introduction and overview

One of the great endeavours that lies behind both Hebrew and Christian scriptures is the task of “passing on the story” to those in the future who might otherwise have only a hazy view of the origins and purposes of the community to which they belong. In

¹⁵⁸ Malcolm was born in England, and has been ordained as an Anglican priest since 1978, following a short career as a Chartered Civil Engineer. He has always been interested in the interconnecting stories of the peoples of the Middle East, being at one stage invited to serve on the Executive Committee of the London Society of Jews and Christians, and then Secretary to the British Regional Committee of St. George’s College, Jerusalem. This was followed in 2000 by an invitation to come and live in Jordan as a priest of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem, made possible through the sponsorship of the Church Mission Society. Malcolm returned to the UK in 2007, and is now retired.

this way, the stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Ruth, for instance, inform and enlighten new generations of the Jewish community, whilst the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles can act in a similar way for the Christian community. But the Bible is not the only resource available to such groups – often each specific community will have its own set of foundational narratives that should be freely accessible and celebrated, not just as a way of remembering the past but also as a way of entering the future. Without such narratives, biblical or otherwise, it becomes increasingly difficult for local faith communities to keep their focus; even with them, they must continue to work at how to interpret their texts, for they will speak in different ways to succeeding generations.

For this reason, I have wanted to sketch something of the story surrounding early Arab Anglican pioneers, in what is now the Diocese of Jerusalem, during the latter part of the 19th century, for it forms part of the foundational narratives of the Anglican Church in that part of the Middle East. Because much of the material is now stored away in archives not normally available to the casual reader an attempt should be made to make them more widely known. The particular focus on Arab Anglicans is no idle choice; for they are a small but significant part of the Eastern Church which has witnessed faithfully to the Gospel for nearly 2000 years since the day of Pentecost. They face today enormous challenges to their survival, not unlike many other non-Western Christian communities in the Middle East. For they face a whole variety of issues - unresolved political questions, inflamed cultural tensions, and the uncertainty of any future if they are to remain in the Middle East – and these inevitably contribute to the steady decline in the number of Christians still resident there. Rumours of there being nothing but a “museum-piece” church in the region within 40 years – visible to pilgrims from elsewhere, but no longer connected to any living indigenous community of the land – are real enough.

There is a further reason why a focus on Arab narratives should be collected here: they describe a different emotional landscape from that which is so often described by visiting foreigners, whether intrepid explorers, military surveyors, or even Christian missionaries. This is especially true when we come to the describing of the “opening up” of the region to the east of the River Jordan in the latter half of the 19th century. For Arabs, the sounds and conventions that might have so struck a visitor are not unusual, for their own cultural world dealt much more with the needs of tribal etiquette and status, and possible entrepreneurial advantage. By comparison, the desire of Westerners is often to make observations that would suggest western technical superiority and propose reassuring biblical connections – part of a narrative becoming familiar to audiences in their home countries. For many Arabs, especially Christians from the Nablus area, crossing the Jordan to the East had been a necessary task for work or business for some generations. So, for instance, stories that we may find in Western narratives of great endeavours to cross this symbolic river are largely absent from more local accounts. We may compare an account of Captain Warren, a Royal Engineer surveyor in the employ of the Palestine Exploration Fund based in London, in his crossing of the Jordan in 1867, with that of Chalil Jamal, an Arab Anglican originally from Nazareth, who made a similar crossing from the west into Transjordan just two years later, in the summer of 1869. The former appears to dwell more on the heroic and pioneering aspects of the experience that would surely appeal to home audiences but would have little resonance with locals with whom such crossings were a part of life:

... this boat (or ferry), bad as it was, was our only way of crossing the Jordan. Each hour, they said the flood would go down, and each hour it appeared to rise. We were told that men were coming down from Nablus to put things to right, but we could hear nothing for certain: and as it was impossible to cross without the boat, we had the alternative either to go

back or to try and go along the western bank of the Jordan to the north. This latter was an unknown route; we could not hear that it had ever been traversed by Europeans.

(Our work in Palestine; p.226)

Whilst Chalil Jamal's account has a very different feel, viz:

On the 26th June last, I left for Salt passing through Nablouse and after 4 days stay there in wait for a caravan I left for Salt leaning upon the Almighty's arm; arrived in Salt early in the morning of the 1st of July crossing the Jordan in the dead of night.

(quoted from CMS archives CM/O.36)

It is this writer's hope therefore, that in some small way a brief celebration of the narrative of Arab Christian pioneers (even if it be constrained to the mere reciting of the names of those of whom we, as foreigners, may know very little else, but especially are brought alive by descriptions of developments and travels that have survived) will help to ensure that local voices continue to be heard, and to encourage the present Anglican community there in their endeavours. For, in the days to come, they will surely need the courage, hopefulness and vision of the saints from amongst their number who have gone before them.

2. Acknowledgements

But before I can do that, there are several debts of gratitude that I must pay in bringing these words together. The first lies with the staff of the Church Mission Society (CMS), who sponsored, encouraged and prepared my wife and I in our move to Jordan in 2001 to work with the Diocese of Jerusalem. They strengthened

a love for what Bishop Riah Abu el Assal¹⁵⁹ called, “the Land of the Holy One.” He was referring to the disputed lands on both sides of the Jordan, from Mount Hermon in the North to the Red Sea in the South, and its peoples within that land. That respect and memory remains with us to this day. CMS began its involvement in the area in the very earliest days of the Diocese, some 160 years ago, and it has access to the CMS archives that provide so much of the first hand material that will follow. So, additional thanks to the CMS archivist, Ken Osborne, for his encouragement and permission, and to the staff of the special collections department of the Birmingham University Library - where these archives are stored - for their assistance and time. The second debt of gratitude lies with all the Arab Anglicans and friends who opened their lives and homes to us whilst we were living in Amman, until 2007. From the Bishop himself at that time, Bishop Riah, and his current successor, Bishop Suheil Dawani, to the very humblest member of that community, we have received nothing but kindness and openness of heart. They can never know how their faith has touched our lives, and how their wisdom, vision, and even their struggles have illuminated our own journey; for that reason alone, this particular debt of gratitude can never be fully repaid.

3. Historical Background: The Jerusalem Bishopric and the Church Missionary Society

For some, the story of the origins of the Anglican Church in this region may be well known. To avoid assuming that it therefore does not need some explanation here, it is helpful for completeness’ sake to include at this point some notes about origins. It may be observed that a number of the issues surrounding authority, mission, and imperialism, which

¹⁵⁹ A native of Nazareth, Abu el Assal was the 13th bishop of the diocese, from 1998 through 2007.

accompanied the official formation of the Anglican Church in the Middle East in 1841, are still current today.

Although the London Jews Society had begun a work among the Jewish population on Mount Zion some years before, it was the controversial formation of the Protestant Bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841 that really marks the establishment of a Protestant Church in the region. It was a joint Lutheran/Church of England venture, sponsored by King Frederick William IV of Prussia and the government of William Gladstone, with some Anglican bishops in Britain (these two nations being the most influential of the Protestant powers in Europe and concerned at the rise of influence of Catholic and Orthodox interests within the Ottoman empire at that time). With the announcement of a Hebrew Christian Bishop for the new Diocese, feelings ran high among many Protestants involved that a new era for the Jewish people had arrived. This is as indicated by the diary entry of the emissary of the Prussian King, Chevalier Bunsen, dated July 19th 1841,

The successor of St. James will embark in October. He is by race an Israelite; born a Prussian in Breslau; in confession belonging to the Church of England; ripened (by hard work) in Ireland; professor of Hebrew and Arabic in England (in what is now King's College). So the beginning is made, please God, for the restoration of Israel.

(quoted in Stock, CMS history Vol I,p.420)

That first bishop, the Rt. Revd. Michael Solomon Alexander, had been a Jewish Rabbi i before becoming a Christian. He saw some success, but his early death in 1845 was a considerable blow, as were the continuing delays in the completion of Christ Church in the Old City of Jerusalem¹⁶⁰. This was achieved in

¹⁶⁰ For more on Bp Alexander see Bridgeman 1943 and Crombie 2006. For an account of some of the difficulties faced early on see Jack 1995.

1849, but by that time, the second Bishop of the Diocese, the Rt. Revd. Samuel Gobat, had begun to reach out to the wider community. Gobat was a Swiss Gentile, a gifted linguist and evangelist, who had previously worked with CMS in Ethiopia. Though he continued to support the small Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem, he soon perceived the value of a wider spread of Protestant congregations across the region – and this could only be achieved in the short term through Arabs from existing Christian communities.

From the beginning of Gobat's time as a bishop in July 1846, the presence of interested Arab Christians was never far away, as will be seen from this extensive quote from Gobat's annual report written from Jerusalem, dated November 9th 1847.

....(In Jerusalem) on Sundays, we have three services, two in English,and one in the German tongue for the remaining converts and the six or eight German residents here. Every morning a Hebrew service is held. We celebrate the Holy Communion on all the great festivals, and on the first Sunday of each month. As several Arabs have attached themselves to us, and others seem to be so inclined, we are thinking of soon establishing a regular Arab service.....

The people in general are kindly disposed towards us. They seem to perceive more and more clearly that a Church which rests upon the Word of God alone has juster claims than the superstitious communities of which they are passive members. A spirit of inquiry after the truth continually manifests itself amongst the members of the various Churches.... a few months ago, therefore, I appointed an intelligent, well-read young man as Bible-reader; he has not formally seceded from his own Church, the Greek Catholic, but he knows and loves the truth..... This inquiring tendency has revealed itself not in this city alone, for many petitioners have begged us to send teachers and preachers to the country-folk. Only a few days ago, the Sheikh of a large Christian village came as a deputation from his congregation to request us, in the name of the whole community, to send to them a teacher, and to assure me that if I granted their prayer, they would immediately build a church and a school. As I have at present no means to

enable me to meet their wishes, I must content myself with laying the fact before the Christian public.....

(Memoirs pp.244-246)

It is an unfortunate reality within these published reports of Bishop Gobat that personalities are not named, though the “village” mentioned must surely be Nablus (see Gobat’s report of 1848 quoted below). What is already emerging, however, is a pattern of entreaties to the bishop for teachers, schools, and pastors, that we shall see repeated many times in the years to come. Gobat’s response can only be guarded at this stage – not only does he not have the resources to supply the requested personnel, but neither does he want to encourage Arab Christians to leave their existing churches unless they are forced “out of communion”. Such a pattern can be seen at work in the situation that Gobat describes in his 1848 report, written on October 30th 1848:

I have during this year again employed three evangelists or colporteurs, one among the Christians, one among the Jews at Jerusalem and one among the scattered Arab population. I am expecting a fourth to arrive from Beirut in a few days... when one of these evangelists, a simpleminded faithful Arab, was at Nablus about a year ago, several men began to read the Scriptures together.... At Easter, a few of them came hither in order to see and hear our service, and returned home again with not having spoken much to me. Some weeks later, however, I received a letter from Nablus signed by about ten men, wherein they announced to me that they had resolved to leave the Greek Church (or as they call it the Church of the Patriarch) for if they remained any longer within its pale, they and their children must go to destruction through ignorance; they therefore decided to constitute themselves an evangelical congregation, to take the Word of God as their sole rule of conduct and to place themselves under my guidance.... I answered that I was ready to do my utmost to aid them in their search for evangelical truth, but that I could not countenance them in forsaking their church. The only counsel that I could give them would be that they should

continue to read God's word with diligence and prayers... and remain in their Church until they were excluded from it, if matters should ever come to such an extremity. after some further interchange and letters, a missionary went with one local evangelist to inquire more closely into the matter.... they learned that several heads of families who with their respective wives and children amounted to seventy out of the four hundred Christian souls in Nablus, had signed a mutual promise to hold together in their seeking and following the Holy Scriptures, and especially to do their utmost to obtain for their children an education based upon the principles of the pure word of God..... I determined quickly to buy a good house, large enough for a boys' and a girls' school, and to accommodate a teacher and his family. I installed an intelligent, most promising young man, a native of Nazareth, but resident in Nablus, as master under the supervision of two influential men of the Society..... on September 5th, the school was opened with 21 boys (there are now 25).....

(Memoirs pp.252-254)

News of the venture clearly spread to surrounding villages, for despite an outbreak of cholera as a result of which several from the school die, there begins a small movement of Arab Christians into Nablus.

Sundry Christian inhabitants of the villages in the mountains of Samaria have decided to migrate to Nablus, in order to associate themselves with our friends...to send their children to a Christian school.

(Memoirs p.255)

By the following year, in Gobat's annual letter dated November 1st 1849, he was able to report that schools had opened in several other places: indeed, he was now anxious for such numbers to increase, following a local ruling that had pronounced freedom for Arab Christians to associate with any group of Protestants that they wished.

I have recently opened a similar school also in Tiberias. There was a school of older foundation in Salt, which I had made over, in the interests of peace, to a priest of that place, but as he did not answer, I have established another in the course of the summer, under a more efficient master. The Greek Patriarch has taken upon himself to defray the entire cost, and has further promised to retain the master chosen by me, and to admit no other books beside those which I have prescribed... I fear before long great multitudes of people will set up a religion of their own, a sort of unbridled Protestantism of their own, so soon as they get sufficient encouragement from without. Under these circumstances, all that I can do will be to spread the Word of God by every possible means.

(Memoirs p.261)

By October 1850, Gobat was able to report that a Protestant congregation had indeed formed in Nazareth, and that they met "...on Sunday, in small companies in order to read their Bible and pray in common, on which occasions they make use of the English liturgy translated into Arabic" (Memoirs 270). So, facing this urgent need for pastoral care and educators, Bishop Gobat appealed to CMS for help and, despite the obvious caution against inflaming fears of proselytising that had already been aroused, they agreed to the offer of the Revd. John Bowen (who had heard of the need at one of the CMS Jubilee celebrations in 1849 to mark 50 years of the Society) to visit the region to see what openings there might be for sending missionaries to help Gobat.

As a result of Bowen's visit, CMS decided in 1851 to open a formal Mission in Palestine. The Revd. Frederick Klein, one of a number of German Protestants who made up the larger proportion of Western missionaries in the region in the early days of the Diocese, arrived in Palestine in the same year. By 1854, there would be Western missionaries in Jerusalem (Klein himself), Jaffa, Haifa, and Nablus. Bowen himself is temporarily posted to Nazareth (where he will meet with the family of Chalil Jamal, whose description of Bowen in 1871 will refer to him as

bishop – which he became on his consecration as a short-lived Bishop of Sierra Leone in Sept. 1857). As part of the “Documents of the Jerusalem Bishopric”, published in 1883, there is an interesting reflection by Klein (who had memorably discovered the Moabite stone in 1868 during one of his journeys to the east of the Jordan) which echoes much of what we have already seen in Bishop Gobat’s early annual reports.

When in the year 1851, I arrived in Palestine, I found at Jerusalem a small number of natives, partly enquirers, who used to come together on the Lord’s Day for prayer and reading of the Scriptures. At Nablous, there was another little band of enquirers and at Nazareth, a larger number had expressed a desire to place themselves under our instruction. At Salt, also, on the other side of the Jordan, there were some people willing to be instructed in the Word of God.

(Jerusalem Bishopric Documents 73)

And although the company of Western missionaries in Palestine soon decreased to just the two locations of Jerusalem and Nazareth, this date of 1851 marks the beginning of continuous involvement by CMS personnel in the life of what is now the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem covering the peoples of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Occupied Territories.

4. Arab Christian pioneers

If 1854 sees the establishing of a number of Western missionaries in different locations across Palestine, it also marks the year when the first so-far named Arab Christian is appointed as a catechist to work among the newly forming Protestant communities. His name is Michael Kawar¹⁶¹. As has been

¹⁶¹ Whose name is spelled in various different ways using the Latin alphabet; the precise Arabic spelling is ق.ع.وار

noticed, he was not the first local Christian recognised as having this ministry in this new Protestant community, but as the first so recorded in official CMS reports (the detail is in the privately circulated Register of CMS Missionaries, dated 1904), his appointment represents an important step towards the indigenization of the Protestant Diocese. That it will be 17 years before Michael Kawar is made a deacon in the Anglican Church, and a further six years before he (and the Revd. Seraphim Boutaji) are priested¹⁶² is a sign of the struggle for mutual acceptance across cultural boundaries that is such a mark of mature Christian mission development; this is a story worthy of much study and reflection that cannot be told here.

We shall never know the full number of local Christian catechists, evangelists, pastors and teachers, whose lives shaped the Arab Anglican Church in the years following Bishop Alexander's arrival; and therefore readers who are frustrated at the brevity of the descriptions that follow are encouraged to research the matter further. For those familiar with Arabic, the two-volume history by Archdeacon Rafiq Farah must be a primary source (details are in the bibliography), whilst the CMS archive contains significantly greater amounts of original source material than the present writer has been able to cover in making this survey. This archive is, of course, mainly written from the point of view of the Western missionaries and their organisational priorities rather than that of the indigenous Christian, but there is first-hand material in Arabic among the papers. There are, no doubt, other sources also, available in the Middle East as well as in Europe, that would repay study should time be available to someone with the appropriate linguistic skills.

¹⁶² The mentioned ordination to the diaconate took place at the newly consecrated Christ Church in Nazareth in 1871 (Miller 2012), but note that Alexander had previously ordained some Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem.

4.1 Two lists of local leaders, 1904 & 1920

A beginning can be made, though, from the CMS archives, for they contain two valuable lists of Arab Anglican clergy. One was published around 1904 and another dated 1920, and they give a framework for looking at those who followed in the footsteps of Michael Kawar.

The first list comes from the previously mentioned Register of all CMS personnel, from its earliest days until 1904. The order of names here follows that of the register, and each entry gives some outline of origin, which parishes served, and ordination dates. Further details for some of those shown here are given in the biographies to be found later in this article. Spellings in English can never exactly match the Arabic, but the names are as shown in the register.

Name	Original community & serving church if shown	Ordination dates D= Deacon P= Priest
Seraphim Boutaji	from Acre, a Greek Catholic	D 1871, P 1877
Michael Kawar	from Nazareth, Greek Catholic	D 1871, P 1877
Chalil Jamal	from Nazareth, Greek Catholic	D 1874, P 1877
Nasir Odeh	No detail shown	D 1879, P 1880
Ibrahim Baz	Greek Catholic: Jerusalem	D 1884, P 1886
Murad alHaddad	Greek Catholic: Haifa	D 1884, P 1886
Yusef Zorab	From nr. Sidon: Ramleh, Gaza	D 1889

Hanna Dimishky	Greek Catholic: Lydd	D 1889
Hanna Musa	Latin: Taiyibeh	D 1889
Selim Gomri	Protestant: Nablus	D 1889
Nicola abuHattum	serving in Salt	D 1894
Asaad Mansur	serving in Jaffa	D 1894
Butrus Musa	serving in Bir Zeit	D 1900 P 1902
Saleh Saba	serving in Shefr Amr	D 1900 P 1902

As the Cathedral Church of St. George was not finished until 1898¹⁶³, all ordinations before that date must have been held elsewhere – possibly at the Anglican Churches of Christ Church Jerusalem (opened in 1849), St. Paul’s Jerusalem (1874), or Christ Church, Nazareth (1871) which had all been open for some years by the time the Cathedral was constructed. The 1871 ordinations did take place at Christ Church Nazareth though. Church buildings in Salt, Nablus and Shefr Amr had also been opened by that time, but their dates of opening are unknown.

This register also gives 67 names, and some details of women who were sent over the same period by CMS to the area - from Eliza Armstrong who went to Jaffa in the earliest days of Gobat’s expanded mission in the 1850’s, to Annie McNeile who was sent to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the first years of the 20th century.

The second list appears as a record of Arab representatives, all clergy with one exception, who were present at a meeting of the 11th Palestine Native Church Council held in July 1920, together with a note of the Churches where they were currently serving. It is instructive to see that some names appear on both

¹⁶³ For additional details on the history of the Cathedral Church of St George the Martyr and its life today, see Miller 2007.

lists. Again, the names are as written in the CMS archives and may differ slightly from the previous list.

Name	Parish where serving
The Revd. Ibrahim Baz	Jerusalem
The Revd. Asad Mansur	Nazareth
The Revd. Saleh Saba	Haifa
The Revd. Butrus Musa	Jaffa
The Revd. Yusef Fuleithan	Shefr Amr
The Revd. Elias Mamora	Nablus
The Revd. Nikola Hattum	Salt
The Revd. Jirius Ittayyim	Kufr Yasif
Mr. Elias elFar	ElHusn

(Archive ref: G3/P/1920/1)

Clearly, it would require a whole book to be written if it were possible to recount the stories of all of those recorded here; the intention here will be to focus on those Arab Anglicans who were ordained in the 1870's and 1880's. There will be a special focus on their experiences of crossing into the region east of the River Jordan, which may conveniently be called Transjordan, for it is these narratives that are best represented in the CMS archives explored so far. To do this, it will be useful to give a general overview of the situation at that time of the Ottoman province, or vilayet, of Syria, based in Damascus, and which included all of modern day Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

4.2 The Transjordan under Ottoman Rule in the 19th Century

The first thing to say about Ottoman administration across the area east of the Jordan in the latter part of the 19th century is to

highlight its moves to increase its connections with the mainly agricultural activities of the countryside there. Nominally, the region was already under the control of the two sub-provinces, or sanjuks, of Balqa and Hawran, but there were few towns of any size. Not until 1851 did any of these boast of any form of government administration centre from which external authority could be exercised. This situation of small-scale, co-operative farming has been elegantly summarised by a contemporary Jordanian, Raouf Sa'd Abujaber, writing in 1989, whose family were very significant farmers on land near Amman¹⁶⁴ from the late 19th century:

In Transjordan during the 19th century agriculture was the main field of human activity, and the greater part of the population was engaged in it. It was run by small farmers cultivating their own shares of musha' (common land ownership) land in their villages or in the neighbouring khirab (deserted villages). In general, these were one or two faddan (oxen ploughing team) operations worked by the head of the family with the help of his brothers and sons. The general rule was one of co-operation within the community, and farmers helped each other during periods of intensive work such as ploughing or harvest on a reciprocal basis. Whenever extra labour was needed it was normally hired for the day or the season and wages were paid in kind, usually wheat. (85)

These rural, agricultural regions, being largely left to their own devices, were mostly subject to the influence of local Bedouin chiefs, as a result of which it was not surprising that tax revenues could rarely be collected by the authorities. Significant dangers to settled communities and travelers alike were often experienced due to conflicts within the tribes. We may get a helpful overview of the tribal situation at that time by returning again to Raouf Sa'd Abujaber, in his description of the tribal situation in the Balqa region:

¹⁶⁴ For more details on the foundation and present-day of life of the Anglican Church of the Redeemer in Amman, see Miller 2007.

...the Balqa was the territory of the two largest Jordanian tribal federations, the Adwan and the Beni Sakhr. Travellers mentioned them often, and many a trip had to be cancelled as they were unable to acquire safe-conduct in the different districts. The Adwan were semi-settled Bedouin who were chiefs of the tribal federation that included all the settled and semi-settled people of the Balqa. They spent winter in the cultivated lands and pastures of the Jordan Valley, and moved upwards into the plateau west and north of Amman in summer. Their paramount chiefs were (during the 19th century) the Salih clan headed by Sheikh Dhiab and his son, Ali elDhiab. However, they had to contend all the time with their cousins the Nimr clan headed by Sheikh Gublan and his family... Gublan was usually the chief who arranged the protection needed. (49)

Wheat was a basic crop for the whole community. This necessitated those who were not farmers themselves, mostly the nomadic bedouin but then, increasingly, merchants from Nablus and Jerusalem as these cities expanded, to have a place where trading could take place. The ancient town of EsSalt was ideal for this purpose, for it lay strategically between the fertile wheat fields of Moab and the Jordan River crossing at Damieh which led directly to the administrative centre of the whole Balqa sanjuk established at Nablus. With an Ottoman administration centre established at EsSalt in 1867, the authorities were able to create a more effective taxation collection system, and take pre-emptive action against the traditional, perhaps arbitrary, authority of bedouin groups. This, in turn, encouraged the movement of farmers from other parts to come and establish themselves on the abundant land that as yet lay unworked across the western parts of Transjordan. Thus came Christians from the Nablus area, others from the Hauran areas south of Damascus, others north from Egypt, and even Circassian farmers who were brought by the authorities to settle around Amman from 1878. A similar development of settlements was taking place in the more northerly sanjuk of the Hawran which, being closer to Damascus,

had seen a government administration centre being opened in Ajloun some sixteen years earlier, in 1851.

It is in this context of an opening door to Transjordan that most of the Arab pioneer journeys that will shortly be described must be seen. The transitions to stability and more intensive styles of trade and communication were not immediate in all areas but the process can now be seen as irreversible. Thus, even though in 1878 kidnappings and raids were still taking place in more isolated areas, there was a growing expectancy that the conditions were right for long term investment of people from outside the region. Evidence of this is shown in the report of that year that CMS received from the Revd. John Zeller on the feasibility of European missionaries actually residing in the Ajloun area. From there they might supervise the running of small schools further north in the Hauran, in which he still advises due caution:

... before any real mission work can be carried out, there must be either greater stability or considerable financial resources to overcome the daily demand for ransoms, safety money etc. from warring sheikhs and tribesmen.

(Archive ref: CM/O2)

It must at least be possible that it was the very presence of Europeans that excited this demand for financial reward, and that local communities by this time did not suffer from the same attention. Whatever the level of increased political and fiscal authority, however, it could not rule out some factors endemic to the region: drought and poor harvests would continue and could quickly lead communities to leave their villages and resort to the nomadic grazing of sheep and goats in order to provide for their basic needs. Taxation itself could be a cause of instability when, for instance, there arose extra Ottoman demands for funds caused by the onset of wars within the Empire – as happened in

1877 when war broke out with Russia. At times like that, additional taxes could be imposed and active men conscripted into the Army, thus putting pressure on a small rural community's ability to survive.

Contrastingly, by this latter part of the 19th century, the region west of the Jordan appears more stable and settled, due no doubt to greater connections to the trade routes around the Mediterranean, its more developed infrastructure, and its greater preponderance of established cities and communities. Moreover, its landscape and centres were already being eagerly visited, mapped and described by the many Western Christians fascinated by biblical connections that could illuminate their own sense of divinely ordained origins. As a result, a variety of European nations would often compete in the establishing of a range of amenities of education and healthcare available to the local population as part of their struggle to establish precedence for their particular religious or national identity.

It was natural, therefore, that the Anglican Church should be found first in places like Jerusalem and Nazareth, with schools, as we have seen, set up by Bishop Gobat in places like Nablus, Ramleh, and Lydd – all west of the Jordan. The establishment of Gobat's school in Salt in the late 1840's is the exception to this, of course, though the Bishop's continuing anxiety over its future expressed in the years that followed its opening is understandable. Only after Ottoman administration had been established in Salt could that city become one of the permanent hubs of Anglican activity east of the Jordan. It was matched only at that time by the attempts to secure a centre at ElHusn, Irbid, or Ajlun to serve the scattered group of village schools in the Hauran region that have been mentioned before.

From this, one would expect that most of the Arab Anglicans appointed to ministry in the early days were to be found serving in the area west of the Jordan and only gradually spreading across to the eastern bank – and this is indeed what we find. This will be noted in the instances of most of the six brief

biographies of Arab pioneers that will now be given. But what is probably far more revealing than any such summary are the descriptions which then follow of people and landscapes that emerge from a collection of reports from the CMS archives written by some of those six pioneers. Their own words, even translated into an English form that sometimes obscures the clarity of Arabic names and places, bring a fresh perspective to the story of Anglican origins. It is not too fanciful to suggest that their journeys through the Transjordan in particular have an apostolic ring to them, written with the insight of one who is a local, but aware that a whole new future might be awakening.

5. Arab Pioneers

5.1 Biographical sketches

The following descriptions of seven Arab Christian pioneers are brought together from a number of different sources within and beyond the CMS archives and, no doubt, they could be expanded considerably with further research. The amount of information given in any instance is purely a reflection of the amount of information so far obtained, and nothing to do with any kind of relative importance of ministry or measure of success.

Michael Kawar: described as a Syrian, he came from Nazareth from a Greek Catholic background. Records show that he served as a catechist for CMS from 1854 in the cities of Nablus, Haifa, Acre, and Nazareth. He was, with Seraphim Boutaji, the first Arab Anglican to be ordained deacon, by Bishop Gobat on October 1st 1871, on the day of the opening of the

Anglican Church in Nazareth. He was priested on September 23rd 1877, and served in the Churches of Salt, Nazareth, and Jerusalem. He died on November 11th 1886.

Seraphim Boutaji: described as a Syrian, he came from a Greek Catholic background in the region of the city of Acre (Akko). He had been accepted by CMS as a catechist in 1864, serving in Reineh, Nazareth, Shefr Amr and Haifa. Ordained deacon and priest by Bishop Gobat at the same time as Michael Kawar, he served in the Churches in Nazareth, Salt, Haifa, and ElHusn.

Chalil Jamal: from a Greek Catholic background, he was born in Nazareth on Jan. 18th 1840, but in his own words written on Feb.16th 1871, “..when 5 years old, my family moved to Baka Al-Gharbiah (a large muslim village between Jaffa and Nazareth), because the yoke of the Hawwa was intolerable. 3 years and 4 months after our removal to that village, we were visited by a most earnest and sincere Christian missionary, even the late Bishop John Bowen....” (Archive ref: C.M/0.36). Jamal came back to Nazareth to attend the first Protestant school there but, in Sept. 1850, the family moved to Jerusalem where Jamal “was admitted to the Diocesan school.” Finishing his schooling, he was sent by Bishop Gobat to Caiffa (Haifa?), returning to Jerusalem to be an Arabic teacher at the Jerusalem school. Jamal was ordained deacon on November 29th 1874, at the opening of St. Paul’s Church in Jerusalem, to serve as pastor of the Arab congregation meeting there, and priested with Michael Kawar and Seraphim Boutaji in 1877, serving in the churches of Jerusalem, Salt, and Nazareth.

Hanna Dimishky: The family came from a Greek Catholic background, originally from Syria¹⁶⁵. Hanna’s father, Joseph Antoine Safi, had come to Nazareth around 1830 but, after marriage, Joseph had moved on to Lydd where Hanna was born

¹⁶⁵ The Arabic family name *Dimishky* literally means “Damascene”, or “from Damascus”.

on July 19th 1847, one of eleven children. Hanna was a teacher in Lydd for 19 years, and was ordained deacon on Trinity Sunday (June 16th) 1889 by Bishop Gobat's successor, Bishop Blyth, the 4th Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. The Revd. Hanna Dimishky died on Dec. 5th 1912. By this time one of Hanna's children, Paul, had also himself been ordained by Bishop Blyth, becoming Deacon in 1902 and priested in 1906, after three years service in Beirut, and one year apiece in Jerusalem and Haifa. He is described as having married a sister of Mrs. Boutaji (Haifa) whose family were "well respected in Lebanon". From 1906-11, the Revd. Paul Dimishky served with SPG in Bombay, returning to work with a Canon Parfit in Lebanon until moving to South Africa, and later to England where he became the Vicar of St. Augustine's, Skirlaugh, in the Diocese of York (Archive ref: G3P/L14 p.403). The writer was privileged to get to know one of his daughters, Lydia Lyth, who was a regular member of the Anglican parish in Farnham Royal, in England, before her death in 2010.

Nicola abu Hattum: Ordained deacon in 1894, and served in the Church in Salt. He is described in a letter from an unnamed CMS Secretary in 1925, to him on his retirement, as coming from Suwier in Mount Lebanon to take charge of the CMS school (in Salt) in 1877, where "the present Church building was your school room." The letter continues, "There was no residential clergyman, for the late Revd. Khalil Jamal was not transferred from Jerusalem until 1878. The medical mission, confined to outpatients, was only opened in 1884. You were ordained in 1894 to take the place of Mr. Jamal who was moved to Nazareth." (Archive ref: G3P/L15 p. 252).

Ibrahim Baz: His name appears in Frederick Klein's reflection in the "Jerusalem Bishopric Documents" as the local tutor working at the "Preparandi Institution" in Jerusalem with the Revd. John Zeller, when it opened in 1876 with eleven students. It was intended that this institution would increase the number of local evangelists, teachers, and ministers. The

reflection speaks of Ibrahim Baz as “highly spoken of” (“Documents”.p73).

Suleiman Nasser: His name does not appear among those ordained in the CMS registers. However, he was in ElHusn from around 1878, before moving in around 1886 to Khorabah in the Hauran to oversee the work in the schools there. The schools were closed down by the Ottoman authorities a year later and he left the area.

5.2 The pioneering reports

There now follow a number of first-hand reports, mostly written by Chalil Jamal, which are all taken from the CMS archives. It is not exactly clear whether these reports are (local?) translations into English from an Arabic original, or whether they express the original words of their authors; whatever the process that brought them to be part of their presence in CMS archives, they surely retain the authentic flavour of a first-hand witness to the events they describe. The first one is dated Jerusalem Sept. 7th 1869, and describes a journey made across the Jordan – to Salt initially, but also to the Christian community at Fuheis which would be at a higher, and therefore healthier, altitude. This Christian community is very much alive today (2012).

On the 26th June last, I left for Salt passing through Nablouse and after 4 days stay there in wait for a caravan I left for Salt leaning upon the Almighty's arm; arrived in Salt early in the morning of the 1st of July crossing the Jordan in the dead of night. When at Salt I intended to leave for Jebel Ajloun on the 3rd of July in order to keep the Lord's Day in one of the villages of Jebel Ajloun, ...[but an] attack of a very hot fever confined me in bed for 10 days. During my illness, I thought that changing the air might do me good – therefore I left Salt (accompanied by my host Mr. Mutanes Kawar and two others; one a Protestant Christian, and the other a muslim), and went to visit the Fe-he-se-yeh¹⁶⁶. They are living in a village called by their

¹⁶⁶ That is, the people of Fuheis.

name. They are all Christians – but alas none of them know the truth of Christ's religion.

On my way to the [illegible] I passed Wadi El-Azrak, and found there a priest called Sa-eed with his family living in that wadi. He is a Greek [Orthodox] priest who for poverty's sake was obliged to live in that wadi and plant some vegetables upon which he lives. Myself and my party went to live in his hut made of branches of the bushes and wild trees of that wadi. after 10 minutes' ride we came to the source of the water that is gushing in that wadi; it springs out of a large, broad and white solid rock, very remarkable for its whiteness. Fishes were swimming in that water but of a very small size. Badawins never eat fishes because they consider them to be no better than serpents. We continued ascending up the wadi – the rode is very rugged and I was often obliged to dismount and walk: after half an hour's ride we reached E-youn El-hommos (a fount) where we found the Fe-he-se-yeh maidens coming to fill their skin bottles with water; and after 5 minutes' ride we arrived to the encampment of the [illegible] which makes a very large round circle. The tents were 16 in number made of goat's hair – but very large indeed. They live in their village for 3 months only and the rest of the year they live a badawin-life in tents..... there are many encouraging signs for establishing a mission in the East....

(Archive ref: CM/0.36)

The second report from the now ordained deacon is dated 1876, and describes a journey to Salt and Ajloun districts, including this arrival at ElHusn,

....they earnestly begged us to spend the day with them: certainly we were obliged to change our plans and accept their invitation of love with thankfulness.... they mean to follow the doctrine of the Gospel, I will not say of our church, because I know that they are the Gospel doctrines. They asked for a missionary, and a school for their children. One of them, even a Mr. Isa ElAzar said with power and earnestness, "The Gospel must be preached and those who are against the teachings of the Gospel must first cut the wings of the angel" (Rev. 14:6).

There then follows a report of Chalil Jamal's departure from Salt.

Friday, September 1st. We left for Amman, Mr. ElKarey the priest, his brother Solimon, a horseman, and myself (they meet a bedouin horseman of the Beni Sakhr and have a conversation on the way). In Amman, we found another, one Salwen, a muslim; he lives in one of the caves in Amman. He said that to steal when in need and to kill an enemy when you meet with him, is not sin; but to steal from a friend, or to kill a friend, is sin. I taught him the same prayer that I taught AbdAllah – but we could not convince him that killing an enemy is sin. Left Amman and rode to El Yadoodi. In the night, spoke about the fruits of the Christian religion....our host was a friend of mine but belongs to the Latin Church.

The report concludes with an interesting list of the places visited and the scope of the enquiries that Chalil Jamal must have been making.

The number of Christians in the villages that I have visited

<i>Village name</i>	<i>Souls</i>	<i>No. who can read</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Priests</i>
<i>Kufrinji</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Anjara</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Ajloun</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Ain Janna</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

<i>Soof</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Uryaan</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>ElHusn</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>

(Archive ref: CM/O.36)

The third report by the now priested Revd. Chalil Jamal is from his first days in Salt, written to CMS in Jerusalem and dated Jan. 1879. It describes the establishing of the organisation of his parish in a pattern that continues to this day:

As soon as I was settled here I approved a Majlis Ichtiyaria (Church Council) to meet once every fortnight or whenever there is an occasion for their meeting together to settle the affairs of the congregation with me...

(Archive ref: CM/O.36)

The next report by the Revd. Chalil Jamal is dated Nov. 29th 1879. It includes his observations of life in Salt, and of visits to members of the community of Fuheis who are seeking to become Protestant.

Salt is famous for its grapes. There are upwards of 1800 vineyards. It is a blessing that wine and Araki (a kind of strong and intoxicating drink) are not known to the Salti people. The grapes that are not consumed fresh are either made into raisins, or pressed and the juice is made into dibs (honey) and milban (a kind of sweet meat), and these are stored against the winter.

The Lord has graciously opened a way for the preaching of His Gospel in El Fuheis (a village about one and a half hours to the South East of Salt. This is a Christian village). Some three months ago, I received more than two invitations from heads of families there, to go and make them Ingleez (English) as they say. I repaired thither twice with Mr. Behnam and Hanah Effendi Kawar and spent three nights with them. I spoke very earnestly and

sincerely with them. They have worldly thoughts. Since then they have been often visited by Behnam who works among the bedouins of the district. As yet, we have not recognized them as our community but mean to hire a room with them for instruction in our hired room. They like to hear the Word, and they sit attentively when we read or speak to them, but before they quit the room, they forget it.

(Archive ref: CM/O.36)

The final report by Chalil Jamal is written from Salt to the Secretary of CMS in Jerusalem and dated July 14th 1880. In it he describes some of the lessons he has learnt in being an evangelist in that place.

... Salt where I now live is a thorough Badouin village in habits, manners, customs, and mode of living, and whosoever lives here with the aim of winning the hearts and confidence of the people, must treat them according to their own manners and habits as was the custom of St. Paul in such cases, see 1 Cor. 9: 19 – 23, and the wise man says, “He that winneth souls is wise” Prov. 11: 30. Their manners and habits stand mostly in entertaining them with coffee, tobacco, Narjili [that is, the water pipe], etc., etc., whenever they pay a visit to anyone, and without such entertainment, one almost loses his character and credit, as is the case with some here...

(Archive ref: CM/O.36)

Before we leave the community of Salt, there is one further letter from the archives that comes from 58 families belonging to the community itself, and written to the CMS Secretary in Jerusalem and dated March 17th 1873. It describes the origins of an established Protestant community there in 1866.

Your children of the Evangelical congregation at EsSalt beg to state that you are doubtless aware that 7 years ago Bishop Gobat sent a missionary (a native of Mosul, named Behnam Hessroneh) to this place. This man did not cease to teach us God’s word and to exhort us and our families, and

although for the first and second years we hated him and his teaching and thought the Protestants to be a set of men without religion and without God, yet at last through the grace of God and the zeal, patience, and perseverance of Mr. Behnam, we were led to the true faith and left the vain rites and traditions... When our congregation increased we begged the Bishop to build a place of worship and a residence for the missionary, and he did so. Whilst we rejoiced in the faith, and made daily prayers, so that we founded a society for the spread of the Gospel in these parts and had begun to collect money for to open a school [at] Jabal Ajloun, and another at Kerak.

The letter later gives a valuable indication of the significant size of the Protestant community in Salt in 1873; “our congregation numbered 600 souls.”

(Archive ref: CM/O.12)

For the last of the reports from the CMS archives, we must retrace our steps across the Jordan, and let the Revd. Hanna Dimishky describe the role his own family had in the very origins of the Protestant community in the Jerusalem area. It is written from Lydd, and dated June 1st 1879:

I was for some years in the Bishop's (now the CMS) school on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, and therefore knew English well. My deceased father which was the first born of the Protestant congregation at Jerusalem did place me in that school having but one intention and the greatest desire that I may become God's servant in his vineyard between [among?] his own nation the Arabs. So he promised the late Bishop Gobat and so he vowed it before God, and thanks be to the most merciful Father which has heard and accepted my father's humble voice, as it is now the 16th year that I am working at Lydda as a schoolmaster... I was the first who opened the field of Christ after our land and people have fallen in great misery and a heavy cloud... by and by [the school] flourished so gloriously that I have since then every year from 70 – 100 boys and girls learning in one house where I live. Before 8 years [that is, eight years ago] I began a Sunday school for those boys who went out of school, to come on Sunday and have instruction in the

catechism...but there came always grown up people that I could not keep myself. The Sunday school but had turned it to the usual services as in the Common Prayer Book....there comes every Sunday from 20 - 40 men and women, besides the scholars [that is, students] where we have 100 souls to attend the services.

(Archive ref: CM/O.22)

6. Conclusion

There is clearly so much more to be told of this story of hope and endeavour, if it becomes possible to recover further first-hand evidence of Arab narratives. This was a crucial time in the history of a land that has played such a foundational role in the faith of Jew, Christian and Muslim alike, to say nothing of the role it has played in the unfolding of the aspirations and pains that make up the dilemmas of the modern Middle East. These voices, added to the welcome writings of modern Arab authors on their own understandings of their past, will provide an effective balance to the diet of mostly western voices that have so often dominated the narrative world of our understanding of the area. With the critiques of orientalism to assist modern readers, it should be possible to gain a better appreciation of the motives and actions of those who sought to travel across Transjordan in the latter parts of the 19th century. If this is possible, then the outcome could be of real assistance in the strengthening and encouragement of the community of Eastern Christians in their journey of faithfulness in the years to come.

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