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Palestine's Syriac Orthodox community and the Dead Sea scrolls

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ABSTRACT

In 1947, a shepherd in the hills north of the Dead Sea visited a contact in Bethlehem, a dealer of antiquities to foreign visitors, offering fragments of written material. The dealer, from the Syriac community, was unsure of the items' value and began enquiries which followed Syriac Orthodox religious and intellectual networks. Despite initial scepticism, the fragments were the first of the now globally famous Dead Sea Scrolls, and ever since have been surrounded by rumours and controversy. Inextricably entwined in these has been the Palestinian Syriac Orthodox church, in a pattern of involvements which link this small Christian community with the creation of knowledge in and about Mandate Palestine, the fate of its members during the Nakba, and internal competition for ownership of valuable resources in a community fragmented by the 1947–1949 conflict. In this paper, I reconstruct the role of Syriac Orthodox community members in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, examining how the parts they played were informed by their status in late Mandate Palestine. As a counterpoint to this, the case also highlights how the needs of the community – particularly in the wake of the Nakba – were tied to a kind of cultural diplomacy as the head of the church in Jerusalem, Mar Samuel, sought to frame his community as refugees, as Christian Palestinians, and as owners and valid beneficiaries of Palestinian archaeological heritage.

KEYWORDS

Dead Sea Scrolls; Ta'amira Bedouin; Syriac Orthodox; Palestine; Bethlehem; Jerusalem

In 1947, a member of the Ta'amira pastoralists from the hills north of the Dead Sea in Mandatory Palestine visited a contact in Bethlehem, a merchant who, amongst other things, sold antiquities to foreign visitors and archaeologists, offering fragments of written material. The dealer, a member of the Syriac Orthodox community,¹ was unsure of the items' value and began a series of enquiries which followed Syriac networks including the Metropolitan of Jerusalem, Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, the scholar Stephan Hanna Stephan at the Palestine Archaeological Museum (also a Syriac Orthodox from Bethlehem), as well as several other Syriac clergymen and members of the community who worked at European institutions in Jerusalem.

Despite initial scepticism from Stephan and others, the fragments were the first finds from the now globally famous Dead Sea Scrolls, and ever since their discovery have been surrounded by rumours, ownership claims and counter-claims, and controversy. The Syriac Orthodox church in Palestine was inextricably entwined in the first two decades of these at the levels both of ordinary members and of its highest hierarchy, in a pattern of events which link this small Christian community with the creation of knowledge in and about Mandate Palestine, the fate of the community's members during the Nakba (Catastrophe, the displacement of c.750,000 Palestinians by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948), and internal competition for ownership of valuable resources which pitted individual against leadership claims in a community fragmented by the 1947–1949

conflict. The discovery of the Scrolls took place amidst the rising violence between Jewish and Arab forces in Mandatory Palestine, the withdrawal of British forces and governmental functions, the establishment of the State of Israel and the imposition of Jordanian rule on the West Bank. These events embroiled refugees and displaced Palestinians, hardening borders which cut off contact between individuals and groups. The Scrolls were thus drawn into competing national narratives, with the Palestinian role rapidly subsumed beneath the claims to the scrolls made by Israel and Jordan, whose rule over the West Bank included East Jerusalem and the Palestine Archaeological Museum.

The political context thus runs through the entire story of the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but is often presented only as incidental and inconvenient in Western accounts. Indeed, one of the very few accounts of discovery, negotiations and purchase surrounding the Scrolls which fully acknowledges the political context is that by the Israeli archaeologist and politician Yigael Yadin, who, along with his father, Eleazer Sukenik, was instrumental in buying the bulk of the Scrolls for the State of Israel. Yadin was a senior commander in the Haganah (the Zionist armed forces in Mandate Palestine) at the time of the Scrolls' discovery, and his narration interweaves the wartime context with detail from his father's diaries of the networks of churchmen, antiquities dealers and scholars through whose hands the Scrolls passed in these early moments (Yadin 1957).

The political moment of the Dead Sea Scrolls' discovery has therefore had a major impact on the way in which their story has subsequently been told: much of the initial 'mystery' around them, beloved of popular writers, stems not from conspiracies but from wartime disruption, and the various far-fetched theories about parts of the Scrolls being kept secret because of their explosive contents in relation to Christianity are actually the results of post-war hostility between Israel and Jordan, combined with later mismanagement of the publication project.² In this paper, I endeavour to reconstruct the role of members of the Syriac Orthodox community in the discovery and sale of the Scrolls, viewing them as a network and examining the ways in which the interlinked parts they played were informed by their status as Christians, scholars, officials or religious leaders in late Mandate Palestine. What happens to the conventional narrative of the Scrolls' discovery if we foreground Palestinian activity, paying attention to a historical context of archaeology, antiquities sale and intercommunal relations which extends back into the Ottoman period?

In order to do so, this article focuses on the initial months after the small group of Ta'amira Bedouin men who found the first Scrolls brought them to Bethlehem and launched them into the local antiquities market. This period is reconstructed from the various accounts published, mainly in the 1950s and 60s, by American and European archaeologists who became involved with the Scrolls after this phase of their history, but who endeavoured – mainly through interviews – to find out how and where the Scrolls had come to light. There is very little formal archival material on these months, whether in Arabic or colonial languages, because the activities of the Bedouin sellers and their Syriac Orthodox go-betweens were of necessity secretive and clandestine. My portrayal of the Syriac community's involvement is thus built up from a combination of these resources and from the often contradictory and mutually antagonistic autobiographical writings of two men at the heart of the process, Metropolitan Athanasius Yeshue Samuel and Anton Kiraz. The focus is mainly on anglophone and occasionally francophone literatures because they are the main international languages of what has become known as 'Qumranology'; indeed, the extent to which scholarship and discourses of ownership around the Scrolls has been captured by Israeli and Euro-American interests is highlighted by the extreme scarcity of studies in Arabic, especially from Jordan, the country which still holds one of the most striking finds, the Copper Scroll (Zayadine 2009, p. 113). With the exception of letters from the Harvard Semitic Museum which cast some light on the attitudes of American archaeologists to the Palestinians embroiled in the Scroll story, most of the sources used in this article are thus in the public domain, albeit in some cases (such as Archbishop Samuel's autobiography) now largely ignored. My contribution is to read them against the grain, paying close attention to the orientalist and colonialist narratives which dominate much academic and popular Scroll literature, and considering instead how the contemporary

hegemonic narrative of the Scrolls hides their significance for Palestinian histories in favour of their Jewish and Christian religious importance. Refocusing the narrative of the Scrolls' discovery onto the Palestinians who discovered and brokered them, reinscribing these world-famous artefacts back into a specifically Palestinian history, is a reminder of the ethically problematic and complex route taken by these and many other antiquities from the region, relocating the question of the Scrolls within wider debates about cultural heritage and ownership as well as within studies of how refugee populations seek to shape their own self-representation. It therefore also represents a case study of how the Syriac Orthodox of Palestine operated in a particular niche within wider society before 1948,³ and how this community experienced the Palestinian Nakba, the initial years of dispersal, and the politics of aid and refugeehood.

Framing the Dead Sea Scrolls

Accounts of the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of manuscripts dating from the decades either side of the year 0AD, usually follow a similar format. The scrolls are found in caves in the hills above the Dead Sea by Bedouin shepherds around the turn of the year 1946/47; they then pass through the hands of various shadowy figures in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and from thence to their proper owners, defined (according to the position of the writer) either as a network of international scholars and 'experts' who can properly interpret them, or as the Israeli state and the museum it has erected especially for these objects.⁴ Even scholarly books on the scrolls, in their brief copy-and-paste accounts of the discovery, sometimes wrongly state that they were found on Jordanian territory, although the land was under Palestine Mandate rule until a year or more after the initial finds (e.g. Flint 2013, p. 5) or confuse the Syriac Orthodox faith or Assyrian ethnicity of key figures with Syrian nationality (e.g. Collins 2013, p. 4, 8, 33).

Indeed, it is noteworthy that scholarly discussions of the Scrolls rarely engage with the story of their discovery at all; the focus of attention is on the manuscripts' contents. Most of the existing information on the early days of the Scrolls' re-entry into the world thus comes from 'popular' books written by many of those involved in their purchase and early interpretations and published by trade presses. Common discourses underlying these narratives include the idea of the Scrolls as objects of unparalleled value in Jewish history, understood as having implications for their rightful ownership, and/or notions of global heritage which position valuable archaeological finds and, indeed, places such as the city of Jerusalem as outside the claims of individuals or peoples and as subject to a kind of international patrimony. Questions of religion/religious history and academic expertise tend to dominate, whilst the extent to which the early years of the Scrolls' return to human sight are entwined with the displacement of the Arab-Palestinian people, orientalism, legal infringements and extra-judicial violence is largely swept aside. Indeed, the mere presence of Palestinians in the process of the discoveries is at times presented as a source of confusion, error, delay and disorganisation.⁵ And even now, more than 70 years after the initial discoveries, the Dead Sea Scrolls – or forged fragments sold as part of them – still make headlines in stories largely focused on the idea that the documents represent a link to a pivotal period of Jewish history or, less realistically, to quasi-mystical stories of the life of Christ or conspiracy theories orchestrated by the Vatican (Collins 2013, ix, Elgvin and Langlois 2019, pp. 113–114).

But the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, handled, weighed up, bartered and sold by ordinary inhabitants of the land, following well-established routes along which antiquities had passed (with varying degrees of formal legality) from rural peasants and pastoralists to urban dealers and thence to foreign scholars since at least the early nineteenth century (Fields 2009, pp. 25–26, al-Houdalieh 2014, pp. 104–105). These were social and economic relationships which, more often than lucrative antiquarian discoveries, also channelled cheese, sheepskins and other quotidian objects from the countryside to Palestine's towns and cities (Schölch 1993, pp. 98–102, 131, 143–145, Fields 2009, p. 26). The scrolls might themselves be extraordinary items, but their discovery, far from being the tale of intrigue portrayed by many Euro-American writers, followed everyday

patterns which became mysterious only as far as was necessary for the actors within them to circumvent the legal framework of the British Mandate administration's Department of Antiquities. The scrolls, and their story, has, however, been distorted, elements of it amplified out of all proportion, by the kind of ideological and emotional furore which surround many archaeological discoveries with Biblical links (Brodie and Kersel 2012). The focus on the Scrolls and their theological importance has, moreover, obscured much of the archaeological context, with non-documentary finds from the various caves often dispersed around the world and their significance for understanding the site lost; a recent project to trace these objects is one of the few scholarly enterprises which seems to take the Ta'amira Bedouin and their activities seriously, in the interests of reconstructing from various interviews and secondary accounts their exact activities in the 1940s and 50s (Taylor et al. 2017).

Reframing the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in an Arab- and Syriac-Palestinian context is not a matter of writing new characters into the story, but instead requires a shift in how we think about antiquities. Much writing on archaeological discoveries is founded on the assumption that ancient items rightfully belong in the hands of a scientific scholarly community (one rooted in capitalist and colonialist power structures and global relations) who will study and preserve them, and if they are significant enough display them in museums and galleries (Abu El-Haj 2001, Field et al. 2016, p. 5). This model of knowledge formation and ownership has been increasingly challenged by the claims of indigenous peoples and formerly colonised nations to ownership of their heritage, and by debates within the discipline of archaeology since at least the 1980s (e.g. Trigger 2002, Given 2004, Anderson and Rojas 2017). Although many popular depictions of archaeology are still centred on a lone white male explorer, within academia discussions of the ethics of excavation, its relationship to past and present communities and questions of how finds should be handled and interpreted are very much alive and influencing the practice of field archaeologists, museum curators, funding organisations and other actors (e.g. Atalay 2012 Gnecco and Lippert 2015, Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019), as well as discussions of those active in the past (Griswold 2020, Meskell 2020).

Much of the public debate around return of antiquities to their countries of origin is, however, rooted in the notion that there is a single rightful owner, usually identified with the nation-state and its institutions, such as national museums (Field et al. 2016, p. 8), effectively excluding ordinary people and their everyday relationships with ancient objects. Such formulations become especially problematic in situations where the legitimacy of the state is itself ambiguous; in the contemporary setting, this issue is complicated by the absence of a Palestinian state. In the historic setting, it is evoked especially in the power imbalances between colonised and colonising peoples and other environments in which the state is seen as illegitimate; in these cases, standard tropes of 'looters' and corrupt antiquities dealers need to be subjected to a series of questions (Field et al. 2016, Barker 2018). Why would someone discovering an ancient object whilst living under an oppressive colonial regime necessarily see that regime as the safest or most legitimate owner of that antiquity? Why, if an ordinary person discovering an item knew that reporting it to official authorities could lead to major disruption to their livelihood or to expropriation of their land, would this seem like the most logical choice? And why, if someone living under a colonial regime they deemed illegitimate discovered an ancient object, might they not with good reason view themselves as having an equal, if not greater, right to the proceeds of their finds, rather than a duty to submit them to the gatekeepers of a vague 'heritage of humankind' whose main beneficiaries appeared to be colonial elites? As Brent Nongbri has written of the Egyptian peasants and antiquities dealers whose networks form the backdrop to many discoveries of early Christian manuscripts, whilst the intentions and information of local and indigenous peoples should be subject to critical scrutiny, so should those of Euro-American scholars (Nongbri 2018, p. 15). In addition, however, we also need to integrate ideas such as James Scott's 'weapons of the weak' into our understanding of the former's positionality – of antihegemonic choices of how to deal with antiquities as tactics for managing, if not resisting, the impacts of colonialism (Ibid.; see also Scott 1985).

Narrating the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls

The story of the Scrolls' discovery starts with Muhammad Ahmad el-Hamed, also known as al-Dhib, a Ta'amira Bedouin man from the area between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. Along with his companions Jum'a Muhammed and Khalil Musa,⁶ in late 1946 or early 1947 one of the men apparently found the opening to a cave whilst looking after his sheep and goats in the hills. Such caves are common in the region, and sometimes contained items of archaeological interest which the finders sold on to supplement their normal income (Shanks 1998, pp. 9–10, Fields 2009, p. 25). Muhammad el-Hamed is often portrayed, in orientalist fashion, as a naïve figure, sometimes even described as a 'shepherd boy' or 'lad' (see, e.g., Burrows 1955, p. 4, Allegro 1956, p. 13, Samuel 1968, pp. 142–143, Shanks 1998, p. 3); he was around 15–17 at the time of the discovery – young, but in his community old enough to have substantial responsibilities. Various scholars also note, with varying degrees of (dis)approval, that during searches for more manuscripts the Bedouin successfully located and excavated entire caves which had gone unnoticed by the 'experts' from Jerusalem who were digging at Qumran and Ein Feshka in the 1950s (Burrows 1958, pp. 5–14, De Vaux 1967, pp. 319–320, Shanks 1998, xiii), while Bedouin labourers were simultaneously employed on the excavations (De Vaux 1967, p. 335, 1973, p. 97, Hirschfeld 2004, p. 16, 20). The very fact that Bedouin involvement in illicit digging is almost always mentioned in descriptions of the discovery of the scrolls, but their presence as employees on official excavations is rarely noted, highlights the orientalist tendencies of most Euro-American narratives. The most marked example of this is the finder of the first scrolls himself, Muhammad, who is usually referred to using his enigmatic kunya, 'the Wolf,' but of whom it is rarely noted that he was employed as an archaeological labourer both at Qumran in 1952 (De Vaux 1967, p. 335) and later near Nablus (Kiraz 2005, p. 143).

Some time after Muhammad el-Hamed found the initial scroll fragments and jars (accounts range from days to months), one of his relatives, possibly Jum'a Muhammed (Kiraz 2005, xviii) visited Bethlehem on a regular route to sell the products of the family's pastoral economy (Allegro 1956, p. 15). On arriving in town, he consulted various people already known to him, including members of the same tribe who had settled in the city, and various Bethlehemites who they knew were involved in selling antiquities, some of them on a casual and illicit or semi-licit basis alongside their main livings, which ranged from selling souvenirs to tourists or cloaks in Bedouin settlements to shipping stone mined around the Dead Sea (Samuel 1949, p. 26, Shanks 1998, p. 9, Kiraz 2005, xviii, 112). Following what was probably an established way of doing business, Jum'a Muhammed consulted the latter group of men to find out what they might be willing to pay or to arrange to leave items with them so that they could search out buyers from amongst the private collectors, academics and museum staff who might be interested in the Scrolls and willing to overlook the fact that they had not, as the law required, been reported to the Mandate authorities (Shanks 1998, p. 9). These contacts amongst the antiquities dealers and merchants of Bethlehem were Ibrahim Ijha, Daoud Musallam, Faidi Salahi, (probably also known as Faidi al-'Alami), Khalil Iskander Shahin (often referred to as Kando) and George Isha'ya Shamoun (also spelt Shaya, Isaiah in various accounts; Samuel 1968, pp. 141–167, Fields 2009, pp. 26–29; Shanks 9-10, 15-16, Burrows 1955, p. 5). Of these, Khalil Shahin, George Isha'ya and possibly others were members of the Syriac Orthodox community who, like other Christian denominations in pre-1948 Palestine and for a variety of socio-economic reasons, often occupied 'in-between' socio-economic roles – translators, dragomans, officials, journalists, photographers, 'fixers', and producers and sellers of the types of items that would be of interest to foreign visitors (Norris 2013; Haiduc-Dale 2013, 27, 29, 85-86, 143). The connections used to find buyers for the first batch of Dead Sea Scrolls were, therefore, firmly embedded in the wider social and economic networks which ran through Mandate Palestine society.

Four of this original batch of scrolls were passed to Khalil Shahin and thence to Archbishop Athanasius Yeshue Samuel of the Syriac Orthodox church, and his acquaintance Anton Kiraz, a Syriac taxi company owner from Bethlehem. The competing claims of Kiraz and Samuel – which are dealt with at greater length below – were fought out in the press and threats of

legal action, but behind them lay a number of other internal disputes within the Syriac Orthodox church in Palestine. The other three scrolls had a less dramatic, and for the purposes of this article less informative, trajectory. One of the three Bedouin finders – it is not clear from the conflicting accounts which – sold his share of the scrolls to Faidi Salahi in Bethlehem; Kiraz described Salahi in a letter as ‘a dealer of antiquities all his life’ and thus as being well-acquainted with figures in the world of Jerusalem antiquities and archaeology (Kiraz 2005, p. 65). Salahi contacted Levon Ohan, an Armenian friend whose father, Nasri, was an established antiquities dealer in Jerusalem (Yadin 1957, pp. 21–24, Shanks 1998, p. 10, Fields 2009, p. 41). Ohan, in turn, got in touch with Eleazar Lipa Sukenik, Professor of Archaeology at Hebrew University, and showed him fragments at a November 1947 meeting point between the military zones into which Jerusalem was divided in the months before the British withdrawal. They arranged a risky bus trip to Bethlehem, where Sukenik arranged to buy three of the scrolls from Salahi (Yadin 1957, pp. 15–20, Shanks 1998, p. 12, Fields 2009, pp. 41–450).

It is notable that most of the conventional accounts of the Scrolls’ discovery persist in referring to Khalil Shahin by his local nickname of Kando, in a way that can – whatever the name’s social function within Bethlehem – be read as dismissive and disrespectful. Almost certainly they would never refer to a fellow scholar, a government official or any other Westerner in a similar way, but Shahin is ‘Kando, the quondam Syrian cobbler of Bethlehem’ (Fitzmyer 1974, p. 391, 1976, pp. 214–215). A similar dynamic is found in the habit (albeit in private correspondence) of senior US archaeologists such as Carl Kraeling of referring to Metropolitan Samuel as ‘Bushy-beard’ (e.g. Kraeling to Albright, 31st December 1949, ASOR Albright 002 1/4 Correspondence 1949). Muhammad el-Hamed, Jum’a Muhammed, Khalil Musa and their friends and family are even more faceless, as ‘the Bedouin,’ ‘the Ta’amireh Bedouin’ or similar wording (eg Fitzmyer 1976, pp. 214–215, Hirschfeld 2004, p. 16), whilst Orientalist images of the ‘noble savage’ echo through the emphasis placed by many authors on el-Hamed’s nickname al-Dhib, ‘the Wolf’ (e.g. Shanks 1998, pp. 3–7, Collins 2013, p. 4, Flint 2013, p. 2) and of the site of the scrolls’ discovery as a ‘howling wilderness’ (Cross 1954, p. 4). There are exceptions – Hershel Shanks’ popular account, for example, robustly rejects narratives of Bedouin naivete about their finds and pours scorn on the idea that Shahin would have used the scrolls he received to mend shoes (Shanks 1998, pp. 9–10), and Robert Boling’s overview of significant finds in the area credits Ta’amira ingenuity for many of the major discoveries and uses more neutral language such as ‘unsponsored’ to describe their searches, as do some of Roland de Vaux’s accounts (Boling 1969, pp. 82–84, De Vaux 1973, vii–viii, 49–53, 95–97). But in general, el-Hamed and his companions are framed in ways familiar from stereotypes of the ‘desert Bedouin’ – naïve, mysterious, wild and unreliable, influenced by images from the Lawrence of Arabia genre which are a long way from the livelihoods of the Ta’amira, who had been at least semi-sedentary in their habits for several hundred years (Schölch 1993, pp. 143–145, Layish 2011, pp. 16–19). Descriptions of the Syriac Orthodox merchants of Bethlehem can, meanwhile, be located within tropes of the ‘Levantine,’ rooted in racialised suspicions of liminal and hybrid figures which were often applied by Western commentators to Middle Eastern Christians and Jews, urbanised Arabs, dragomans and those ‘cosmopolitans’ not protected from suspicion by an upper-class socio-economic status (Eldem 2009, pp. 225–227, Chiti 2020, pp. 78–85).

The scrolls in Syriac Orthodox hands

In order to find buyers for the scrolls, the middlemen in Bethlehem, who were merchants and businessmen of varying economic weight, tapped into another network, that of their Syriac Orthodox coreligionists in Jerusalem, many of whom belonged to the educated lower-middle class of the colonial setting. These men primarily worked in institutions such as the Palestine Archaeological Museum, the YMCA and European consulates, and were thus in direct contact with sources of colonial expertise and authority, but they also – via family and social and religious relationships – overlapped with the mercantile networks of Bethlehem. They intersected most notably at the centre of

the Syriac Orthodox community in Palestine, the monastery and church of St Mark in the Old City of Jerusalem. This centuries-old institution marked the Syriac Orthodox as one of the various denominations which formed the complex Christian makeup of Mandate Palestine.

The exact route that the various scrolls took from Bethlehem to Jerusalem remains unclear to this day; Khalil Shahin (Kando) himself never recorded or wrote down his version of events before his death in 1994 (Shanks 1998, p. 10), and the events involving Anton Kiraz and Archbishop Samuel remain the subject of claim and counter-claim as voiced in their personal accounts (Samuel 1949, Samuel 1968, Kiraz 2005). This section therefore seeks to reconstruct parts of the journey from the accounts of Samuel and Kiraz because of their centrality to the Syriac Orthodox theme of this paper, supplemented by non-Syriac primary and secondary sources, particularly Weston Fields' detailed timeline. In doing so, I locate the history of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls within a broader Palestinian history which also involves the Ta'amira Bedouin, the Palestinian Archaeological Museum and other local actors, but which also includes the workings of the religious and lay sections of the Syriac Orthodox communities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and some of the tensions that existed within them and between the Syriac church and the Mandate administration.⁷ This historical path is supplemented by a textual reading of Archbishop Samuel's autobiography and the letters of Anton Kiraz, published by his son, in order to unpick some of the intra-communal dynamics which are uncovered by the story of the scrolls.

According to Archbishop Athanasius Samuel, his encounter with the Dead Sea Scrolls began with George Isha'ya, a member of his congregation, trying to attract his attention after a Sunday service at St Mark's in July 1947. In an account which mocks and patronises both Isha'ya and Shahin, Samuel differentiates himself from the part-time antiquities dealers of Bethlehem and their role as brokers between himself and the Ta'amira Bedouin sellers (Samuel 1968, pp. 141–142). An initial meeting ran aground when Father Bulos Jilif of St Mark's monastery turned away Isha'ya, the two Bedouin who had come to Jerusalem with him (probably Jum'a Muhammed and Khalil Musa), and the 'very dirty' scrolls they wanted to show to the Metropolitan (Samuel 1949, p. 27, Burrows 1955, p. 6, Fields 2009, pp. 29–30). According to Samuel's account, only Isha'ya's claim that Jaffa Gate was a 'Jewish area' and that the Jewish antiquities dealer who wanted them to make them an offer for the scrolls was plotting to kill them persuaded Muhammed and Musa not to sell them on the spot (Samuel 1949, p. 27, 1968, pp. 146–147). Samuel still maintained that had Father Jilif not sent the Bedouin away, other scrolls would also have come into his hands (*ibid.*, 166). The misunderstanding having been cleared up, Samuel bought his four scrolls from the Ta'amira on 5th August 1947 but, fearing that Isha'ya and Kando might have been colluding to fool him, sent Isha'ya and Father Yusif al-Kabawi, a monk from St Mark's, to inspect the cave in which the scrolls had been found (*ibid.*, 148–149, Fields 2009, p. 33). After this or another expedition to the caves, Isha'ya brought further remains – a 'matted mass of fragments' from the Book of Daniel – which Samuel later handed to US scholars (Samuel 1968, p. 174). This latter find highlights the extent to which, although popular narratives tend to talk of the scrolls as if they were full books, found intact, and the process of discovery and sale as if it involved only a few items, most of the finds were fragmentary, including as well as pieces of parchment the jars in which some of the documents had been kept, and other contextual objects (see, e.g., Samuel 1949, p. 28).

In a bid to understand exactly what he had just purchased, Samuel then took the scrolls to another Syriac Orthodox connection, Stephan Hanna Stephan, a longstanding employee of the Mandate administration's Department of Antiquities, based at the Palestine Archaeological Museum. Stephan, who was not an expert on Hebrew or ancient finds but normally worked on Arabic scripts and on early modern Ottoman Turkish, apparently told the Metropolitan that the scrolls were 'worthless' and warned him against becoming a 'gullible' consumer of the kind of items usually sold to foreign tourists (Burrows 1955, p. 7, Samuel 1968, p. 150, Fields 2009, pp. 36–37). Samuel sought a second opinion from his friend Father Sebastianus Marmadji, an Arabist at the École Biblique, the Dominican institute of Bible studies which was home to famous experts on ancient manuscripts, and a former 'Catholic priest of the Syrian rite in Baghdad' (van der Ploeg

1958, p. 9). Marmadji brought with him another Dominican with expertise in the Old Testament and Hebrew, Father van der Ploeg. Again, the two thought that the scrolls were fairly modern (Burrows 1955, pp. 7–8, van der Ploeg 1958, pp. 10–11, Samuel 1968, p. 151, Fields 2009, pp. 33–35); when van der Ploeg told his Dominican colleagues of his visit to St Mark’s that evening, they reminded him of the famous Shapira forgeries of fifty years earlier, implying that they thought he had had a lucky escape (Murphy-O’Connor 1992, p. 149, van der Ploeg 1958, p. 13); another account has the Ecole Biblique’s eminent scholar Père Vincent refusing even to look at the scrolls for the same reason (Fields 2009, p. 34). According to van der Ploeg, their suspicions were heightened by Samuel’s vehement refusals to bring other experts into the discussion (1958, pp. 12–13). On another visit to Stephan, the Hebrew scholar Toviah Wechsler seconded the idea that the scrolls were no older than medieval, and had perhaps been stolen from a synagogue (Trever 1965, pp. 107–110, Samuel 1968, pp. 152–153; Faidi Salahi is also said by several narrators to have initially refused the scrolls for the latter reason).

By this point we have reached late 1947; on 29th November a vote at the United Nations backed the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab one to be administered by Transjordan. Tensions had risen considerably in anticipation of the decision and even more so in its aftermath. The British announced in the same month that their mandatory administration would pull out in August 1948, but soon afterwards brought this date forward to May 15th; they were, in effect, already winding down operations and evacuating non-essential officials, and Jerusalem was divided up into security zones, largely along perceptions of ‘Arab’ and ‘Jewish’ areas, with passes necessary in order to travel between them. Under these circumstances Anton Kiraz, the owner of a car hire and taxi company with contacts spread across the city, including amongst British officials, and the ability to move people and objects around (Kiraz 2005, p. 65), became a valuable person to know. According to Archbishop Samuel, Kiraz had heard of the scrolls’ existence through the Syriac grapevine (1949, p. 30, 1968, p. 155); others believe that Samuel enlisted Kiraz knowing that his extensive networks might help him verify the nature of the scrolls (Flint 2013, p. 4). Kiraz, however, told a different story from Samuel’s – to journalists, American scholars, and to the lawyers he later hired to take legal action against the Metropolitan. According to him, he had a long-standing friendship with Samuel, and had previously helped him navigate the local politics of Palestine’s Syriac Orthodox community when the Metropolitan ran into trouble; in an affidavit sworn by Kiraz during his legal action against the Metropolitan, he even stated that he had hosted and paid for the celebrations for Samuel’s consecration as Archbishop (Kiraz 2005, xvii, 50). Kiraz also claimed that he lent Samuel some of the money to buy the scrolls and that they had been partners in the attempts to sell the manuscripts (Fields 2009, p. 38). Whatever the truth of the dispute – and several of those most closely involved with the scrolls in the early years ended up backing Kiraz – the claims and counter-claims of the two men add fine detail to our understanding of the internal workings of the Syriac Orthodox community in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the tensions between different parties within it, and their entanglement with other institutions in Palestinian society, such as the Greek Orthodox church (to which the Syriac church owed money) and the Mandate administration. The fight over the scrolls and the proceeds from them thus highlights the extent to which the convoluted routes along which several of the Dead Sea Scrolls travelled were shaped by local Palestinian dynamics.

Amongst Anton Kiraz’s useful contacts was Eleazar Lipa Sukenik. In 1945 Sukenik had excavated remains (reported at the time as ‘the earliest records of Christianity in existence’) at Kiraz’s property at Talpiot, and Kiraz used this acquaintance to contact the archaeologist (Sukenik 1947, p. 251, 365, van der Ploeg 1958, p. 16, Fields 2009, pp. 50–51). Because of the political and security situation they needed a neutral place to meet, so Kiraz arranged to use an office at the YMCA, which he accessed via Malek Tannourji, another Syriac Orthodox who was the librarian there (Yadin 1957, p. 27, Samuel 1968, pp. 155–156, Kiraz 2005, pp. 54–55). Sukenik took away the sample he was shown – the parchment which became known as the Isaiah Scroll – to examine, raise funds, and – apparently unbeknownst to Kiraz and Samuel – photograph it (Samuel 1968, p. 156, 168, Kiraz 2005, pp. 54–55).

Sukenik returned the scrolls to Kiraz at a second meeting at the YMCA and made Kiraz an offer (Yadin 1957, pp. 28–29, Fields 2009, p. 53), although the negotiations then stalled whilst Sukenik tried to raise enough money and Samuel started talking to American scholars (Yadin 1957, p. 29). When Sukenik sought a third meeting, however, having raised funds to buy this second batch of scrolls, Kiraz did suggest the Yugoslav consulate, where another member of the Syriac community was the *kawass* or dragoman (Yadin 1957, p. 29, Kiraz 2005, p. 108). Archbishop Samuel later denied all knowledge of this set of negotiations, perhaps because given the political situation – both the conflict of 1947/8 and the refugee crisis in the aftermath – he did not want to be seen selling the scrolls to an Israeli buyer (Samuel 1968, pp. 200–201, Fields 2009, pp. 52–56).

At around the same time, however, Archbishop Samuel's confidant, a monk named Butros Sowmi (like the Archbishop a refugee from the *Seyfo*), returned to St Mark's from a trip, providing someone with whom Samuel could share his concerns and uncertainties regarding the scrolls in his possession. Sowmi suggested contacting the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR) to ask their advice; Samuel apparently agreed, but attributes to Sowmi – who was killed by Israeli shelling of St Mark's in May 1948 and could not therefore defend himself – the notion of telling the American scholars that the scrolls had been found during cataloguing work at the monastery library (Samuel 1968, p. 157). This claim would have rendered Samuel's ownership of the scrolls legal, whereas failing to report an archaeological find would have infringed the Ottoman-based mandate antiquities law and made the scrolls subject to seizure by the British authorities. Other than Sukenik, who was initially less confident, it seems to have been John Trever, a recent PhD graduate who was acting head of ASOR, who was the first person to make a reasonably clear identification of the scrolls. With Samuel and Sowmi's permission he and William Brownlee, an American Biblical scholar, examined, provisionally repaired and photographed the four scrolls. On March 10th 1948 they started to contact colleagues about the find, and five days later received a response from William Albright, then doyen of Biblical archaeology, who declared the scrolls 'the greatest manuscript find of modern times' (Burrows 1955, pp. 10–15, Fields 2009, p. 76). Starting to realise the value of his acquisition, Samuel asked Sowmi to take the scrolls to Beirut to keep them in a bank vault. Sowmi had been able to travel around Jerusalem with help from his brother Ibrahim, who worked for the Palestine Mandate's customs branch. Ibrahim Sowmi also seems to have been stationed on either the Lebanese border or on the Allenby Bridge crossing into Jordan (accounts disagree), so he may well also have smoothed the valuable package's journey out of Palestine (Samuel 1968, pp. 157–161, Fields 2009, p. 79). ASOR announced the discovery of the four scrolls photographed by Trever in April 1948, followed a few weeks later by Sukenik's revelation of the three scrolls bought from Salahi. Given the turmoil in Palestine during the second half of 1948 and the establishment of Israeli and Jordanian rule in former Mandate Palestine, formal archaeological excavation of the find sites – headed by G. Lankester Harding of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and Père Roland de Vaux of the *École Biblique* – did not take place until early 1949.

Outwith the scope of this article, but in need of further research in relation to the Palestinian place in the discovery and marketing of the scrolls, is the role of Yusif (Joseph) Sa'ad, secretary of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, and his colleagues, including the well-known Palestinian archaeologist Dimitri Baramki (see e.g. letter Sellers to Kraeling 21st February 1949, ASOR Kraeling 012 2/3 'Dead Sea Scrolls general correspondence'). The Museum's acting curator after the withdrawal of the British Mandate authorities, Gerald Lankester Harding, has been described as 'pivotal in every aspect of early research' and as deserving the 'greatest share of the credit for saving the Cave 4 fragments' despite his absence from many scrolls narratives (Fields 2009, p. 17, see also Cross 1954, p. 4). Harding may not have been Palestinian – he was the British director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities until 1956 – but his role and that of Yusif Sa'ad highlight the largely uncharted place in the scrolls' history of the PAM, now the Rockefeller Museum, a key piece of Palestinian national history taken over first by the Jordanian authorities and then by the Israelis after 1967.

Sa'ad, in particular, seems to have been aware of the discovery of the scrolls from fairly early on and to have been attempting to track them down – including using his own knowledge of Jerusalem

Christian networks to bypass George Isha'ya and obtain information from Father Yusif al-Kabawi of St Mark's (Allegro 1956, pp. 20–23, Trever 1965, p. 146, Kiraz 2005, p. 115); in early 1949 a Jordanian officer, Akkash al-Zebn, located the caves and guided antiquities officials to them (Harding 1949, p. 112). According to van der Ploeg, it was also Sa'ad who finally persuaded Shahin to admit to being the dealer who had acted as the key go-between (1958, p. 19). As another Jerusalemite Christian, and not only as a key employee of the PAM but also the son of one of its longest-standing employees (the museum formatore, and well-known painter and sculptor, Mubarak Saad), Yusif Sa'ad had his own powerful, if as yet unplotted, networks of connections, which were instrumental in other discoveries by members of the Ta'amira Bedouin, such as the major Samaritan finds from caves in Wadi Daliyeh, reaching the PAM (Cross 1969, pp. 41–45). Yusif Sa'ad later occupied a significant place in the history and presentation of the Dead Sea Scrolls: as curator of the PAM, he worked with the research team in the 1950s and 60s and wrote the guides to the museum which introduced the later finds, including the Copper Scroll, to visitors (e.g. Saad 1965).

The Nakba and the Dead Sea Scrolls

On the human level, the trajectory along which the Dead Sea Scrolls travelled in the immediate wake of their discovery was closely entwined with the catastrophe which enveloped most ordinary Palestinians in 1948. Indeed, Muhammad al-Dhib, the famous shepherd mentioned at the start of almost all narrations of the Scrolls story, himself died a refugee in Jordan in the late 1990s (Stegemann 1998, p. 1). Anton Kiraz's frantic efforts to stake a claim to some of the scrolls, or at least to a share of the proceeds from their sale, largely stemmed not from greed but from the loss of his taxi business and his family home, built during the Mandate period, both of which ended up on the Israeli side of the border (Kiraz 2005, xxiii, 50). Having suffered some kind of illness – probably TB – and been sent to a rest home in Lebanon (Samuel 1968, pp. 168–172, 174, 187, 200), he was then trapped there by the ongoing conflict, while his family spent at least some time as indigent displaced persons at a Syriac monastery in the Jordan Valley, along with other members of the community. By the beginning of 1949, Kiraz, his father, mother and sisters were all living 'in a single room ... near Jaffa Gate' (letter Sellers to Kraeling 21st February 1949, ASOR Kraeling 012 2/3 'Dead Sea Scrolls general correspondence').

The plight of displaced Syriac Orthodox was also a narrative deployed by Archbishop Samuel in his bid to win the highest possible price for the scrolls in his possession. His memoirs are a carefully worded effort at portraying himself as a naïve and innocent man of religion abroad in a world of unscrupulous dealers and worldly international academics. Although Samuel's book is entitled *Treasure of Qumran*, a third of its length is spent constructing this persona, stressing the hardships Samuel experienced as a peasant boy born in a village now on the Turkish-Syrian border. Under the Ottoman Empire his family had been subjected to repeated instances of violence, culminating in the genocide which, during World War One, targeted his Assyrian (Syriac Orthodox) community as well as the Armenians. The book's *bildungsroman* structure allows Samuel to deploy themes of purity, bravery and fortitude against a backdrop which contrasts the Archbishop – by then based in the USA and writing for North American and British readers – with both the faceless orientalised 'Arabs' (the Ta'amira finders of the Scrolls, and other 'Bedouin'; p82-3, 142) and with lay members of his own Syriac community, depicted as grasping urban Levantine merchants with 'electric fingers,' a 'practiced' facility for quickly counting money and 'glowing eyes' at the sight of cold hard cash (Samuel 1968, p. 149). It is thus somewhat ironic that Mar Samuel is himself orientalised in other accounts, as in van der Ploeg's comment that the 'bishop would have been no true oriental if he had bought [the first scroll sample]' (1958, p. 7).

The motive behind Samuel's framing of himself and of Palestine's Syriac Orthodox community becomes clear when we place it within the competing claims to ownership of the Scrolls. The Ta'amira, who threatened legal action against the Archbishop and the Jerusalem diocese in 1949, are in this telling dismissed as ignorant and greedy (Samuel 1968, p. 147, 178). Anton Kiraz,

Samuel's former friend, is tangled up with the depiction of his other city-dwelling Syriac companions as devious, deceptive and grasping (*ibid.*, 168, 174). But he can also be shown as pathetic, recovering from tuberculosis in the sanatorium in Beirut while his family became refugees. This last theme is the culmination of Samuel's narrative of moral purity, the point behind his self-fashioning: the Scrolls, he argues, had been 'directed by Providence to St Mark's' and into his hands so that he can use the proceeds from them to repair the damaged monastery and help the 'dislocated families throughout Jerusalem and Bethlehem [who] were destitute, threatened with starvation and disease' (*ibid.*, 167). In an emotive prologue, Samuel depicts himself as racked by conflicting senses of how he should proceed, but as ultimately choosing to prioritise the Syriac Orthodox of 'Jerusalem and Syria, in Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, the needs are great: urgently, they require schoolrooms, books, clothing, cash' (*ibid.*, 26). Their larger claims are juxtaposed with those of the archaeologists and Bible scholars with whom Samuel was in competition, whose moral position is summarily dismissed: '[the refugees' needs] cannot expect to be satisfied by a disputed place in scholarly history' (*ibid.*), although the Archbishop later notes that the first money to be disbursed after the Scrolls were sold was used to renovate churches in Mosul and Tur Abdin (Turkey), not to feed starving refugees in Palestine (*ibid.*, 200).

Whilst Archbishop Samuel's mismanagement of the Dead Sea Scrolls' care and sale has been justifiably criticised and his motives subject to suspicion (see e.g. Kiraz 2005, letter Trever to Kiraz 11th January 1950, ASOR Kraeling 012 2/3, 'Dead Sea Scrolls general correspondence'), the profound traumas of his own refugee background must also be taken into consideration in understanding both his decision-making processes and the diasporic networks into which he tapped in the USA (Murre-van den Berg 2013, pp. 63–64). The clergy at St Mark's had, during the Mandate period, attempted to promote the use of the Syriac language – not just for liturgical purposes, but by members of their congregation – in a move to rebuild Syriac culture in the wake of the *Seyfo* (*ibid.*, 66). Samuel's desire to maximise the price he could obtain for the scrolls should also be seen in this wider historical context, bound up in the early twentieth-century geopolitics of the Middle East.

The strength of the Syriac Orthodox refugees' claims to help and support, alongside those of hundreds of thousands of other Palestinians displaced by the Nakba, is beyond dispute. Several of the archaeologists who in 1949 were helping the Archbishop with his attempts to attract the highest possible price for his scrolls stated that they were doing so because they believed that the proceeds would go to Syriac Palestinian refugees (Kiraz 2005, p. 2, 14). But for Samuel to rest his justificatory narrative, published almost two decades after the fact, upon this issue is highly disingenuous. Having rejected a number of previous offers, in 1954 he had sold the four scrolls in his possession to a middleman who passed them on to Israeli archaeologists, for a sum well below that initially quoted and generally expected (Shanks 1998, pp. 22–23, Flint 2013, p. 6). And even when he acquired the agreed \$250,000, the US government classed it as personal income and, despite a lengthy legal case, much of it ended up with the IRS (*ibid.*, 23; according to Kiraz (2005, p. 122) the sum was '£87,000' but it is not clear of which currency Kiraz is writing). Back in what was now the Jordanian-ruled West Bank, displaced Syriac Orthodox (including Anton Kiraz's family) were highly critical of the Archbishop and his claims. Letters from both Kiraz and his mother, written in 1949, are bitter in their rejection of Samuel's claims to US audiences that he is working on behalf of the community in Jerusalem, calling his words 'fake and hypocrisy,' and stating that the only aid they had received was some second-hand clothes from England (Kiraz 2005, p. 16, 22, 27); like Samuel, they appear to speak for the entire Syriac community, but in doing so reveal the ruptures within it, pre-existing but exacerbated by the Nakba.

Syriac Orthodox and the scrolls after the Nakba

The entanglement of the Syriac Orthodox community in Bethlehem and the Dead Sea Scrolls did not end with the Nakba of 1948, the point at which the purview of this journal issue ends. As well as

Archbishop Samuel's efforts to sell his four scrolls in the USA, and his dispute with Kiraz, George Isha'ya continued to be questioned by archaeologists wanting to know more about the location of the caves he had visited, whilst Khalil Shahin perhaps came off worst, apparently having been threatened with violence by members of the Ta'amira Bedouin who felt that he had cheated them, and with arrest by Metropolitan Samuel when Kando approached him during a later visit to Jerusalem to ask him for money – for himself, and to pay off those threatening him (Kiraz 2005, p. 125). Finally, in 1967, when Israel defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria in the June War, it occupied the PAM and thus acquired most of the Scrolls found in the 1940s and 50s by Ta'amira explorers and by the official excavations headed by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, its director, G. Lankester Harding, and by Père Roland de Vaux of the École Biblique.

But Yigael Yadin, the Israeli archaeologist (and later politician) who had bought Archbishop Samuel's four scrolls in 1954, had been embroiled in on-off negotiations for a further complete scroll or scrolls in 1960–1961, via a clergyman in the USA who was acting as a broker for Khalil Shahin. Yadin had also been called up as a military advisor to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol just before the war broke out. When Israel's victory led to the occupation of the Jordanian-ruled West Bank, Yadin sent a detachment from the intelligence corps to Bethlehem to track down Shahin and the scrolls. Shahin never wrote down an account of his involvement in the Dead Sea Scrolls affair, either in 1947–1949 or 1967, so the details of what happened in Bethlehem remain vague. Yadin himself, in his announcement of the find, stated that he could not divulge details in case the acquisition of future discoveries was endangered, but that the story would 'seem like a tale from the Arabian Nights' (Yadin 1969, p. 139). Yadin's (largely sympathetic) biographer states that when Shahin initially refused to hand over the artefacts – for which he had been asking up to US \$200,000 six years earlier – he and his son Anton were subjected to 'a lengthy and increasingly unpleasant interrogation ... at a military installation' (Silberman 1993, p. 305). Other chroniclers have tended to blander language – the scroll was 'acquired' and 'found its way' to the Shrine of the Book (Hirschfeld 2004, p. 31). The intelligence officers brought the scroll, which had been hidden under the tiles of Shahin's bedroom floor, to Yadin, while Shahin lost no time in finding an Israeli lawyer to represent his claim for restitution or at least compensation (*ibid.*, 306, 308). He eventually received a substantial sum for what became known as the Temple Scroll, one of the largest and best-preserved of the collection (*ibid.*, 311).

Conclusion

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their associated artifacts was rightly greeted as an event of international importance, given the implications they have for our understanding of key moments in two of the world's three main monotheistic faiths. But this aspect of the finds, and the conspiracy theories and legends which have grown up around them, have obscured the historical context – of the nature of antiquities excavation and dealing in Mandate Palestine, of the different people who were involved in finding and selling the scrolls, and of the political conflict which was taking place at the time. This article's re-reading of these events and recontextualization of them in their historical setting thus achieves a number of aims. It reminds us that, despite the nationalistic framing of many of the scrolls in the museums in which they are held, they were found by Arabs on land politically designated, both now and then, as Palestinian, and the routes along which they travelled provoke many questions about the licitness and illicitness of antiquities, and how these legal and moral states should be determined. The long and complex history of the trade in antiquities and remains in Palestine is thrown into sharp relief, suggesting that in colonial settings questions of ownership are complicated by the views of colonised peoples who see their finds as a quasi-'natural' resource of the land on which they live, and demand the right to benefit from them. And chance moments recorded in the memoirs of key figures – including the fact that perhaps the first person to recognise the scrolls' antiquity was Ibrahim Sowmi, the amateur historian, customs official brother of Father Butros – upset the assumptions that indigenous and colonised

people know and care little about ancient remains on their land (Fields 2009, p. 58, Collins 2013, p. 33).

In the context of Palestinian history the approach and contents of this article also de-emphasise the scrolls themselves and consider instead what their story tells us about the times in which they were unearthed. It is a glimpse into a set of social and economic relations – between Bedouin producers and Bethlehemite merchants, and between the latter and Jerusalemite professionals – which are often poorly understood and simplistically described. It is also a window into the inner dynamics of one of Palestine's smaller and less well-known ethno-religious minorities, the Syriac Orthodox of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and how these are cross-cut by class and geography. And perhaps most importantly, in considering the trajectories of members of the Syriac Orthodox community, and the claims and counter-claims made by them in the context of refugeehood and political turmoil, it adds texture and detail to our understandings of how different Palestinians experienced the Nakba – including those groups such as the Syriac Orthodox who at the time may not have identified widely as 'Palestinian' or 'Arab', but who nevertheless suffered the same violence and displacement as majority members of the Palestinian population. This account inevitably foregrounds the accounts of Athanasius Samuel and Anton Kiraz, because it is these two men who had the wherewithal to preserve their versions for posterity; Khalil 'Kando' Shahin's key role, in particular, remains obscure and contested, especially given his descendants' apparent involvement in selling further Dead Sea Scroll fragments – revealed to be forgeries – to the Museum of the Bible (Greshko 2020). But in drawing together the many fragments of information still available on George Isha'ya, Sebastianus Marmadji, Butros and Ibrahim Sowmi, Malek Tannourji and the even more elusive members of the Syriac community who helped shape the route of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Samuel and Kiraz fall into context. The Nakba and Naksa (the 'Setback' of the 1967 Arab defeat in the June War) experiences of Athanasius Samuel, Anton Kiraz and Khalil Shahin thus highlight how their encounters, and those of other Syriacs, with the wider political situation were shaped by their pre-1948 social environments and networks, and how they deployed resources – material, identitarian, ideological and religious – in an attempt to navigate the wider catastrophe.

Notes

1. The term used throughout this article is Syriac Orthodox, the official preferred wording of the community in the twenty-first century. Much of the anglophone literature on the Scrolls written in the 1950s and 60s, and on the community during the Mandate period, uses the phrase Syrian Orthodox, or just Syrian, and reserves the term Syriac for the language spoken by many of the community and used in their religious rites. These religious definitions also overlap in modern parlance with the ethnic denominators Assyrian or Aramaic (Murre-van den Berg 2013, p. 64).
2. Because of the political conditions in the years after 1948, analysis and publication of the scrolls in Jordanian hands was carried out by a team largely comprising Catholic scholars, with no Jewish members. Underlying anti-Semitism from both the Jordanian government and the Catholic Church probably played a part in this, but on the political level at the time it would also have been impossible for Israeli scholars to access the scrolls held by the PAM (Collins 2013, x-xi, 18).
3. Syriac Orthodox Christians have had connections with Jerusalem since at least the fifth century, and the Syriac Orthodox convent of St Mark, an important site of pilgrimage for this denomination, dates to Crusader times; the current population of the diocese which covers Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories is around 1100 (Murre-van den Berg 2013, pp. 59–61). Much of the Syriac Orthodox community in Mandate Palestine had its roots in the refugees who fled the *Seyfo*, the neo-Aramaic term for the WWI genocide of Armenian and other Christians in the Ottoman Empire (ibid., 63). Although the *Seyfo* refugees swelled Syriac Orthodox numbers in Mandate Palestine from the hundreds to the low thousands, this was still a fraction of the global community; many of those in the Middle East remained or were internally displaced in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, whilst a significant and ancient population are based in India.
4. Examples include Timothy Lim (2017), also (Allegro 1956, De Vaux 1967, Collins 2013, Flint 2013).
5. See, e.g., Stephen Reed (2007, p. 199, 203–204, 211), in which the nameless Bedouin are identified as the reason for scroll fragments being mixed up and misidentified, and 'Kando' as having caused confusion and delay in them reaching their destination in a teleological sense that they somehow must end with the scholarly community.

6. Shanks 1998, p. 3, Collins 2013, p. 4. Even the exact identity of the finder is confused and debated between scholars of the Scrolls, as only a few of the original authors on the subject tried to make contact with the Bedouin, or were able to in the disturbed conditions of the Nakba. Even Weston Fields, who has reconstructed the most detailed timeline of the finds, states that the exact makeup of the original Ta'amira group is ambiguous, and may have numbered up to five men (Fields 2009, p. 24).
7. As illustrated by, for example, a memo of 26th May 1939 by the District Commissioner of Jerusalem, detailing conflicts over the leadership of the church in Jerusalem and entailing interventions by the Patriarch, and related correspondence (Palestine Mandate/Israel National Archives folder 107/3, 'Syrian Orthodox Community,' 26–27 et passim; see also folder 28/21, 'Protest by the Vicariate of Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate against the installation by Armenians of Electric Wire and lamps in their Chapel of St Joseph and Nicodemus in the Holy Sepulchre, 1926-1944'; and 6581/23 'Syrian Orthodox School/St Mark's School 1927-1947').

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