

Rooted in the Holy Land

The Ethnic Origins of the Bethlehemite Hamael¹



By Anton Mansour

Modern genetics enables us to trace our ancestry over thousands of years. In 2005, National Geographic's Genographic Project endeavored to test and match the genetic samples of people all around the globe in

order to map the various positions of haplogroups and reconstitute the migratory movements of the Homo sapiens species within and out of Africa. Haplogroups are prehistoric Y-chromosome DNA groups that display specific sequences that have mutated over time. It was concluded that the A and B haplogroups were purely African negroids; the C group migrated to Southeast Asia; the D group to Tibet, northern China, and Japan; the E haplogroup seems to have migrated to Asia, with part of it migrating back to North Africa (Egypt, Libya), East Africa (Ethiopia), and the Middle East; whereas the F group migrated first to Asia and then to Europe and never returned to Africa. From the F group mutated the G group in the Caucasus, the H group in India, the I group in Western Europe, the J group somewhere in the Middle East (most probably in Mesopotamia), and the K group in northwestern Iran. The Y-chromosome DNA of the K group then evolved into a multitude of groups, called Eurasian groups, that range from the white to the yellow race. The R group represents, more or less, the Indo-Aryan subgroup that evolved from a Mongol or Asian race, and most of the European peoples are either categorized as this R

group or belong to the purely Western-European I group.

Marriages in Palestine traditionally took place within the *hamouleh*; foreign males generally were not accepted to join the circle. This explains why, in most cases, the same Y-chromosome DNA is found among all the families that constitute a *hamouleh*. Moreover, the deep clade test – as it can detect more recent mutations that correspond to historical periods – allows us to pin down more exactly in what region recent migration has taken place. For instance, if you test positively for the Y-DNA haplogroup E, it means that your paternal lineage settled somewhere in northern Africa some 30,000 years ago. When tests of the deep clade group examine the more recent mutations of your paternal ancestors, the E-M123 clade indicates the Levant and Anatolia as the most recent region of origin, E-V13 indicates a lineage that comes from Greece and the Balkans, E-V22 points to northern Egypt, and the E-V12 clade to southern Egypt.

I embarked upon the project of testing the origins of the Bethlehemite clans to demystify oral traditions. Intending to reconstruct our ancestral history with complete disregard for political or religious ideologies, I adopted a scientific approach in search of pure historical truth. In the methodology that I apply, Y-chromosome DNA (whose origin is prehistoric) is tested

Y-chromosome DNA tests determine the paternal lineage, mitochondrial tests ascertain the maternal lineage, and autosomal gene tests determine the percentages of different racial features in an individual. Thus, if a person has a paternal ancestor who carries European autosomal genes, we can identify this lineage through Y-DNA and autosomal gene tests.

in about six to seven families within each *hamouleh*. Next, I test the deep clade to approximate in what area and at what time in history the paternal lineage of the common ancestor of the *hamouleh* was settled. Then, I order autosomal tests to find out with which other races the paternal lineage of the *hamouleh*'s founder intermarried, before, finally, the mitochondrial DNA helps determine the origins of the maternal lineage, the places of origin of

■ Egyptian representation of Canaanite Hyksos traders.





■ Egyptian representation of blue-eyed Canaanite Hyksos women.

the wives of the paternal lineage of the *hamouleh*. My findings up to this point are summarized below.

Khumsan: According to oral tradition, the original Bethlehemites descended from five brothers (referred to as Al-Khumsan, as *khamsa* means five), who, for many centuries, were reluctant to let other clans settle in Bethlehem. Tests of the Y-chromosome DNA of these five families revealed that they



■ Egyptian representation of red-haired, hooked-nosed, tall, Canaanite warriors, probably Hurrian-Amorites.

all belong to the same G1 prehistoric group that originates from the eastern Caucasus, an area bordering the Caspian Sea. Even the Sleybis, who might be considered descendants of the Crusaders, were similar to the other four families. This result is not surprising and indicates that the name Sleybi – derived from the Arabic *saleeb*, cross – does not refer to descendants of a European Frankish Crusader but to traders who sold crosses during the Christian feast of the cross.

Farahiyeh: I then tested the second-oldest clan, the Farahiyeh, who are said to originate from the two brothers Farah and Kolah. They lived in the Wadi Musa area, and oral tradition says that they settled in Bethlehem in the seventh century, at the time of the Islamic conquest of the Bilad ash-Sham (lit. the land to the north, i.e., the Levant countries – Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq). Because some members of the Farahiyeh family believe that they are originally Yemenite Arabs, I tested these families. Their results matched those of the Khumsan, as they exhibit the Y-chromosomal DNA of the G1 haplogroup. Searching whether the G1 group existed in Arabia, I noted that they existed only in insignificant numbers in Yemen and Arabia at large, indicating that they are not indigenous. Thus, I reckoned that the Farahiyeh must have been more numerous and thus absorbed the Khumsan, probably because they were distant cousins who reunited to intermarry.

But the question remained: Why did some Farahiyeh believe that they were Yemenite Arabs, whereas the Khumsan did not have such memories? Most likely, because the Farahiyeh lived in an area that is known as the biblical Se'ir or She'ir (“hairy” in Canaanite) and whose

successive rulers were the Edomites and eventually the Nabateans,¹¹ the latter trading with Yemen luxury items such as frankincense. The Khumsan, however, lived in the Judahite territory that remained in the hands of the Edomites, rather than being taken over by the Nabateans. Thus, they were not as exposed to the Arabization process that affected the people who were in contact with the Nabateans and Kedarites (northern Arabian tribes that lived mainly in eastern Jordan and – similar to the Hebrew Judahites – from there also penetrated central Palestine where they found the Canaanites who had long inhabited the region). It is also worth noting that since biblical times, the territory of Se'ir – where Wadi Musa, Mount Shaubak, and Petra (the capital of the Nabateans) are located – used to be called *Se'ir ta' Shasu*, meaning the Se'ir of the Shasu. The Shasu were nomads who seemingly allied themselves to the 'Apiru (probably Hebrew) against the Canaanites for the conquest of Canaan and are probably the descendants of Ishmael. Finally, it is also worth noting that during the Crusader period, this area was called Montreal, and the European blood of the Farahiyeh likely stems from their intermingling with Frankish women, which would explain the simultaneous affinity and resemblance to both Arabs and Crusaders.

Next, I consulted the Old Testament to find out that the Amorites, who inhabited the mountainous area of Palestine (Jerusalem area), around 1350 BC invaded the territories of the Moabites and Ammonites (non-Israelite Hebrew tribes, living in modern-day Jordan). Further research revealed that these Amorites arrived together with the Hittites and the Hurrians, who settled in the Jerusalem area and became what is known in the Bible as the tribe of Jebus (Yabbus).



■ Canaanite YDNA was excavated in Sidon bones found in a jar dating back to around 1750 BC.

I probed even further into biblical scriptures to find out that Seir and Heshbon were descendants of Hur, the founder of the Hurrian clan in Canaan. Furthermore, Assyriologists found that the Yabbusi'um were mentioned as a northern Mesopotamian tribe in the annals of the Semitic Akkadians of Mesopotamia (modern central and southern Iraq). The Bible states that Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron were founded by Jebbus, whose father was an Amorite and mother a Hittite. Putting together these narratives, I was able to conclude that the Jebusites were a Hurrian clan that was absorbed by the Amorites who had intermingled with the Hittites, the western Caucasian cousins of the Hurrians.

Hasabneh: To prove this hypothesis, I had to test the largest clan in Bethlehem, the Hasban clan, to which belong as well the Hitti, Shreim, and Masriyeh families. Originally from the Hasban Valley, located on the border of the territories Moab and Ammon (modern-day Jordan), they are said to have migrated to Bethlehem in the seventeenth century via Petra, ancient Idumaea–Nabataea (southern Jordan). In the Bible, Hasban is referred to as

Heshbon, a Canaanite name meaning “little thinker.” This Heshbon also came from the lineage of Hur, whose descendants settled in Palestine along with the Amorite wave that invaded Jordan around 1350 BC, shortly before the arrival of the Israelites from Egypt into Moab and Ammon around 1200 BC. I tested the Hasbun family and found that they carry the same Y-DNA genes as the Khumsan and Farahiyeh families, which proves that they are of similar Hurrian origin, stemming from the Jebusites of the Jerusalem area who in the thirteenth century BC were led by the Amorite King Sihon.

Tarajmeh: At this point, I shifted my attention to the third-oldest clan in Bethlehem, the Tarajmeh, who are divided into two groups: the Ulad Harat at-Tahta (lit. sons of the lower quarter), who are descendant of the older brother, and the Ulad Harat al-Foka (lit. sons of the upper quarter), who stem from the younger brother. Both of these groups settled in Bethlehem, coming from Jerusalem around 1347, the time of the Franciscan friars’ arrival. These two brothers are said to have been allied with the Venetian army that fought the Seljuk Turks during the Crusades. In short, two conflicting oral traditions compete among these families: one says that they descend from Venetian translators who arrived together with the Franciscans, coming as pilgrims from northern Italy, later joined also by Spanish and French pilgrims; the other says that they are indigenous Palestinians from Jaffa who enrolled in the Venetian army and later became translators in Bethlehem. I tested families of both branches and found that the correct oral tradition is the latter. Indeed, all of them, without exception, were from the same origins and carried the same deep-clade E-M123* gene that mutated around 15,000 years ago in the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Anatolia),

deriving from the E haplogroup that originated most probably in the Sinai about 25,000 to 30,000 years ago. This prehistoric group is the direct descendant of the Y-DNA Z827 clade, a gene that was identified after it had been taken from the bones of Proto-Canaanite Natufians. Jaffa and other coastal Canaanite cities are, therefore, the most probable place of origin of the Tarajmeh’s forefathers, and not Venice, France, or Spain. If there is Italian blood in the Tarajmeh clan, it is likely to stem from their maternal lineage.

Kasakseh: The Kasakseh clan’s origins can be traced to Zarqa town, from where they came to Bethlehem in the eighteenth century. Tests revealed that they stem from the same Y-DNA group as the Tarajmeh, meaning E, and exhibit the same mutation M123*. Hence, their origins are also Proto-Canaanites. I did not, however, test all the families in this clan; further testing is still in progress.

Najajreh: I then proceeded to test the two Najajreh families, the Morqos and the Zarruqs, the latter through its offshoot, the Jaqaman family who claim to be of European descent. Because the Al-Ali and Abu Rdeineh families are descendants of the Zarruq family as well, by testing Jaqaman, we tested these two offshoots as well. The tests showed that both the Morqos and the Jacaman families carry the G1 gene, just like the other original Bethlehemite Jebusite families. So here again, no Crusader or pilgrim origins but pure Bethlehemites. The European blood seems to stem from the maternal lineage. The Qattans, who originally came from Lydda and joined the Najajreh clan much later, turned out to carry the G2 genotype, most probably inherited from the Hittite people, as G2 is the genotype of people who originated in the Western Caucasus and western Anatolia.



■ Member of the Tarajmeh clan around 1780.

Ghathabreh: Having joined the Najajrah clan, the Ghathabreh clan is composed of seven families: Saqa, Sammur, Hosh, Ghattas, Mansur-Barbur, Anastas, and Nassar. Tests of the Ghathabreh clan revealed that most of its members carry the G1 genome, except for the Saqas, who carry E-V12, an Egyptian element that likely penetrated some Arab or Canaanite tribes. The Nassars also belong to the G1 group, but to a more recent genetic mutation, found among Armenians, which confirms the oral tradition that the Ghathabreh Nassars are of Armenian origin. The Sammurs have not yet been tested, whereas tests of the Anastas family revealed that they carry J2, an ethnic Canaanite gene that was found in the bones of Sidonian Canaanite males from around 1700 BC.

Anatreh: In the seventeenth century, the Anatreh clan came to Bethlehem from the village Tell ‘Antar, located south of Herodion’s Palace, next to the village of Teqoa, where the Bedouin Arab Taamreh tribe lived. I tested all the various branches, among them the Freij, the Faraj (who have become

the Canawati), the Bandak, and the Khursan subgroups. The Bandaks are sometimes said to originate from Venice, Italy (called *Al-Bundukiyah* in Arabic) – while others claim that they come from Yemen – and the Khursan were considered to be of Germanic origin because they have fair eyes, hair, and skin. The Y-chromosome DNA of the Bandaks, however, was similar to that of the Freij and Canawati – who are all of dark complexion – and similar as well to the relevant DNA of the Khursan. Hence, all the Anatreh family branches are of the same origin and neither Yemenite nor Germanic or Italian; they carry the eastern-Caucasian Hurrian G1 gene. The reason why some of them believed they were Germanic was most probably due to marriage with Germanic pilgrims on the maternal side, and the reason why they believed they were Yemenites may be that they intermingled with Arab tribes of southern Palestine. But the paternal lineage was the same for all Anatreh families, and this lineage is Jebusite, just like the Khumsan, Farahiyeh, Najajreh, and Hasbun families.

Hreizat: The Hreizat clan is said to be from villages around Jerusalem and from Teqoa, while some of them believe that they come from the village ‘Anjara that lies on the shores of the Jordan River. All those tested were also G1 Jebusites. Further testing is taking place to find out whether the families from Tekoa are genetically distinct from the ones that come from the villages Hreizah and Sur Baher that are located near Jerusalem.

Handal: The Handal family, the second-largest family in the area, came to Bethlehem in the seventeenth century, fleeing Tekoa after a dispute with the Taamreh tribe. For the first time, tests revealed a Semitic family of the nomadic J1 Y-DNA type to which most Arabs, Hebrews, Arameans, and

Assyrians belong. I then tested further to determine the specific clade – to find out whether they were of the Bedouin, Hebrew (including Judahite, Edomite, Nabatean, Ammonite, Moabite), or Amorite-Canaanite branch – and it turned out that they were of the latter branch, found in northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Looking into the etymology of their name, I discovered that it refers to a plant found on the eastern banks of the Jordan River in ancient Moab, an area that was occupied by the Amorites around 1350 BC. I thus assume that, most probably, the Handals were ethnic Amorites who had been absorbed first by the Moabites, then by the Ammonites, and eventually most likely by the Edomites who took over Judah, where Tekoa was located. The recounted hypothesis that the name Handal may have come from the German *Händler* (meaning trader) is, therefore, extremely weak. Not only is it unlikely that a German trader would settle in Tekoa on the border of the desert, but moreover, the family's typical facial traits show hooked noses, and they tend to have olive skin and black hair. To find blue or green eyes among some of the Handals is not surprising, as many Palestinians and other Levantines share this characteristic. Resembling the original Canaanites and Amorites, who had intermingled with Aryan elements and then intermarried with the Hittites and Hurrians of Anatolia, they exhibit features that were already depicted by ancient Egyptians when they showed the Hyksos people who invaded Egypt circa 1720 BC.

Qawawseh: Towards the end of my research, I moved my attention to the religiously important Qawawseh tribe. Here, I was surprised to find a clan that, unlike the other clans of Bethlehem, is completely heterogeneous. The Qawwas and their offshoot, the Thaljiyehs, carry the J2



■ Canaanite Hyksos traded with Egypt circa 1900 BC. Their features are very similar to the features of present-day members of the Handal clan.

gene that is also found among the Anastas family, indicating that they are ethnic Canaanites. The Qarraa family, however, was from a very ancient Egyptian branch that has not mutated (incidentally, it can also be found in Sardinia), which means that they could well be descendants of Egyptians or of Canaanites with Egyptian origins. The Al-Lusis, tests revealed, belong to an Ethiopian group; they may be descendants of ethnic Ethiopian priests or Arabs of Ethiopian-Abyssinian origin. The Juhas, who came to settle in Bethlehem from Tekoa, carry the J1 gene, similar to the Handals, but from another genetic mutation, which means that, originally, they could have been Idumean or Nabatean. Genetic testing for the Qawawsehs is still going on.

Fawaghreh: Finally, I have started to test the Fawaghrehs, the only Muslim clan in Bethlehem. Coming from the village Faghur, this clan settled in Bethlehem in the eighteenth century and is said to be of Kurdish stock, stemming from the army of Saladin the Ayyubid. So far, I have tested one family (the Shokehs), and the results indicate that they are not of Kurdish-Aryan origins, as they do not carry the genotype that is found among the

pure Medes or Parthes (who founded the Kurdish language). Rather, they belong to the Caucasian G group. I am in the process of checking whether they carry the eastern-Caucasian G1, like the original Bethlehemites, or the western-Caucasian G2, like the Hittites of Anatolia. In either case, it would mean that if they are historical Kurds indeed, they are not ethnic-Aryan Kurds from Iran and Russia but stem from the indigenous Hittite people of Anatolia, most of whom became Armenians in Anatolia before they became Kurdish or Turkish. Other Fawaghreh families are said to be Arabs and need to be tested as well. One of them is of Taamreh origins, which will allow us to compare their Y DNA with that of the Handal and Juha families.

Syrian: I have begun to test, as well, the Syriac clan of Bethlehem, whose members mainly came from the Syrian people in territories that were lost to the Turks. They are of Assyrian and Aramean origins, sometimes also Canaanite. So far, one family (the Shahin of the Asfes clan) carries the J1 genome, and they seem to be most probably of ethnic Aramean or Assyrian origin, whereas the other family (the Basus, also of the Asfes clan) carries J2 and is, therefore, most probably Canaanite in origin.

In conclusion, Bethlehemite clans are predominantly descendants of Canaanite tribes (Natufians, Canaanites, Amorites, Hurrians, and Hittites) with some elements that

stem from Egyptian and Hebrew-Aramean (Idumean/Nabatean) origin. Their paternal lineage seems to be roughly 60 percent Caucasoid, 25 percent Mediterranean (Levantine and Egyptian), and 15 percent Semitic (Mesopotamian and Arabian). The maternal lineage shows some evidence of intermarriage with Aryan or European women who probably were pilgrims, while some maternal lineages come most probably from ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as from ancient Aryan Anatolian Hyksos. Further autosomal (percentages of various races) and mitochondrial (maternal) DNA testing will give more information regarding the various ethnic influences that have impacted the Bethlehemite genetic makeup and reflect the extremely wide spectrum of ancient Palestinian history.

Anton Luqian Yaqub Mansour of the Tarajmeh clan of Bethlehem (of Palestinian Bethlehemite origins) was born in France in 1965. He holds a BA in government administration, a master's degree in business administration, a degree in Vedic philosophy, and a diploma in the teaching of meditation. He is an entrepreneur in both the real estate and the flower sectors, a co-founder of the Bethlehem Icon Centre, and the founder of the Abna Kanaan Non-Profit Association.

ⁱ Plural of *hamouleh*: clan, group of related families

ⁱⁱ The Nabateans are an enigma. It is not known whether they migrated from Iraq or are descendants of Nabayot, son of Ishmael, son of Abraham.