It is difficult to say when the tradition of producing memorable religious items in Bethlehem started. It is said that Franciscan and Roman Orthodox monks during the middle centuries taught the natives how to hand craft primitive souvenirs to be sold to Christian pilgrims who visited the Holy Land to follow the foot prints of Jesus Christ. Olive wood, mother-of- pearl, terra cota, bee wax, camel leather, sheep wool, tinted glass, etc. were some of the row materials locally available and used to produce spiritual artifacts such as Crosses, rosaries, nativity sets, candles, biblical scenes, embroidery, art objects, etc. Handed down through successive generations, these traditional crafts, alongside to agricultural activities and farming, provided the daily bread to the majority of the population and contributed in enriching the artistic culture throughout the region.

The Bethlehem olive wood craft was the craft that developed most. During the last decades, modern techniques were adopted, fine art schools and vocational centers were inaugurated and scholarships were granted for talented artists in an effort to develop and modernize the trade and adapt it to the variable competitive market's needs. Today, one can say that the olive wood craft in Bethlehem has evolved into a reputable industry.

OlivArt, being founded at the beginning of this evolutionary process; had served as a vocational center for tenths of artisans. Many of them still work for OlivArt today. Usually it takes more than two years to train a qualified carver


