SECTION 5

Living Empire in the Provinces

The Universal and the Particular: A View from Ottoman Homs ca. 1700

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Hem Evrensel Hem Mahalli: 18. yüzyıl Osmanlı Humus'undan Muhammed el-Mekkî'nin İzlenimleri

Öz ■ Suriye taşrasında bulunan Humus kasabası sakinlerinden biri, 1688 ve 1722 yılları arasında yaşadığı kente ve kentin çevresindeki hayata dair izlenimlerini kayda geçirdi. Muhammed el-Mekkî'nin anlatısı, imparatorluğun siyaseten baskın olan dinine (İslam'a) mensup olmakla birlikte kendi mahalli çevresine de sıkı sıkıya bağlı olan, Osmanlı tebaasından birinin dünya görüşüne dair kesitler sunmaktadır. Suriye'nin küçük kasabalarından birinde kaleme alınmış olan bu nadir belge, modern dönem öncesi Osmanlı iktidarının ikonografisinde köklü bir yer tutan cihanşümul İslam telakkisi ile sınırlı ve son derece hususiyetçi olan mahalli mensubiyetler arasındaki gerlimi gözler önüne serer. Bu makale, el-Mekkî'nin kendisini ve içinde yaşadığı dünyayı nasıl kavradığını, mahalli seçkinlerle olan ilişkisini, söz konusu seçkinlerin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda mevcut olan daha geniş ilişkiler ağıyla olan bağlantılarını, el-Mekkî'nin kimlik algısını, adalet ve zulüm kavramlarını anlayış biçimini tartışmaya açmaktadır. El-Mekkî'nin anlatısını okuyanlar bu anlatıda yerel başıbozuk askerlerle, şehirli seçkinlerle, kabile topluluklarıyla, Hristiyanlarla ve Osmanlı'nın taşradaki idarecileriyle karşılaşırlar. El-Mekkî'nin tarihçesi, acımasız çevre ve doğa şartları karşısında modern öncesi insanın yaşadığı tehlikeli hayatı da resmetmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı, Suriye, Muhammed el-Mekkî, Humus, Araplar, Adalet, Zulüm

Between 1688 and 1722 a resident of the unheralded Syrian provincial town of Homs recorded his impressions of life in the town and its surroundings. Muhammad al-Makki's account offers glimpses of the worldview of an Ottoman subject

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who shared the Ottoman Empire's politically dominant religion (Islam) yet who was firmly grounded in his provincial environment. This rare document from one of Syria's smaller towns illustrates tension between a pre-modern Muslim universalism rooted in the symbolism of the Ottoman Sultanate, and local affiliations that were parochial and highly particularistic.

Homs is a venerable town located near the Orontes River. In Ottoman times as well as today, Homs has been at the crossroads of major trade and communication routes that link Syria's interior to the Mediterranean coast, and that join the country's north to its south. Typical of Syria, Homs has a continuous history dating from ancient times when it was known as Emesa and produced two Roman Emperors. The city's Christian roots go back to late antiquity, and a relic (the Sash of the Virgin Mary) was preserved until recently in one of [a change to reflect the effects of 2013-2014 fighting in Homs and the gutting of the church in question] Homs's Old City churches, a site of documented Christian worship going back to Roman and Byzantine times. Homs also has a significant place in Islamic history: Syria's Arab conqueror, Khalid ibn al-Walid, is buried nearby; and within and around the (now vanished) walls of its old city Homs hosts many tomb-shrines of Companions of the Prophet. (Up to 500 Companions are said to have settled in Homs.) A venerated Qur'an, believed by tradition to be one of the original copies compiled at the time of Caliph 'Uthman, was housed in Homs's citadel till the First World War when the retreating Ottomans took it with them to Istanbul.[1]

Homs owes its longevity as a settled urban site to its location in the Orontes River valley. The Orontes irrigates the city's extensive gardens, and Homs also benefits from its setting in the midst of a grain-producing region watered by winter rains that reach the interior plain from the Mediterranean through a gap in the coastal mountain range. Though not a major cultural and administrative center on par with Damascus, Homs was very much a part of Ottoman Syria's urban network and hosted the typical Ottoman panoply of judicial and military officials and institutions. These included a resident district governor (called *mutasallim* in the secondary literature, but typically *hakim* in local contemporary sources) who was appointed by the Pasha (Governor) of Tripoli (and later, Damascus); a *naqib al-ashraf* appointed by Istanbul from among prominent local families; a qadi sent or appointed from Istanbul, who was assisted by local deputies; and a principal (Hanafi) mufti drawn from the same local families that provided the *naqib al-ashraf*. Further underscoring its role as a typical Ottoman Syrian city,

1 N. Elisséef, "Hims," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), p. 397; Na'im Salim al-Zahrawi, *Usur Hims wa-amakin al-'ibada* (Homs: Tanwir, 1995), pp. 2:69, 167–172.

Homs had a guild and market structure comparable to those found elsewhere, and (as aforementioned) it was communally mixed (Muslim and Christian) similar to other Ottoman Syrian cities.

Literary sources that describe Homs ca. 1700 variously emphasize its greenery, its construction and its crafts, and its religious life and institutions. Writing of a journey he made through Homs in 1689, French traveler Jean De La Roque noted the comfortable circumstances and prominence of the city's Christians. He went on to praise the city's well-built fortifications, its public commercial buildings and caravanserai, and its textiles woven of silk and gold thread. Most striking to him was the town's green setting: "Enfin, les jardins qui environnent cette ville sont enchantés; ils sont principalement plantés de mûriers en alignement et parfaitement arrosés." Just a few years later the greatest Syrian *'alim* of his day, the Damascene Sufi 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi, wrote a differently inflected but no less positive account of his 1693 visit to the city emphasizing Homs's abundance of Sufis and scholars, and its tombs and religious sites associated with Companions of the Prophet and prominent *ashraf*. Although the Citadel showed signs of disrepair, its 'Uthmanic Qur'an distinguished it. But a John Green, a British writer who published his travel account in 1736, offered a more grudging depiction: "… [Homs is] a considerable city of Syria, indifferently large, though not as famous as it was formerly under the name of Emissa [sic]…. The walls are of black and white stone." He noted Homs's towers, gates and churches, whilst observing that the town was "exposed to depredations of Arabs." Both Green and al-Nabulsi remarked on the roughness of the path that led up to the citadel.[2]

During this same era, specifically from 1688–1722, Homs resident Muhammad al-Makki kept a diary of events that offers insights into his world-view and into the lives of people around him. Al-Makki owned some property, and seems to have worked as a *waqf* administrator or as a professional witness in Homs's sharia court, or both. Thus he had regular access to the local judiciary (i.e., the sharia court). His family roots lay in the village of Burayj (ca. 50 km south of Homs). Al-Makki's grandfather had owned a shop in Homs, meaning that the family had ties to the town extending back for at least two generations.[3] His rustic ancestry notwithstanding, al-Makki strongly identified with the Homs urban milieu.

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2 Jean De La Roque, *Voyage de Syrie et du Mont-Liban* (Beirut: Dar Lahad Khater, 1981), p. 74; 'Abd al-Ghani b. Isma'il al-Nabulsi, *al-Haqiqa wa-al-Majaz fi al-Rihla ila Bilad al-Sham wa-Misr wa-al-Hijaz* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-al-Kitab, 1986), pp. 32–42; [John Green], *Journey from Aleppo to Damascus* (London: W. Mears, 1736), pp. 32–34.

3 'Umar Najib al-'Umar, "Introduction," in Muhammad al-Makki, *Tarikh Hims* (Damascus: Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes de Damas, 1987), pp. xi–xii.

Al-Makki was acquainted with elites and notables of the city, and he had social and marital ties to them through his extended relations.[4] He was a client or follower of Homs's elites and notables rather than being himself among the top ranks. Hierarchy dominated al-Makki's experience and understanding of society. He felt deference to legitimate authority, at the apex of which was the Sultan, and he expressed his admiration for distant authorities including the Sultan and Grand Vizier.[5] Al-Makki's loyalty was to the idea of the sultanate as a symbol, more than attachment to sultans as individuals. Thus he recorded telegraphically and without emotive language the death of Sultan Süleyman II in 1691, the abortive reign of a strangled would-be successor Mehmet, and the accession to the throne of Ahmet II.[6] In contrast, al-Makki sounded worried when he learned of Grand Vizier Mustafa Köprülü's death two months later, and he prayed that the news would turn out to be untrue.[7] The importance of the sultanate as a public symbol was underscored when, in the following year (November 1692), Homs took on a celebratory atmosphere to mark the birth of twin boys to Sultan Ahmet II.[8] Celebrations were reprised six years later when the next Sultan, Mustafa II, sired a baby boy.[9] And once more the city was decorated in honor of Sultan Ahmet III in 1716, on which occasion al-Makki prayed that God would guide the Sultan toward truth and justice for his subjects (*ra'aya*).[10]

In addition to distant figures like the Grand Vizier and the Sultan, al-Makki was deferential to the more proximate figure of the qadis who rotated in and out of office in Homs. His text says nothing unkind about any of them. He is respectful as well of the local *ashraf* notables (principally from the Atasi and Siba'i families) who served as muftis, as deputy judges, and also as judges when an outsider from elsewhere did not occupy the position. As for military elites al-Makki was particularly attached to the Suwaydan family, *aghas* whose base was at Hisya (36 km south of the city, on the main road to Damascus that also led through al-Makki's ancestral Burayj). When a Suwaydan was *hakim* of Homs, al-Makki

4 E.g., the daughter of al-Makki's brother in Burayj was married to an *agha* (al-Makki, *Tarikh Hims*, p. 76); a maternal cousin was married to daughter of the *naqib* 'Umar al-Jawish (p. 82); his daughter associated with women from the household of a later *naqib al-ashraf* (p. 151).

5 Ibid., pp. 15, 19, 26, 97

6 Ibid., p. 30.

7 Ibid., p. 30.

8 Ibid., p. 34.

9 Ibid., p. 74.

10 Ibid., p. 210.

expressed satisfaction and prayed for his success.[11] Al-Makki's greatest local hero was Ibrahim Agha Suwaydan (d. 1709). During periods when Ibrahim Agha was out of office, al-Makki reported on his movements and expressed hoped that he would be appointed or reappointed to the post of *hakim*.[12] After Ibrahim's death his son, Sulayman Agha, was among those who rotated in and out of the office of *hakim*.[13]

The Suwaydans were a Homs version of "local Ottomans," people whose rank and duties placed them firmly in the Ottoman military and administrative structure, but who also were an integral part of local society. Al-Makki was predisposed to think well of this group, as when he invoked God's blessing for the soldiers of a local commander (*bey*) on the birth of a son in Homs whilst the commander was away on campaign. The boy's mother was the daughter of another military man.[14] "Local Ottomans" were one nexus between Istanbul and provincial centers like Homs. As an example of the Ottoman connection, Ibrahim Agha's retainers were known to spend time in Istanbul, and Ibrahim himself also journeyed there.[15] Locally, marital ties linked Ibrahim Agha and his sons to Homs's religious families. The Suwaydans' web of marital connections to the Atasis was particularly pronounced.[16] This proximity between the Suwaydans and Atasis extended to at least one inheritance dispute between Ibrahim Agha's son and successor, and the Atasi mufti who married a widow of Ibrahim Agha.[17]

Unsurprisingly in view of his respect for hierarchy, al-Makki was shocked and disgusted by villains or scoundrels (*ashqiya'*) who disregarded rank and status. One group of *ashqiya'* is said to have slandered ulama, *ashraf* and judges/rulers (*hukkam*) while meeting under cover of night. Al-Makki called on God to abandon or desert (*yakhdhul*) them, and anyone else as well who insults "the people of knowledge and people of the Prophet's House" (*ahl al-'ilm wa-ahl al-bayt*).[18]

Al-Makki's deference to hierarchy was tempered by his commitment to "justice" (*'adl*) and his condemnation of "oppression" (*zulm*). The arrival of a sultanic order in 1689 caused al-Makki to pray that the Sultan would "destroy (*yuhlik*) all who

11 Ibid., pp. 40.
12 E.g., ibid., pp. 54, 56, 59, 61.
13 Ibid., p. 162.
14 Ibid., pp. 40–41.
15 Ibid., pp. 71, 73.
16 Ibid., pp. 73, 84, 103, 146.
17 Ibid., p. 155.
18 Ibid., p. 19.

want to bring misfortune to the Muslims."[19] An imperial rescript of 1718 promised relief from arbitrary taxation, and al-Makki prayed that this sultanic edict would prove effective.[20] Al-Makki understood that the *hakim*'s main job was to combat injustice and oppression, entreating God to "answer him [i.e., the *hakim* Ibrahim Agha] and strengthen him among the Muslims, and give him victory over the evildoers (*mufsidin*) and lead him toward justice for the poor, the weak and the unfortunate."[21] Al-Makki also invoked the idea of justice upon the appointment of a new qadi in 1690: "We ask that God heals (*yuslih*) us, that He heals the evil in our hearts, that He gives victory to our Sultan, that He lowers our prices and that He accomplishes (*yakhtim*) [these things] for us, for our brethren, for our loved ones, for our shaikhs, and for all Muslims."[22] In a subsequent, typical evocation al-Makki prays for the Sultan's victory against unbelievers and for the dispensation of justice "in all of the Muslim lands."[23] Al-Makki mistrusted successive Pashas of Tripoli,[24] so when in 1705 a new *hakim* arrived from Tripoli, al-Makki prayed that God would orient the *hakim* toward virtue (*khayr*), and would diminish oppression and injustice (*al-zulm wa-al-jawr*).[25] In what must have been a triumph of hope over experience, al-Makki prayed that God would put goodness in the heart of a new Pasha of Tripoli who arrived in 1714.[26] But within a few months al-Makki was penning curses against him. Describing injustice, he decried oppression of the poor, the weak and the unfortunate when fiscal agents confiscated barley, cracked wheat and durra by breaking down doors, shops, and markets and entering peoples' houses.[27] Al-Makki was reluctant to acknowledge that his own favorite local officials, especially the aforementioned Ibrahim Agha, might be capable of injustice themselves. On one occasion in 1709 when the Pasha of Tripoli summoned the aging Ibrahim Agha to answer complaints lodged against him by "people of the Mountain," al-Makki prayed for and then welcomed a resolution

19 Ibid., p. 11.

20 Ibid., p. 232.

21 Ibid., p. 10; see also p. 17.

22 Ibid., p. 13.

23 Ibid., p. 67.

24 E.g., regarding governor Mustafa Pasha in 1706: "May God destroy him and all oppressors," ibid., p. 116. In 1711 a group of ruffians associated with Qabalan Pasha killed and robbed in Hirmil, then arrived in Homs where their disruptions caused people to flee their houses. Ibid., p. 168.

25 Ibid., p. 106.

26 Ibid., p. 191.

27 Ibid., pp. 193–194.

of the situation in terms that spared Ibrahim Agha from any criticism.[28] Late in al-Makki's life he had kind words for an increasingly prominent local Ottoman named Isma'il Bey al-'Azm, a progenitor of the storied family of Syrian provincial governors who began their rise to power in the districts of Homs and Hama. In 1715, at a moment of insecurity and hardship, Isma'il Bey (called Ibn al-'Adm in al-Makki) provisioned Homs with wheat and food oil.[29] Two years later, al-Makki praised Isma'il Bey again: "He performed a great beneficence for the people of Homs, supporting the poor and the unfortunate by sending wheat and barley."[30] Isma'il Bey did this regularly.[31] Officials who supported the poor and the unfortunate, and who defeated obstreperous tribes thus offering security for townspeople and cultivators, attained al-Makki's gold standard of justice. Isma'il Bey was appointed *hakim* of Homs, Hama and Ma'arra in 1718, and al-Makki expressed hope that he would rebuild villages, provide security and administer justice.[32] Al-Makki wished Isma'il Bey success in a 1721 campaign against tribal Arabs.[33]

As for the antithesis of justice —oppression — al-Makki most frequently characterized *zulm* as coming from outside of Homs: from Bedouin Arabs, from Mountain Arabs, from Turcomans, and from greedy Pashas of Tripoli along with many of these Pashas' appointees including non-Suwaydan *hakims*. The mere mention of one particularly loathsome governor of Tripoli, Aslan Pasha, caused al-Makki to call on God to destroy Aslan and "all others who harm God's worshipers."[34] On another occasion — and quite typically for him — al-Makki called on God to destroy evildoer Bedouin Arabs "for our sakes, and for the sake our brethren, our loved ones, our shaikhs, our Muslim neighbors and all the Muslim lands."[35] Later al-Makki approvingly reported that Ibrahim Agha (at that point no longer the *hakim*) had seized and impaled three Mountain Arabs (*'arab al-jabal*) who deserved their fate.[36] He reported in a nonchalant manner that Nasuh Pasha of Damascus had killed men, women, boys and girls belonging to the Kulayb Arabs, and had sold the survivors and their seized wealth and treasures. Acknowledging that some of the surviving Kulayb had escaped and taken refuge with a notorious

28 Ibid., pp. 140–141.
29 Ibid., p. 203.
30 Ibid., p. 218.
31 Ibid., pp. 223, 225.
32 Ibid., p. 236.
33 Ibid., p. 251.
34 Ibid., p. 51.
35 Ibid., p. 17.
36 Ibid., p. 123.

Arab brigand/rebel who was among al-Makki's recurring bêtes-noirs, al-Makki called down curses on "each one who commits outrages and who is an enemy of his brethren the Muslims."[37] From the context this hail of curses was almost surely directed against the disreputable Arab tribal leader, not against the Pasha who had variously killed the Kulayb and ransomed or "sold" survivors (into slavery?). In 1721 al-Makki cheered another expedition against the Kulayb, indicating that they had it coming because they had disobeyed the Sultan.[38] On hearing news from the Hijaz in 1694 that the renegade Sharif of Mecca was besieging Medina and had mustered "many Arabs," al-Makki called down curses on him too.[39] When Turcomans came to Homs in November 1711 claiming to be pilgrims, al-Makki suspected they were up to no good. In fact their presence unleashed a wave of violence.[40] Expressions of fear, disgust and loathing regarding tribal depredations are leitmotifs of al-Makki's writing across the decades.[41] He regularly depicted Arabs and Turcomans as endemic sources of violence, trouble and worry for honest townspeople and travelers.[42] When in 1717 the *hakim* of the day returned to Homs from a successful punitive expedition against nearby Arabs, he was greeted as a conquering hero: "The poor and the unfortunate — men, women and children — opened the gates and went out to meet him. Some cried, and some blessed him, and they honored him with a great procession."[43]

Miscreant officeholders were little better. In the winter of 1710, when an official identified as the *agha* of the Grand Vizier visited Homs, al-Makki hoped that he would act to lift oppression and injustice tied to the misappropriation of water resources by the Pasha of Tripoli and his underlings. Al-Makki denounced the actions of these wrongdoers in some of his strongest language, viz., "What they did to people in terms of oppression, violations, tyranny and corruption, and seizing people reducing their wealth to nothing."[44] In 1712 al-Makki was aghast when the Mufti and other local worthies were treated cruelly and put in chains, an injustice attributed to the Tripoli Pasha's *ketkhuda.* (In the Ottoman version of plausible deniability, the Pasha claimed he knew nothing about the incident.)[45] Some years

37 Ibid., p. 143.
38 Ibid., p. 256.
39 Ibid., p. 44.
40 Ibid., p. 167.
41 E.g., ibid., pp. 185, 189 for later examples.
42 Ibid., pp. 16, 153, 159–60, 203, 226, 235.
43 Ibid., pp. 224–225.
44 Ibid., p. 147.
45 Ibid., p. 171.

before (1703), al-Makki's schadenfreude was close to the surface when he wrote of Aslan Pasha's humbling dismissal from Tripoli and subsequent visit to Homs.[46] Our chronicler's complaints about oppression and injustice reflected wider social concerns and public opinion. In 1714 Homsis were so upset with their *hakim* that they in effect called a general strike:

"The mufti, the qadi, the leadership [*niqabat*] of the *ashraf* and the Christians, and the craftspeople (*ahl al-hiraf*) all left and went to the [banks of the] Orontes…. The market and the mosques were closed, there were no adhans and prayers. After two days, [the *hakim*] Husayn Agha Ibn Dandash and his associates left the city".[47]

A few years later al-Makki passed along news of a similar protest action in Damascus.[48]

Al-Makki also cited a case of injustice and oppression on a personal level, when he referred to an offender who had usurped his grandfather's shop in Homs, and in a formulaic way invoked God's intervention against evildoers.[49]

Al-Makki expressed his hope that revenues collected in the name of the Sultan would be used to further the cause of justice. Only thus, he implied, could these onerous burdens be considered a legitimate exercise of authority. His prayer for the provenance of justice upon the accession of Sultan Mustafa in 1695[50] underscores the cardinal importance of justice as a component (or condition) of al-Makki's deference to hierarchy. He also expressed high hopes when delegations from Homs went to Istanbul to plead for assistance and succor. Thus, for instance, a delegation departed for Istanbul in December 1689 to petition the Grand Vizier Mustafa Köprülü about local conditions (*fi jihat hims wa-ahwaliha*). Among others the delegation included the head of the butchers' guild (*qassab bashi*), the head of the canal-workers' and water-carriers' guild (*saqa bashi*), and the local treasurer (*amin al-sirr*).[51] Another delegation went from Homs to Istanbul the following year (1690), to complain about Arab tribes.[52] The Ottoman-ness of a locale like Homs was underscored by special events such as a gathering of *sipahis* at the Khalid ibn al-Walid mosque in May 1703 where they unfurled their banner or standard

46 Ibid., p. 95.
47 Ibid., p. 197.
48 Ibid., p. 234.
49 Ibid., p. 143.
50 Ibid., pp. 46–47.
51 Ibid., p. 17.
52 Ibid., p. 22.

(*bayraq*), inspiring al-Makki to invoke the blessings of Khalid for the Muslims.[53] For al-Makki, the symbols of Ottoman authority represented both justice and the wider Muslim community, notwithstanding the rapacity, injustice, and moral failings of individual officeholders like loathsome Pashas of Tripoli. If Tripoli failed to meet the standard of justice for Homs and its residents, then Istanbul should step in and correct the situation.[54]

Recurring annual moments defined the cycle of the seasons and the passage of time. Major cyclical events included the dispatch and return of Mecca pilgrimage caravans (determined by the lunar calendar), the opening of the principal irrigation canal at the end of winter, and the harvest in May. The principal irrigation canal, the Mujahidiyya, was a mainstay of Homs's water supply and its irrigation networks, and when reporting its opening al-Makki often gave thanks to God. Popular rituals associated with religion and Sufism were pegged to the seasons. One that al-Makki mentions was called Shaikhs' Thursday (*khamis al-mashayikh*). This occurred on the Thursday before Easter, when Sufi shaikhs paraded with their banners and exhibited their powers through displays such as the Dawsa, where a shaikh rode on horseback over the backs of his devotees.[55] The 'Uthmanic Qur'an was brought down from the citadel on special occasions, including Sufi processions.[56]

The author's sense of those whom we would label the Other included tribal peoples (Bedouins and Turcomans) and Christians. He was hostile to and fearful of tribal peoples, and reports of their depredations fill many pages of his account over the years. When in 1707 al-Makki's local hero, the sometime *hakim* Ibrahim Agha, seized and impaled three "Mountain Arabs" while on an expedition, our author expressed hope that God would destroy all such evildoers.[57] On another occasion al-Makki reported with satisfaction the violent deaths of Turcoman grandees, characterizing them as among those who do harm to, sow corruption among, the Muslims.[58] Even when tribal grandees were not leading raids but rather were being feted in Homs by military officials either to conduct negotiations or to mark

53 Ibid., p. 93.

54 Ibid., p. 59.

55 Ibid., pp. 150–151. On rituals that took place on successive Thursdays in spring, culminating in Shaikhs' Thursday, see Jean-Yves Gillon, *Les anciennes fêtes de printemps à Homs* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1993). Note also the annual procession in May to Maqam Khidr, outside the walls in the shadow of the citadel, as another of Homsis' rites of spring. Al-Zahrawi, *Usur Hims*, p. 2:69.

56 al-Makki, *Tarikh Hims*, p. 228.

57 Ibid., p. 123.

58 Ibid., p. 83.

reconciliations, al-Makki's tone was guarded and wary.[59] When reporting news of sanguinary fighting having broken out at a (tribal) Arab wedding, al-Makki caustically noted that "fighting this way is their habit; every time there is a wedding they behave thusly."[60] Al-Makki never portrayed the actions of Bedouin and Mountain Arabs positively, but Turcomans sometimes appeared as allies of the local authorities such as when they participated in the *hakim*'s raids against Arabs who had trespassed on Turcomans' territory and stolen their livestock.[61] At other times Turcomans' status as outsiders became less salient, such as the time when as part of his administrative duties al-Makki witnessed or participated the lease of an endowed mill to Turcomans.[62] Early in his account al-Makki expressed hope that attempts to settle the Turcomans would have a positive effect,[63] but these sporadic efforts to integrate Turcomans did not diminish his fundamental mistrust and fear of them.

As for Christians (*Nasayir* or *Nasara* —"Nazarenes"), al-Makki uses this category in two ways. On the one hand, Nasayir refers to the collective identity of hostile foreigners.[64] At other times hostile foreigners are referred to more specifically as "Franks" (al-Faranj). In 1716 he happily reported news of North Africans sinking and capturing "Frankish" galleons.[65] But Christians were not only distant foreigners, they also were part of the local fabric. As *ahl al-dhimma* these local Christians were the Other to the writer and to his sense of himself as a pious Muslim in a community of Muslims. Yet they were not Other when his frame of reference was Homs as an urban community. Thus al-Makki occasionally mentions individual *dhimmis* or, collectively, Nasara in his accounts of people from Homs or nearby who got married, died or who traveled as part of a town delegation.[66] Moreover, al-Makki cites Christian feasts as a way of marking the passage of the seasons.[67] (He usually curses the feasts when he cites them, however.) From time to time a Homsi Christian abandoned his natal religion and became Muslim,[68] though on

59 E.g., ibid., p. 222.

60 Ibid., pp. 81–82.

61 Ibid., p. 86.

62 Ibid., pp. 123–124.

63 Ibid., p. 39.

64 Ibid., p. 7.

65 Ibid., p. 214.

66 Ibid., pp. 60, 109, 113, 124, 210, 229.

67 E.g., the beginning of Lent, the Easter celebration, and the Feast of the Cross. Ibid., pp. 54, 55, 121, 132

68 Ibid., p. 77. The convert is described/named as "the *dhimmi* Ibn al-Qatit."

one of these occasions al-Makki identified the convert as a thief and doubted the sincerity of his conversion.[69]

The author's world was male focused, reflecting what today would be called a patriarchal society. Except for a public incident in 1694 when a group of angry women blackened their faces to protest Turcoman depredations (including abductions and rapes), and to goad or shame the authorities into taking action,[70] women appear in al-Makki's narrative principally in relationship with the men to whom they were connected. Not all women in his account were mentioned by name as opposed to being referred to as the daughter or wife of so-and-so. Al-Makki typically recorded women's deaths by noting that the deceased was the mother or daughter of a particular man.[71] Al-Makki would also mention women when they became part of a marital union that the author deemed noteworthy,[72] or when one was party to a public morals scandal.[73] Al-Makki valued boys more highly than girls; when in 1702 he got word that Ibrahim Agha's wife (daughter of the Atasi mufti) had given birth, al-Makki wrote: "Some say it is a boy, others say that it is a girl, and we pray to God that the first report is true."[74] Al-Makki does not mention living sons of his own, or his wife, but he does reference two adult daughters, Saliha and Khadija.[75] For the most part, though, his account is silent about his own domestic or family life.

The author's sense of place begins with Homs and extends to the hinterland and administrative centers to which Homs was immediately bound. Administratively these were Tripoli and Hama. Al-Makki's account contains frequent references to visitors traveling to or from Tripoli and Hama, and to decisions and appointments made in Tripoli and Hama that have a direct impact on Homs. The district of Baalbak also was not far from the author's consciousness, and recurrent mentions are made of personalities from, or travellers to, or events affecting Baalbak.[76] Culturally and intellectually, however, Damascus was al-Makki's lodestone. His account includes occasional news of ulama of Damascus,[77] as well as to the

69 Ibid., p. 131.

70 Ibid., p. 43.

71 E.g., "The mother of 'Abd al-Baqi, the daughter of Taqi al-Hisnawi, died on Friday, God rest her soul." Ibid., p. 62.

72 E.g., ibid., p. 75.

73 E.g., the daughter of 'Isa Dallal in ibid., p. 62.

74 Ibid., p. 89.

75 Ibid., pp. 151, 219.

76 E.g., ibid., pp. 38, 43, 162

77 E.g., ibid., p. 41, 116.

most celebrated *'alim* of his time, the aforementioned Damascene Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi. This prominent Sufi's visit to Homs in 1693 generated interest and excitement that al-Makki shared. Nearly 20 years later, in 1722, one of al-Nabulsi's protégés came to Homs, stayed with the Mufti, and was assigned to a congregational mosque associated with a tomb of one of the Companions.[78]

In broader geopolitical terms, Homs was on a major a transit route of the Ottoman East Mediterranean world. Personnel visiting or passing through included luminaries from Jidda,[79] Jerusalem,[80] Nablus,[81] Saida,[82] Damascus[83] and Egypt.[84] Traffic between Homs and its near neighbors Tripoli, Hama and Damascus was frequent. (Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi's travel account notes that one of Homs's ulama was a frequent visitor to al-Nabulsi's Damascene home.) There was also a steady stream of travelers and delegations between Homs and Istanbul (typically a 20-day journey)[85], and travelers regularly brought news of Homsis in Egypt or returned after spending time there.[86] The pilgrimage caravans (to and from) were recurring annual events, and at those times of the year al-Makki would note the names of Homsis on pilgrimage. He refers to two tranches of pilgrims: the Aleppo pilgrimage caravan (al-hajj al-Halabi) and the "Persian" caravan (al-hajj al-'Ajami). They typically arrived in quick succession.[87] The Halabi caravan appears to have gathered land-route pilgrims from various Ottoman regions, including Abkhazia on the Black Sea.[88] While both tranches of pilgrims arrived in Homs from the direction of Aleppo, the Ajami ("Persian") caravan likely had its origins at or beyond the eastern frontiers of the Ottoman state. Payments from the treasuries of Egypt[89] and Damascus[90] also passed through Homs regularly, further linking the town psychologically and materially to a wider Syrian and Ottoman world.

78 Ibid., p. 259.
79 E.g., ibid., pp. 43, 75, 135.
80 Ibid., p. 89, 227.
81 Ibid., p. 136.
82 Ibid., p. 228
83 Ibid., p. 193
84 Ibid., p. 103.
85 E.g., ibid., p. 16.
86 E.g., ibid., pp. 55, 67, 76, 164
87 Ibid., pp. 47, 91, 136, 231.
88 Ibid., p. 146.
89 E.g., ibid., pp. 15, 50, 73, 136, 202, 210, 257.
90 E.g., ibid., pp. 88, 122, 126, 185, 205, 218.

So Homs was connected to regional networks. In al-Makki's writing the city itself was *baladna* ("our home town"); its immediate environs constituted *bilad Hims*.[91] As for what constituted Homs itself, al-Makki expressed the breadth of Homs's population when he described the turnout for a prominent shaikh's funeral in 1711: "The people of the town —big and small, free and enslaved — stood on the walls and hills, on the houses and the villas," in order to watch the proceedings.[92] Beyond the town and its immediate environs, al-Makki's Homs was proximate to Bilad al-Sham ("the lands of Damascus") in the South[93] and Bilad Ba'alabakk ("the lands of Baalbak") in the southwest,[94] whilst in the opposite direction lay Bilad Halab ("the lands of Aleppo").[95] Beyond Aleppo was Rum ("Rome") or the *diyar Rumiyya* ("the Roman lands") meaning Turcophone Anatolia.[96] Al-Makki's widest most all-encompassing characterization sees Homs as but one piece of Bilad al-Muslimin "the lands of the Muslims." External to Bilad al-Muslimin are Bilad al-Kuffar, "the lands of the Unbelievers."[97] But the limits of Bilad al-Muslimin are not defined or demarcated; al-Makki often refers to the Sultan, but never to the Empire (or *dawla 'aliyya*) as a bounded territory outside of which the Sultan's writ did not run. Greeting the new *hijri* year of 1121 (corresponding to 1709), al-Makki asked for God's kindness "for us and for the rest of the Muslim Sultans, against the whole of the Unbelievers."[98] On another occasion he prayed for the safety of pilgrims traveling by sea and by land "from among the community of Muhammad as a whole" (*min ummat Muhammad ajma'in*).[99]

So, what did it mean to be "Ottoman" in Homs during the decades when al-Makki wrote his account? The adjective Ottoman does not appear in his text. In al-Makki the default person was a Muslim; those who were not were marked as Nazarenes; individuals or groups of people were also associated with their hometowns; people were differentiated by rank and/or occupation; and tribal people and people from farther away were identified with ethnic markers (Arabs, Turcomans, Abkhazians, and perhaps 'Ajam). Networks of people, travelers and goods linked Homs to other Syrian regions, to Jerusalem, to Egypt, to the Hijaz, and to

91 Ibid., p. 159.
92 Ibid., p. 164.
93 Ibid., p. 152.
94 Ibid., p. 178.
95 Ibid., p. 152.
96 Ibid., pp. 35, 172, 224.
97 Ibid., p. 194.
98 Ibid., p. 139.
99 Ibid., p. 4.

Anatolia; and they all in turn were tied to the Sultan in Istanbul; but never did al-Makki refer to the Ottoman state as such or in the abstract. There is a sense in which the [Ottoman] sultanate was at the heart of al-Makki's world, "the lands of the Muslims," without however strictly limiting this world territorially or administratively. It would have been hard for al-Makki to imagine his world without the presence of a sultanate that gave it, and him, a symbol of loyalty and a fountainhead of normative justice and political legitimacy. Modern Arab identity is nowhere to be found in his account, and indeed it would have been an anachronism. For al-Makki, "Arab" usually meant a tribal Other, not himself and not his Ottoman-urban world.

And yet, in some instances the concept Arab resonated with al-Makki's sense of religious or cultural identity. He called the *hijri* calendar the "Arab" calendar, and he invoked the blessings of Prophet Muhammad who is "*sayyid al-'ajam wa-al-'arab*."[100] Toward the end of his account, offering an inclusive prayer for the entire *ummat* Muhammad, al-Makki defined them as "the living and the dead; Arabs, Turks, and peasants; from the time of Adam till the Day of Judgment."[101] Thus when in due course the unthinkable happened and the sultanate vanished two centuries later, adoption of some form of Arab identity was a historically rooted option for Homsis in a post-Ottoman world.

The Universal And The Particular: A View From Ottoman Homs Ca. 1700

Abstract ■ Between 1688 and 1722 a resident of the unheralded Syrian provincial town of Homs recorded his impressions of life in the town and its surroundings. Muhammad al-Makki's account offers glimpses of the worldview of an Ottoman subject who shared the Ottoman Empire's politically dominant religion (Islam) yet who was firmly grounded in his provincial environment. This rare document from one of Syria's smaller towns illustrates tension between a pre-modern Muslim universalism rooted in the symbolism of the Ottoman Sultanate, and local affiliations that were parochial and highly particularistic. This article discusses al-Makki's understanding of himself and his world, his connection to local elites, his and their connections to wider networks within the Ottoman Empire, his sense of identity and his understandings of justice and oppression. The reader encounters local paramilitaries, urban notables, tribal communities, Christians, and Ottoman provincial administrators. Through al-Makki, one also senses the precariousness of pre-modern life where little margin for error existed in the face of environmental conditions and the forces of nature.

Keywords: Ottoman, Syria, Muhammad al-Makki, Homs, Arabs, Justice, Oppression

100 Ibid., p. 212.

101 Ibid., p. 253.

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