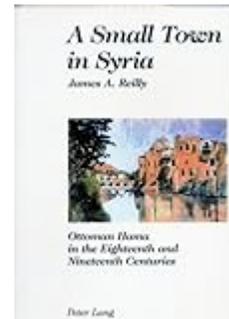




**James A. Reilly.** *A Small Town in Syria: Ottoman Hama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2002. 155 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-3-906766-90-4; \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8204-5606-5.



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## An Urban History of the Ottoman Empire

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In the course of the last decades, a number of books have appeared on the history of cities like Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, and Istanbul. These were influenced by works such as those of Andre Raymond on Cairo, Abdel Karim Rafeq on Damascus, Suraiya Faroqhi on Anatolian towns, and Robert Mantran on Istanbul. Syrian cities figured prominently in these scholarly studies because Bilad al-Sham was the most urbanized part of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, it included the third largest city of the Empire, Aleppo (second to Istanbul and Cairo), along with other cities as well as large and small towns. Consequently, an extensive literature on Syrian towns exists, including Aleppo, Damascus, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Acre, among others.

Many of these studies were based on the court records, which are available in numerous urban centers of the Ottoman state. James Reilly's book is part of this trend interested in urban studies of the towns and cities of Bilad al-Sham. He chose to work, however, not on a city but on a small town (Hama in Syria), moving from the large metropolis, which cannot be taken as a typical

urban agglomeration, to a much smaller and more typical town. Moreover, like many scholars before him, a large part of the book is based on the court records of Hama. Although Reilly does not explicitly attempt to compare the court records of this town with those of the larger metropolis, it is evident that they were smaller in volume. This is obvious by the fact that a single register contains eight years as compared to such registers in a district of Cairo, where a year could take up more than one register. The registers surveyed include register 42 which covers eight years (1727-1734), register 46 covering twelve years (1788-1800), and a third register covering four years (1848-1852). This could be either a result of the small population that it served, although it is apparent that it was used both by town dwellers and by rural residents, or because people had recourse to the court less frequently than they did in the big city. Reilly in fact notes that the women of Hama did not go to court as often as those of Damascus, presumably a reflection of the local traditions of this town.

The time frame that Reilly has chosen for his work, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, represents the

period in which important transformations occurred as a result of changing world conditions and during which Syria and other parts of the Ottoman Empire were gradually but unevenly integrated into a European world economy. The book shows the process by which the notables of Hama came to control the rural hinterland, first as tax farmers then eventually as landowners, a process that was accompanied by a dissociation of the town from the hinterland. We can thus observe the conditions that occurred in this locality at a time of major economic transformations.

According to the author many of the trends observed in Hama paralleled those in other parts of Syria. Thus, we find that, like Aleppo and Damascus, Hama underwent urban growth during the Ottoman period. Like-

wise, the pattern of emerging landowners in the later period had its parallels in other Syrian towns and cities. Moreover, as in many other Syrian towns, notable families remained prominent over many generations. The families that Reilly identified in the eighteenth century, like the Barazis and the Kaylanis, for instance, remained highly prominent till the period of the French mandate. The reader familiar with literature on Syria will not find any big surprises in Hama.

Reilly's scholarly contribution not only helps us to understand the way that a small town functioned, but also can help future scholarship to understand the bigger picture of urban Syria and the urban history of the Ottoman Empire.

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