Antioch's Last Heirs:
The Hatay Greek Orthodox Community between Greece, Syria and Turkey

Abstract
This study explores the identity dynamics of the Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox community of the Hatay province of Turkey. Citizens of Turkey, members of the Greek Orthodox church and Arabic speakers, members of this small but historic community stood among three nationalisms, Greek, Syrian and Turkish. Following the urbanization waves that have swept through the Turkish countryside since the 1950s, thousands of Arabic-speaking Orthodox moved to Istanbul and were given the chance to integrate with the Greek minority there. The Hatay Greek Orthodox point at the resilience of millet-based identities, more than a century after the demise of the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Antioch, nationalism, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Orthodoxy, identity

Introduction
Within Turkey’s dwindling Greek Orthodox population, there is a sub-group that has attracted relatively little attention, disproportionate to its rich history. The Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox community (cemaat or jama’a)\(^1\) of the Hatay (Antakya) province,\(^2\) on Turkey’s southern border with Syria has inhabited one of the most historic regions of the Levant, where Antioch, one of the greatest cities of the ancient and medieval era once thrived. Known in the

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\(^1\) On different aspects of the history and the sociology of the minority, also see Haris Rigas, ed., Üç Milliyetçiliğin Gölgesinde Kadim Bir Cemaat: Arapdilli Doğu Ortodoksları (İstanbul 2018)

\(^2\) Cultural and religious diversity in the Hatay province has attracted scholarly attention, not only because of its Greek Orthodox community. The province hosts Vakıflı, Turkey’s last Armenian village and a significant Arabic-speaking Alawite (Nusayri) population. See Fülya Doğruel and Johan Leman, ‘‘Conduct’’and ‘Counter-Conduct’ on the Southern Border of Turkey: Multicultural Antakya’, Middle Eastern Studies 45, n. 4 (2009), Fülya Doğruel, ‘İnsanıyetler Benzer...’-Hatay’da Çoketnili Ortak Yaşam Kültürü (İstanbul 2009)
interwar years as Sanjak of Alexandretta (Iskenderun), this province remained beyond the borders of Turkey and within French-mandate Syria, when the 30 January 1923 Greek-Turkish mandatory population exchange agreement was signed. This meant that the Greek Orthodox population of the province was not deported to Greece. While the 1939 annexation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey led thousands of Orthodox to the decision to emigrate to Syria or overseas, a substantial part of the population decided to remain and become citizens of Turkey, mainly in the cities of Antakya and Iskenderun, the towns of Arsuz, Altınözü (Qusayr) and Samandağ (Süveydiye) and their adjacent villages. Those who remained maintained their Greek Orthodox identity. Identifying with the Sunni Arab minority of Turkey was never an option: As in the Ottoman era, their Arabic linguistic identity was one

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5 The simultaneous use of the terms ‘Rum’ and ‘Yunan’ in Turkish language has often led to confusion but has also offered interesting insights into modern Greek identity. The term ‘Rum’ comes from the word ‘Roman’ and refers to the Greek Orthodox subjects of the Eastern Roman (aka Byzantine) and the Ottoman Empire, while the term ‘Yunan’ refers to ancient Greeks and to the Greek Orthodox citizens of the modern Greek nation-state (Yunanistan). Following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the Greek Orthodox living beyond the borders of Greece, in Turkey, Cyprus and the diaspora were also called ‘Rum.’

of their identity features, but never strong enough to identify with Turkey’s Arab Sunni Muslim minority. Their identification with Sunni Islam was too strong to allow for Orthodox to define their language as their primary identity badge. Citizens of Turkey, members of the Greek Orthodox Church and Arabic speakers, this small but historic community stood among three nationalisms. They have faced the option of either integrating into the Turkish mainstream by emphasizing on their citizenship and abandoning their primordial identity bonds based on local community and Orthodoxy,\textsuperscript{7} integrating with Turkey’s Sunni Muslim Arab minority, due to their language, or integrating into the Greek minority by focusing on their religious identity. The Hatay Greek Orthodox community could also be viewed as a ‘double minority,’ in other words a minority within a minority.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{The “Vestigial Millet” and the Role of Linguistic and Religious Pluralism}

This study embarks on an overview of the history of this extraordinary city, which is essential for the exploration of the complex identity of the Hatay Greek Orthodox community. It is based on primary ethnographic research, interviews, participant observation and personal communications, which the author conducted with members of the community in Hatay, as well as with members of the community diaspora and officials in Athens, Damascus and

\textsuperscript{7} This is not to say that some primordial identities did not evolve and acquire new features under the influence of modernity. On the historicization of sectarianism in the case of Lebanon, see Ussama Makdisi, \textit{The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon} (Berkeley CA, Los Angeles & London 2000) 67-145.

Istanbul, who chose to maintain their anonymity. It engages with the concept of ‘vestigial millet system’ introduced by Barkey and Gavrilis, and Brubaker’s work on language and religion as identity components to explore the identity of the Hatay Greek Orthodox community. Barkey and Gavrilis argued that despite the formal abolition of the millet system with the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey vestiges of the millet system have continued to shape identities and state policies. Such vestiges can help explain the identity dynamics of the Hatay Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox community, as primordial affiliations proved resilient and adaptive against pressures by modernization and urbanization. Brubaker argued that language and religion were ‘arguably the two most socially and politically consequential domains of cultural difference in the modern world.’ Language and religion have been the most consequential elements of the identity of the Hatay Greek Orthodox

9 Contrary to the mainstream view that the millet system was established by Sultan Mehmet II and Patriarch Gennadius Scholarius a few months after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, recent historical research has pointed that the emergence of the Greek Orthodox (Rum) millet institution from what the Ottoman records described as Rum tai’fe (group) was a long and complicated process. On this see, Benjamin Braude, ‘Foundation Myths of the Millet System’ in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., Christians & Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society (New York & London 1982) 69-79, Paraskevas Konortas, ‘From Ta’ife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community’, Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century, n. (1999) 169-76, Molly Greene, ed., Minorities in the Ottoman Empire, vol. 12 (2005) 1-12, Molly Greene, Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453 to 1768 (Edinburgh 2015) 57-86, Tom Papademetriou, Render Unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries (Oxford & New York 2015) 19-62.


community, as it complex history can attest to. Brubaker explored the role of linguistic and religious pluralism in the formation of identity in primordial and modern settings. In his view:

Conquest, colonization, and especially (in the contemporary world) migration generate religious and linguistic pluralism in similar ways, by importing it from without….Individuals routinely change their linguistic repertoires as well. But they do so in differing ways and with differing consequences. For adults, at least, language change is mainly additive, though there may of course be some attrition of proficiency in languages that are seldom used. Religious change, on the other hand, is often substitutive and transformative. When adults add a new language to an existing repertory of languages, this may inflect their identity, but it is unlikely to transform it. Yet when they convert from one religion to another, or from one form of religious engagement to another, this can involve a basic transformation of identity.\footnote{12} People do not ordinarily simply add a new religion to a repertory of religions, notwithstanding the flourishing of various forms of hybridity and syncretism, nor do they ordinarily ‘convert’ from one language to another. For children of immigrants, to be sure, language change is often substitutive rather than additive; but this reduces heterogeneity in the receiving country, while religious conversion often increases it.\footnote{13}

Tracing the identity dynamics of the Hatay Greek Orthodox community between Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims, Greek-speaking Greek Orthodox and the mainstream Turkish population, as well as their position between Greece, Syria and Turkey with the analytical tools offered by Barkey and Gavrilis, and Brubaker is the main aim of this study.


\footnote{13}{Brubaker, \textit{Grounds for Difference}, 91-92.}
The Rise and Fall of a Glorious Metropolis

Antioch on the Orontes was one of the numerous cities Seleucus I Nicator, the founder of the Seleucid Empire, founded to honour his father Antiochus. Built on the banks of the Orontes — today’s Asi- river, a few kilometres from the Mediterranean Sea, it was destined to become the most famous of all its homonymous cities, the capital of the Seleucid Empire, a major economic, cultural and religious centre for the whole Levant and one of the largest and richest cities of antiquity. In the Hellenistic and Roman world, Antioch was second only to Alexandria, the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt, in its economic and political significance.\(^\text{14}\) The emergence of Christianity marked another landmark in the history of Antioch, as the city rose to the leading Christian centre of the Roman Empire.\(^\text{15}\) The diocese of Antioch was raised to one of the five Patriarchates of Christianity, evidence of its significance and influence within Christianity.\(^\text{16}\) Antioch maintained its crucial position, while Justinian was trying to heal sectarian divisions within Christianity until the transformation of Syria into a battlefield first between the Roman and Persian Sassanid Empires, and later between the Roman and Arab Umayyad and Abbasid

\(^\text{14}\) It is also worth noting that with the exception of an excavation led by Princeton University between 1932 and 1939 under the French colonial administration, no major excavations commensurate to the significance of ancient Antioch have taken place so far. The fast urbanization of Antakya and its environs in recent years have raised fears that important archaeological evidence will be destroyed before being discovered. See, for example, Michael Hodges, "The Remarkable New Hotel Built above the Ruins of Ancient Antioch", Financial Times, 06/03/2020

\(^\text{15}\) According to Acts 11:19-26, the very term ‘Christian’ was coined in Antioch to describe the adherents of the new religion.

\(^\text{16}\) St. John the Chrysostom, a leading religious and intellectual figure of the fourth century, the author of the liturgy used still today in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, was born in Antioch. He was trained there by Libanius, an Antiochian orator and tutor of rhetoric famous throughout the Roman Empire, who refused to convert to Christianity, remaining loyal to his pagan culture.
Empires exacted a heavy toll on it. A series of invasions, sieges and other war calamities devastated northern Syria and led to the rise of new regional city centres such as Aleppo and Aintab. The Arab conquest of the Levant in the early seventh century did not mean that war and conflict would cease in the following centuries. Northern Syria and Antioch remained contested between the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) and the Umayyad and Abbasid Empires until the Crusades era. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, in particular under the administration of Emperors Nicephorus Phocas and Ioannes Tzimiskes, Antioch and much of northern Syria were restored to the Eastern Roman Empire through a series of successful wars against the Abbasids. Antioch also played a central role in the Crusades: The First Crusade was legitimized with the restoration of Eastern Roman sovereignty over Antioch and Syria. The break of the Eastern Roman-Crusader alliance and the establishment of Crusader kingdoms in the Levant -not least of which the Principality of Antioch- brought again the city to the forefront of Levantine politics. Eventually Antioch became a capital of one of the leading Crusader states. The defeat of the Crusaders signalled the end of a century-long military struggle over Syria, and the annexation of the region to the Mamluk kingdom left Antioch devastated and shrunk. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate moved to Damascus in the fourteenth century, while maintaining its title as ‘Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East.’

Figure 2

From Antioch to Antakya

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17 Even under Umayyad rule, Eastern Roman culture continued to thrive. Ioannes Damascenos is a leading example of a Christian scholar and bureaucrat who served in the Umayyad Empire, while writing some of the most popular hymns throughout the Eastern Roman world. See David Richard Thomas, ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam: the First Thousand Years* (Leiden 2001)

Antioch under the Mamluk and the subsequent Ottoman rule was no more a dominant city of the Levant. It was more commonly known as Antakya, the Arabic adaptation of the Greek Antiocheia. Despite its demographic and economic decline, the region maintained its multireligious and multicultural identity. Sunni Muslims, Arabic-speaking Alawites (Nusayris), Christians of different denominations and Jews coexisted in a city that no more commanded the economy of the region. There was no drastic change in the Ottoman era. Aleppo and Aintab were the two cities that dominated the economy of northern Syria. Iskenderun, founded by Alexander the Great as Alexandria ad Issum and renamed in the Middle Ages to Alexandretta or ‘small Alexandria’ as Egypt’s Alexandria monopolized the name, rose to the most significant port of the region, serving Aleppo, Aintab and the Orontes valley.

As the Ottoman conquest of the Levant in the early sixteenth century integrated the region to the Ottoman institutions, the Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox of the Levant were eventually subsumed into the Rum millet. Similarly to the Balkans, where the Ecumenical Patriarchate was consolidating its hegemonic position over the Greek Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, it sought to establish firm control over the Orthodox dioceses of the Levant. While the province of Antakya remained under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Damascus-based Patriarchate of Antioch and all East, the effective influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its involvement in the election of the bishop of Aleppo (Beroea) and the Patriarch of Antioch increased in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This could also

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19 The Ottoman order often enabled a complex web of relations between different religious groups with overlapping identities. For the case of Ottoman Crete, see Molly Greene, A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean (Princeton NJ 2000) 174-205.

be viewed as a response of Ottoman authorities to growing Catholic proselytization activities among the Christians of the Levant, Armenian, Assyrian and Orthodox. Enjoying the support of French consular authorities throughout the eighteenth century, Catholic missionaries had succeeded in proselytizing a sizeable part of the Greek Orthodox population, particularly in the major trade hub of Aleppo.\textsuperscript{21} Recognition demands by the nascent Greek Catholic community were presented as reasons for the consolidation of the hegemonic position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over the Greek Orthodox (Rum) millet and non-recognized Christian communities.\textsuperscript{22} Nevertheless, the outbreak of the 1821 Greek War of Independence broke the trust of Ottoman authorities towards the Ecumenical Patriarchate, led to the loss of the privileged position of the Greek Orthodox and the official recognition of a Greek Catholic (Melkite) millet in 1848. Melkites laid more emphasis on Arabic language as an element of their identity and insisted on maintaining control over ecclesiastical affairs at the local level. This facilitated the rise of a secular Arab nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22} Masters, ‘The Millet Wars in Aleppo, 1726–1821: An Ottoman Perspective’ 146-50.

The rise of nationalism and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the redrawing of borders and identities in the region. Following the signature of the Moudros Armistice on 30 October 1918, France established a mandate in the territories comprising today’s Syria and Lebanon, including the sanjak of Alexandretta. As Antakya, Iskenderun and their adjacent villages belonged to the French mandate Syria, the Orthodox populations of the sanjak were not included in the population exchange negotiations between Greece and Turkey.


25 A series of books and postgraduate theses have been recently authored on the Hatay question highlighting a rising public interest in the topic. See, for example, the books of Yücel Güçlü, The Question of the Sanjak of Alexandretta: A Study in Turkish-French-Syrian Relations (Ankara 2001), Esra Demirci Akyol, Sınırdaki Kimlikler: Türkiye’ye İilha Sürecinde Hatay (İstanbul 2010), Serhan Ada, Türk-Fransız İlişkilerinde Hatay Sorunu (İstanbul 2005), Hamit Pehlivanlı, Yusuf Sarnay and Hüsamettin Yıldırım, Türk Dış Politikasında Hatay (1918-1938) (Ankara 2001) and the theses of Süleyman Tüzün, "İk Büyük Savaş Arası Dönemde Hatay Tarihi (1918-1939)", (Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1989), Sıtkıye Matkap, "Reconsidering the Annexation of the Sanjak of the Alexandretta through Local Narratives", (Middle East Technical University (METU), 2009), Seda Altuğ, "Between Colonial and National Dominations: Antioch under the French Mandate (1920-1939)", (Boğaziçi University, 2002).

26 On 30 January 1923, Greece and Turkey signed a mandatory population exchange treaty involving Greece’s Muslim and Turkey’s Orthodox populations. While the Arabic-speaking Orthodox of the sanjak of Alexandretta were exempted as they were no more under Turkish jurisdiction, this was not the case for the Arabic-speaking populations of the vilayet of Adana. Arabic-speaking Christians were a part of the Orthodox population of the vilayet of Adana, whose majority was Turkish-speaking. While all the Turkish-speaking Orthodox were included in the population exchange, a part of the Arabic-speaking population succeeded in being exempted due to their perceived non-Greek ethnicity. See Lambros Baltsiotis, “Ομογενείς” ή “Αλλογενείς”: Η Περίπτωση των
Nevertheless, the Republic of Turkey maintained its claim over the sovereignty of the province, which it considered illegitimately removed from the Turkish mainland. The term ‘Hatay’ was coined in an attempt to connect the ancient Hattian history of the province with Anatolia and by implication reinforce republican Turkish territorial claims. Despite the opposition of nascent Syrian Arab nationalism, French foreign policy was interested in engaging Turkey. The spectre of the Second World War and Turkey’s strategic position made France willing to negotiate with Turkey the annexation of the sanjak of Alexandretta in return for Turkey’s prospective alliance against Nazi Germany. The sanjak of Alexandretta became officially part of Turkey on 29 June 1939, following the declaration of independence of the ‘Republic of Hatay’ on 2 September 1938 and a controversial referendum on the future of the province. While the annexation of the sanjak of Alexandretta (or the province of Hatay, as the province was renamed) by Turkey was a triumph for Turkish diplomacy, it did not deliver Turkey’s

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27 The Hattians were one of the first people to inhabit Anatolia in the late part of the 3rd millennium BC. They also gave their name to the state that the Hittites established in the mid 2nd millennium BC. In the 1930s, as the ‘Turkish History Thesis’ claimed that Hattians were the first Turkish inhabitants of Anatolia, the use of the term ‘Hatay’ aimed to reinforce Turkey’s irredentist claims.


29 While Turkey failed to join the Western allies when the Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939, the territory remained an integral part of Turkey despite the protests of Syrian nationalists. When the French mandate over Syria ended in 1945 and Syria declared its independence it considered the sanjak as Syrian territory illegitimately ceded to Turkey by colonial power.
entry into the war on the side of France with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. This development separated the Greek Orthodox community of the province from the other Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox in French-mandate Syria and bound them to Turkey, a country that had forcibly expelled its extant Greek Orthodox population less than twenty years before.

*Figure 3*

*From Antakya to Hatay*

Being the latest addition to the territory of Turkey, the province of Hatay took part in the socioeconomic transformations that reshaped Turkey during the Cold War.\(^{30}\) As Iskenderun attracted the bulk of public investment with the development of heavy industry and port infrastructure, it became closer integrated with the mainstream. In contrast, Antakya remained relatively neglected, which contributed to the preservation of its distinct cultural identity and the preservation of minority cultures.

Relations with Syria remained acrimonious throughout the Cold War. The annexation of the province to Turkey was a move Syrian nationalism could never accept. As the end of the French mandate regime and Syria’s independence in 1946 did not produce any border changes, this territorial dispute became one of the impediments to the consolidation of friendly relations between Syria and Turkey. Syria demanded the cancellation of what it called a ‘colonialist deal against the interests and will of the local population’ and the annexation of the province to Syria.\(^{31}\) Official Syrian maps depicted the Hatay province as part of Syrian territory, while Syrian-Turkish relations further soured in the 1980s, due to the construction of the Atatürk dam

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\(^{30}\) Levent Duman, *“Vatan”’ın Son Parçası: Hatay’daki Uluslaştırma Politikaları* (İstanbul 2016) 345-98.

on the upper route of the Euphrates and Syria’s covert support for the Kurdish Workers’ Party (Parîyê Karkaren Kurdistan-PKK).\textsuperscript{32} Syrian territorial claims receded between 2002 and 2011, following the temporary rapprochement in Syrian-Turkish bilateral relations with the advent of the AKP administration and its new Middle East foreign policy. Yet relations reached a new low, following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and Turkey’s fully-fledged support for the Syrian opposition forces. The Hatay province was heavily affected by refugee movements and military operations and was instrumentalized in the justification of Turkey’s policies in war-torn Syria. In his effort to justify Turkey’s military operations in north-western Syria, Turkish officials often linked Turkey’s presence in northern Syria with its sovereignty over Hatay.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Between Citizenship, Language and Religion}

From a minority in the early Imperial Roman era to a dominant majority in the late Roman years and again a minority in the Ottoman years, the Christians of Antioch were characterized by linguistic diversity. In the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine years, Syriac, Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew were among the main spoken languages in the region. The Umayyad conquest of the Levant in the seventh century added Arabic culture and language to the Antiochene mosaic. Over the centuries, Arabic eventually rose to a dominant position in the province,\textsuperscript{34} while Greek, Syriac and Aramaic were reduced to the status of liturgical.\textsuperscript{35} Despite the proliferation

\textsuperscript{32} Robert Olson, ‘Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water’, \textit{Middle East Policy} 5, n. 2 (1997) 169-78.
\textsuperscript{33} See, for example, News Desk, “Başkan Erdoğan: Bugün İdlib’de Olmazsak Yarın Hatay’da Savaşıriz [President Erdoğan: If we are not in Idlib Today, Tomorrow we Shall Fight a War in Hatay]”, \textit{Sabah}, 01.03.2020
\textsuperscript{34} Haddad, \textit{Syrian Christians in a Muslim Society: An Interpretation}, 14-22.
\textsuperscript{35} This phenomenon was not unknown in Anatolia, where a substantial part of the Christian population was speaking Turkish but was using Greek as a liturgical language. With the introduction of printing, a new literature
of Arabic, the Greek Orthodox of the Levant continued defining themselves not on the basis of language but religion, as a part of the Rum ta’ife or millet. While they were recognized as congregation of not the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople but of the Damascus-based Patriarchate of Antioch, they maintained close relations with the Ottoman bureaucracy and the Greek Orthodox community throughout the Ottoman Empire. Religion remained the

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Hasan Çolak, "Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria: 16th-18th Centuries", (University of Birmingham, 2013)

On the Antiochian dioceses of Anatolia, see Ioannis T. Bakas, ʻΟι Αντιοχειανές Εκκλησιαστικές Επαρχίες της Μικράς Ασίας και Ο Ελληνισμός τους (Τέλη του 19ου-Αρχές του 20ού Αιώνα) [the Antiochian Ecclesiastical Provinces of Asia Minor and Their Hellenism (Late 19th-Early 20th Century)], Μικρασιατική Σπίθα [Mikrasiatiki Spitha], n. 17 (2012).
defining feature of their identity, even though some secularized Greek Orthodox Arabic-speaking Christian intellectuals became leading figures of the Arab nationalist movement, playing a crucial role in the rise of pan-Arabism. Russian involvement in the affairs of the Patriarchate of Antioch was also significant, peaking in the late nineteenth century. Aiming to curb the influence of Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate which it viewed as agents of British interests and reinforce the Russian influence among the local Greek Orthodox population, Russian foreign policy succeeded in transferring the control of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch from Greek-speaking to Arabic-speaking bishops. Meletios II, the first ethnic Syrian Arabic-speaking Patriarch of Antioch in almost two centuries, was elected under Russian auspices in 1899.

On the other hand, identifying with the Arab minority of Turkey was never an option for the Hatay Greek Orthodox community. As in the Ottoman era, the Arabic language remained a strong defining feature of their identity against non-Arabic speaking Orthodox Christians, but never pushed them to identify with Turkey’s Arab Sunni Muslim minority. Their identification with Sunni Islam was too strong to allow for Orthodox to define their language as their primary identity badge. Moreover, the annexation of the sanjak of

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43 Author, "Participant Observation" (Antakya, 10/4/2012)
Alexandretta to Turkey meant that Arabic would no more be taught in schools and Turkish would enjoy a monopoly in the field of education. As Arabic remained the mother tongue of the community, bilingualism grew with Turkish being increasingly used in the public sphere, and Arabic being used in private but less in younger generations, which had no formal education in the language, as well as limited opportunities to practice it.\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{Migration to Istanbul and Its Effects}

Urbanization that has swept through the Turkish countryside since the 1950s had a profound effect on the identity of the Hatay Greek Orthodox. Joining the urban migration wave, thousands moved to Istanbul and less in Ankara and Izmir. Those who settled in Istanbul established contact with the city’s Greek minority.\textsuperscript{45} As maintaining their primordial \textit{Rum} identity was increasingly difficult in the urban context of Istanbul, they were provided with new opportunities of self-identification. Existing research has pointed to a high degree of diversity between the members of the Istanbul-based community of Hatay Greek Orthodox. Some viewed themselves as ‘a minority within a minority,’\textsuperscript{46} which reflected the multi-layered identities of both Istanbul and Hatay Greek Orthodox. Others identified themselves as Christian Arabs, while in other the \textit{Rum} element of their identity has emerged stronger and brought them closer to Istanbul’s Greek minority.\textsuperscript{47} Their \textit{de facto} integration with the Greek minority of

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} On this, also see Özgür Kaymak and Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, ‘İstanbul’dı Yaşayan Antakyahı Ortodoksların Kendilerini Kimliklendirme Süreci ve İstanbul Rum Cemaatiyle iliskiselleri’ in Haris Rigas, ed., \textit{Üç Milliyetçiliğin Gölgesinde Kadim Bir Cemaat: Arapdilli Doğu Ortodoksları} (İstanbul 2018b) 77-85.

\textsuperscript{46} Aleksia Kotam, "Azınlık İçinde Azınlık: Hatay Rum Ortodoks Cemaati", \textit{Agos}, 5/11/2016

\textsuperscript{47} Kaymak and Beylunioğlu, ‘İstanbul’dı Yaşayan Antakyahı Ortodoksların Kendilerini Kimliklendirme Süreci ve İstanbul Rum Cemaatiyle iliskiselleri’ 85-95, Özgür Kaymak and Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, ‘Çelişkili Kimlikler: İstanbul'dı Yaşayan Antakyahı Ortodoksların Etnik/Dini Aidiyet Algıları’, \textit{Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi} 73, n. 4 (2018a) 970-76.
Istanbul was a development with profound consequences for both communities.\(^{48}\) Legally they did not comprise part of Turkey’s Greek minority,\(^{49}\) and language and cultural barriers existed. On the other hand, the identification of the Hatay Greek Orthodox with the *Rum* millet and Orthodox Christianity was so strong that these obstacles could be overcome. Many of them were employed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Greek minority foundations in churches, schools and associations, filling the gap the sharp decline of local minority members had left.\(^{50}\) They emerged as a crucial lifeline to Istanbul’s dwindling, ageing Greek minority population.\(^{51}\)


\(^{49}\) The Republic of Turkey officially recognized the three non-Muslim minorities mentioned in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, Armenian, Greek and Jewish. The Greek minority included the Greek Orthodox population of Istanbul and the Aegean islands of Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos). As the sanjak of Alexandretta was part of French-mandate Syria, the Greek Orthodox community of the province was absent in the stipulations of the Treaty. Following annexation to Turkey, the Hatay Greek Orthodox were not officially recognized by the state, similar to non-Muslim minorities such as the Assyrian, the Chaldean, the Catholic and Protestant Christians.

\(^{50}\) Author, "Personal Communication" (İstanbul, 12/5/2016)

\(^{51}\) The demographic decline of Turkey’s Greek minority was the result of emigration induced by long-term discriminatory policies of republican Turkey, culminating to the November 1942 Property Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*), the 6-7 September 1955 pogrom and the March 1964 deportations. For more details, see Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve ‘Türkleştirme’ Politikaları* (İstanbul 2000), Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority in Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974* (Athens 1983), Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları ve Stratejileri Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları* (İstanbul 2006), Speros Vryonis Jr., *The Mechanism of Catastrophe: The Turkish Pogrom of September 6-7, 1955, and the Destruction of the Greek Community of Istanbul* (New York 2005). Given the relative demographic strength of Istanbul’s Greek minority in 1955 and the incipient stage of its emigration to Istanbul, the Hatay Greek Orthodox community did not feature separately during the pogrom.
Just as in nineteenth century’s Balkans, members of the Rum millet had to make a choice between the emerging Orthodox nations,\textsuperscript{52} most Hatay (Antakya) Greek Orthodox opted for integrating with Turkey’s Greek minority. The decision to integrate with the Greek minority was sometimes reinforced by the opportunities that this entailed: solidarity networks, employment and social mobility.\textsuperscript{53}

Education became a crucial instrument in that respect. When many members of the Hatay Greek Orthodox diaspora in Istanbul decided to enrol their children in the Greek minority schools, despite them not being legally members of the minority, their initiative met with the acquiescence of the Turkish state.\textsuperscript{54} Turkish authorities allowed to register their children with the Greek minority educational institutions, which they were already short of pupils. The language barrier proved no match against the affinity bonds of the millet. This eventually led to a more complex language situation: school children would speak Arabic at home, Greek at school and Turkish in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{55} This linguistic diversity further complicated the already complex identity of this community. Although the presence of the children in Greek minority schools was a demographic boost essential for the viability of the


\textsuperscript{53} Author, "Personal Communication" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016)

\textsuperscript{54} It is worth mentioning that Turkish authorities obstructed for decades the enrolment of children of Greek citizens or of mixed Greek-Turkish or other minority background to the Greek minority system school. This changed with the relative liberalization policies in the early 2000s.

\textsuperscript{55} In an effort to promote the integration of school children and the community at large with the Greek minority, complimentary Greek language courses were offered to their parents by the General Consulate of Greece in Istanbul. See Author, "Personal Communication" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016).
Greek minority school system and a signal for their wish to integrate with the Greek minority, responses on the other side varied.56

Some Istanbul Greeks reacted in a defensive and xenophobic manner, questioned the Greek credentials of that population and continued treating them as foreign to the Greek Orthodox minority. To them, Hatay Greek Orthodox were nothing but ‘Arabs,’ foreigners that were keen on exploiting the resources of the Greek minority and taking control of its pious foundations and assets.57 There were several incidents which recorded unease with racist underpinnings regarding the participation of the Hatay Greek Orthodox in the activities and affairs of the Greek minority.58 Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the majority of the Greek minority members welcomed their integration. In their view, the Hatay Greek Orthodox provided a crucial boost, at a time the sharp demographic decline of the Istanbul Greek minority put the very survival of the community and the viability of schools, pious foundations and other institutions of the minority were put into question.59

56 Author, "Fieldwork Interview" (Athens, 6/9/2019)
57 Author, "Personal Communication" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016)
58 Author, "Participant Observation" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016)
59 Tense relations within different subgroupings of the Greek minority were in fact no novelty. Relations between Istanbul and Gökçeada-Bozcaada Greeks have also been rather problematic. The migration of minority Greeks from the two Aegean islands to Istanbul in the 1960s and 1970s caused tension in the relations between them and the local Greek population. While these tensions eventually receded in light of the sharp demographic decline of the minority, they were rekindled since the 1990s with Hatay Orthodox substituting the Aegean islanders as subjects of suspicion and discrimination. While in the case of Hatay Greek Orthodox ethnicity was an additional point of contention, class, economic and social stereotypes were reproduced as in the case of the Aegean island Greeks. In fact, such stereotypes were not absent even in the relations between the urban elements of the community in Antakya and Iskenderun and its rural component in the villages of the Hatay province. See Author, "Participant Observation" (Antakya, 10/4/2012).
Orthodox were raised to an important and indispensable new element of Turkey’s Greek minority. This allowed for the growing integration of the Hatay Greek Orthodox with the Greek minority.

It should not be forgotten though that the acquiescence of the Turkish bureaucracy was a permissive condition for that integration. When Hatay Greek Orthodox parents applied to register their children to the Greek minority schools and to participate in the administration of Greek minority institutions, no obstacles were raised. While the millet system was formally abolished with the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Republic of Turkey, it has continued to serve as point of identity reference in multifold ways and under unexpected circumstances. While the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne recognized national minorities and not millets and the introduction of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926 promised equal rights to all citizens regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, bureaucratic thinking along the lines of the millet system survived. Institutionalized discrimination against the minorities was combined with policies which underscored the enduring legacy of the millet system. The will of the majority of the Istanbul diaspora of the Hatay Greek Orthodox to have their children enrolled to the Greek minority school system in Istanbul and the decision of Turkish authorities to allow the enrolment of the Hatay Greek Orthodox children to the schools of Turkey’s Greek minority in Istanbul is a clear manifestation of a ‘vestigial millet system,’ along the line of the Barkey and Gavrilis argument.  


61 Author, "Participant Observation" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016)

Relations with Greece

The partial integration of the Hatay Greek Orthodox with Istanbul’s Greek minority also meant that they came closer to Greece and Greek national identity. Unlike with the Turkish-speaking
Orthodox of Anatolia, which came to be known as Karamanlı, the Arabic-speaking Orthodox of the Levant did not attract the attention of the Kingdom of Greece in the nineteenth century. No education campaigns were held with the aim to spread the Greek language among the Greek Orthodox population of the vilayets of Adana, Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus. This contributed to a rather equivocal treatment by Greek state. Greek consular authorities had no consistent policy, regarding their recognition as members of Turkey’s Greek minority or the Greek nation at large. Sometimes Hatay Greek Orthodox enjoyed the treatment of Greek minority members or diaspora Greeks. Sometimes they were treated as non-Greeks, who had no entitlement to the benefits the Greek state recognized to members of Greek minorities or diaspora. In the case of those who emigrated to Istanbul, Greek consular authorities had to decide whether to treat them as members of the local Greek minority or not. The fact that a large part of the student body of the Greek minority schools had Hatay origins was an important factor that had to be considered.

In other words, the decision to join the Greek minority education system in Istanbul was understood as willingness to adopt a Greek national identity and evidence of Greek ethnic descent and facilitated their recognition as members of the Greek minority. In practice, the Greek government appeared to follow the Ecumenical Patriarchate

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62 A notable exception was the integration of the Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox community with the Greek community in Alexandria. The Arabic-speaking Orthodox were called ‘Şamlı’ (Şam is the name of Damascus in Turkish and the Damascus province in Arabic) and comprised a sizeable part of the Orthodox community in Alexandria. See Ioannis M. Hatzifotis, Ολίγη Αγαπημένη Πολιτεία [a Little Bit of Beloved City] (Athens 1999)

The term ‘Şamlı’ did not, however, gain any political resonance in the Levant, as the term ‘Karamanlı’ did in Anatolia.

63 Greek citizenship law heavily relies on the ius sanguinis, i.e. ethnic Greek descent suffices to claim Greek citizenship. Proving this however can be rather difficult and open to interpretation.

64 Author, "Fieldwork Interview" (Athens, 6/9/2019)
benchmark. Those who were closely affiliated with the Greek minority institutions in Istanbul had higher chances of being recognized as Greeks compared to those who took a more distanced approach. The situation was different in the case of the Greek Orthodox still resident in the Hatay province. As citizenship applications from Hatay Orthodox rose in numbers, Greek state officials had to conclude whether there was a real bond between the applicant and Greek identity, or the application was made for purely instrumental reasons. The absence of Greek minority education there meant that it could not serve as a criterion for diagnosing willingness to adopt Greek national identity. In some cases, state authorities proved willing to recognize Greek ethnic descent and issued passports. In other cases, they were more circumspect and requested more evidence with the aim to avoid being manipulated by the applicants. This often resulted in paradoxical situations where some members of a family were recognized as Greek and were awarded Greek passports, while other members of the same family were not. This attitude was matched with the lack of knowledge in the Greek public opinion about the Hatay Greek Orthodox. Such incidents clearly pointed at the need for a new policy, as far as the leadership of the Greek minority and the Greek government were concerned.

65 Ibid.

66 Baltsiotis, "Ομογενείς" ή "Αλλογενείς": Η Περίπτωση των Ορθόδοξων της Αντιόχειας στην Τουρκία [Ethnic Greeks or Foreigners: The Case of the Orthodox Antiochians in Turkey] 416-23.

67 Author, "Personal Communication" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016). The acquisition of a Greek passport could facilitate emigration to any EU member state or secure welfare state right claims.

68 One should remember Greece’s membership of the European Union means that Greek passport holders have the right to travel, engage in economic activities and settle anywhere within the European Union territory. This gives Greek passport holders extraordinary opportunities and renders it a very attractive asset.

69 Author, "Fieldwork Interview" (Istanbul, 12/5/2016)
Relations with Syria

Following the annexation of the Hatay province to Turkey in 1939, a large part of the local Greek Orthodox population chose to emigrate to Syria. This meant that the remaining part of the population developed strong family connections with Syria, in addition to the economic links that predated the annexation. Both were subjected to the vicissitudes of bilateral Syrian-Turkish relations. Ending the instruction of Arabic in the province and launching an assimilation campaign, inevitably affected the Greek Orthodox community, and so did the emergence of the status of the province as a dispute in Syrian-Turkish relations. While the Hatay Greek Orthodox diaspora in Syria emerged as one of the main proponents of Syrian irredentism, decreasing cross-border contacts and Turkish assimilation efforts by meant that the Greek Orthodox community living in Hatay remained relatively unaffected by Syrian Arab nationalism and detached from Syria’s Greek Orthodox community. Soviet involvement in the affairs of the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Syrian Greek Orthodox community was also not to be underestimated, in contrast with Turkey’s 1952 NATO membership and rising anticommunism. These links strengthened Turkey’s interest in cutting off all religious and intellectual links between the Hatay Greek Orthodox and Syria-based religious institutions. From the 1970s onwards, Turkey’s relations with Syria became more tense, as disputes such the management of the waters of the Euphrates, following the construction of the gigantic

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72 Author, "Personal Communication" (Damascus, 10/7/2010)

73 Author, "Fieldwork Interview" (Damascus, 11/7/2010)

74 Harry J. Psomiades, ‘Soviet Russia and the Orthodox Church in the Middle East’, Middle East Journal 11, n. 4 (1957) 377-80.
Atatürk dam, and the Kurdish insurgency - with reference to Syria’s treatment of the Kurdish Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan-PKK) were added to the existing ones. While the brief rapprochement between 2002 and 2011, including booming bilateral trade and visa-free travel across the Syrian-Turkish border, allowed for the reestablishment of close connections between the Hatay and Syria’s Greek Orthodox community, relations hit again rock bottom with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in March 2011.  

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War destabilized the whole Levant, including the Hatay province. The state of the Hatay Greek Orthodox community in its ancestral lands, already weakened because of emigration, became more precarious. The influx of tens of thousands of predominantly Sunni Muslim refugees from Syria, Turkey’s growing involvement in the Syrian Civil War and the development of support infrastructure for the Syrian insurgents within the Hatay province disturbed its delicate demographic and political balance.  

Greek Orthodox settlements located next to the Syrian border like the town of Altınözü (Qusayr) and the village of Tokaçlı (Cünte) were inevitably affected. The abduction - and apparent murder - of one Greek Orthodox and one Syriac Jacobite bishop travelling from Hatay to Aleppo by jihadists pointed at the level of polarization that the war had brought about and security concerns about the Greek Orthodox on both sides of the Syrian-Turkish border.  

The 11 May 2013 terrorist attack in the border town of Reyhanlı, one of the deadliest in the history of the Republic of Turkey...
Turkey with 52 casualties, highlighted the risks that the continuation of the Syrian civil war entailed and the fragile position of the Hatay province.\textsuperscript{79} Mounting socio-political polarization in Turkish politics also took its toll, as the relations between the Sunni and the Arabic-speaking Alawite (\textit{Nusayri}) communities of the province became increasingly strained. The Greek Orthodox community remained one of the most vulnerable ones, given its demographic weakness and its potential exposure to acts of terrorist sectarian or religious violence.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Brubaker’s points on linguistic and religious pluralism help illuminate the identity shifts of the Hatay Greek Orthodox diaspora in Istanbul, as well as the primacy of religion over language whether nurturing one identity element can result in the undermining of the other. Since conversion to Sunni Islam was viewed as a primary threat and given the Sunni bias of the Turkish public education system, approaching the Greek minority and its educational institutions became a priority. The barrier of language was not as important as providing Greek Orthodox religious education and deterring the threat of conversion. Learning Greek in the Greek minority schools of Istanbul inflected the identity of the younger generation, at a time their Arabic language skills were declining. This young generation became a bridge between the Hatay Greek Orthodox community and the Istanbul Greek minority.

The last legatees of the glorious city of Antioch, the Hatay Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox community, comprise an ample manifestation of both the cultural diversity of the Levant that has straddled over millennia and the complexities of identity formation in the transition from the age of empires to the age of nation-states. With their distinct cultural identity, they have failed to fit any of the nationalist moulds in Greece, Syria and Turkey. Citizens of the Republic of Turkey, but with a religion and language distinguishing them from

\textsuperscript{79} Doğan News Agency, "Reyhanlı Bombings Death Toll Reaches 52", \textit{Hürriyet Daily News}, 27/05/2013
the mainstream and other minorities, they have been a double minority, as Greek Orthodox among Sunni Muslims and as Arabic-speaking among Greek-speaking Greek Orthodox. They have shaped their identity through a dynamic process of redefining the borders of their community vis-à-vis other groups with which they shared common elements. Refusing to integrate with Turkey’s Arabic-speaking Sunni Arab community, they largely opted for integration with Istanbul’s Greek minority when emigration to Istanbul made the contact between the two possible. The fear of forfeiting Greek Orthodox religious and cultural traits and eventual conversion to Sunni Islam prevailed over linguistic barriers. The Greek minority education system became the bridge connecting the two communities, manifesting their wish to deepen their bonds beyond religion. For the children of the Hatay Greek Orthodox diaspora in Istanbul, learning Greek in the Greek minority school system further inflected their identity, facilitating their integration with the Greek minority. As their Arabic linguistic skills were declining, given the absence of any formal Arabic-language education in Hatay or Istanbul, shifting language from Arabic to Greek reduced heterogeneity not within the Turkish majority but within the realm of the Greek minority. These bear evidence to the continued relevance of vestiges of *millet* system, almost one century after the demise of the Ottoman Empire and its official abolition by the Treaty of Lausanne. The acquiescence of Turkish authorities to the integration of the Hatay Greek Orthodox with Turkey’s Greek minority shows how the millet system continued to influence public policy, remaining alive not only in the minds of members of parochial communities, but also within the bureaucracy of the state that took pride in abolishing it.