

"Jerusalem, Amman, Beirut and beyond: moving from the Jerusalem municipal archives to the collective memory of Ottoman Jerusalem in search of *citadinité*"

Presentation at the workshop « Des archives municipales ottomanes aux archives citadines de Jérusalem », 11. February 2014 at the CRFJ in Jerusalem

Have been working with Vincent and Yasemin since **2011** on the minutes of the Jerusalem municipal council

Arabic – language minutes account for about **45%** of this corpus

Minutes report activities and decisions of the council for the period from **1890 – 1915**; in addition to a large roster of building permits

These archives are very difficult to decipher and not easy to translate, but it is worth it!

Wealth of information and many glimpses of daily life issues in Jerusalem

Our particularity in dealing with Jerusalem is that we are looking for what some historians would dread to find: **an ordinary city**

Through this primary source, Jerusalem becomes an (almost) ordinary city, it gains the commonness which it has lacked so far in historical accounts

Recognizing this commonness does not strip Jerusalem of its **particularity** as a cosmopolitan world-city in spite of its relatively small size during that period

It also does not strip it of its particular status as a city **holy** for three world religions, but this quest for ordinariness allows us to pay closer attention to the daily life of Jerusalem's citizens in all of its seemingly petty details

It is a way of **putting the Jerusalemite citizen center-stage**, instead of the tourist, pilgrim, or archaeologist

This focus on the life of **Jerusalem's citizens** links the **three projects** which I will be speaking about:

1. our municipal archive project,
2. the "Open Jerusalem" project,
3. and my personal project within the larger framework of the "Open Jerusalem" project which concerns the collective memory of Ottoman Jerusalem to be found in autobiographical writings and family memory

I will begin with an overview of the municipal archive project and contextualize it briefly.

Jerusalem's municipal history

Municipal council exists since the beginning of the **1860s**

Jerusalem is in fact one of the very first cities to create a municipality, which is further **consolidated after the Ottoman law on municipalities in 1877**

Before 1860s, local authority was organized around the *majlis al shura* which was established during the Egyptian occupation of Palestine in the 1830s and in which all religious communities were represented

From 1880 onwards: municipal council is composed of **around 9 members** elected for 4 years (renewable mandate): 6 Muslims, 2 Christians, 1 or 2 Jews

Number of elected members and confessional composition was not always the same, but all religious communities were represented

The Ottoman government chose the **council president** among the elected members

Elections were open to Ottoman men over 25 paying at least 50 piastres of property taxes yearly

In order to be elected, an Ottoman man over 30 had to pay at least 100 piastres of property taxes yearly

Important restriction: a *protégé* of a foreign power could not become a council member acc. to the law of 1877

This restriction was meant to **limit the influence of foreign consuls** in Jerusalem's affairs

These developments in Jerusalem have to be seen against the background of others on the local and on the imperial level:

- Since the **1869 Ottoman Nationality Law** all Ottomans are equal before the law: This concept of nationality lessens the importance of the confessional organization of society (millet system)
- since **1872** the district (*sanjaq*) of Jerusalem is **independent** of the province of Damascus and directly linked to the imperial government in Istanbul
- **Demographic development** of the city between 1800 and 1914
Estimations : 10 000 inhabitants in 1800 ; 20 000 in 1870 ; 70 000 in 1914
- **Urban development outside** the city walls :
Est. : 2000 inhabitants in 1881 ; 12 000 in 1890 ; 35 000 in 1914
- In 1914 one of two Jerusalemites lived outside the city walls !
During the 1st WW, Jerusalem becomes the largest Palestinian city

Municipal council minutes show that the **municipality tried to actively frame this urban development** in terms of infrastructures, urban planning and basic services

In **1895** the municipality leaves its **offices** in the Old City and establishes itself on Jaffa Road, outside the city walls

This is a symbolic and practical choice which shows that the **municipality was an integral part of the transformations** Jerusalem witnessed during that period

The “material” aspects of the municipal archive project – a short digression into palaeography

Council minutes are reporting **activities** and **decisions** as well as public **announcements** by the municipal council between 1890 and 1916

18 volumes of about 4000 items

more than 1200 pages of which 45% are in Arabic

- **What do these texts look like?**

Most items in Arabic are written in the **Ottoman administrative script** used also for the items in *osmanlĕ*

Often **quickly jotted down**, therefore difficult to decipher

The items are generally **signed by several persons** (4-5); very few are signed by a single person

Generally **standardized small texts** with a **standard introduction** (*According to the decision/ It has been decided on the level of the council / We announce that*)

in one volume there is a **type-written lease agreement** for a store which substantiates the impression that there were **model forms and standardized procedures**

There are also numerous **lists** of taxes, fees, salaries and rent levels.

- **What vocabulary, grammar, terminology can we find?**

The Arabic texts contain some **Ottoman terms** as well as some terms from (19th century) **Palestinian dialect**

The Arabic **grammar** is sometimes **faulty** which leads me to believe that some non-native speakers of Arabic also kept minutes in Arabic

Some Ottoman items are preceded by a **short Arabic summary** and some Arabic items by a short Ottoman summary which shows that not everyone on the council mastered both languages during that period

The issues dealt with in the municipal minutes – a bottom-up perspective on Jerusalem's development

Most items are standardized short texts indicating **routine administrative procedures** such as

- announcements of store lease agreements (about 20%)
- public bids for civil administration and army needs (*munaqasa*) (about 19%)
- public sales of tax-farming rights according to the *iltizam* system (*muzayada*) (about 14%)
- and nominations of municipal staff (about 8%)

Income-generating activities thus occupy an important place, such as tax-farming and rental of stores, and the **budget** was obviously controlled tightly.

The vital role of income-generating activities notwithstanding, the minutes of the municipal council show that the issues it dealt with are vast:

- Public works and infrastructures
- regulation of bread prices
- warnings about counterfeit money
- organization of vaccinations campaigns
- building of hospitals
- in addition to improvement of infrastructures (lights, streets, water etc.)

The Jerusalem municipality clearly dealt with a lot of issues **outside of the city limits**

There are numerous items about **public services and tax-farming** in other Palestinian cities

In terms of **public bids for the army**, there are many items pertaining to cities located in today's Syria and Lebanon.

What can we deduce from this primary source?

- **Who are the actors of municipal life?**

Muslims, Christians and Jews of different origins appear on all levels of municipal life – on the council, in the administrations, in public service positions and as beneficiaries of public service

We find a lot of members of the Jerusalem notable families (*'ayan*) on all levels of the municipal staff, not only on the top levels, but there are also a lot of council members and high-ranking municipal officers who are neither Muslim nor members of those families

- **How did this administration function ?**

The municipal council seems responsive to the citizens' needs (i.e. requests for street lights are quickly processed and lights are set up)

Many decisions deal with hygiene and public health issues (slaughter practices, food preservation, vaccination campaigns, cost price medicine distributed at municipal pharmacy)

The council applies the rules of urban planning and enforces them

It appeals to legal bodies in case of conflicts

This administration generally followed existing rules and regulations and applied them

- **Some general working hypotheses**

The Ottoman municipality of Jerusalem seems to have been a vector of modernity in the city while maintaining one of the basic features of Ottoman rule since its onset: a policy focusing on the preservation of social peace

- *Signs of modernity:*

- Important infrastructural projects in and around Jerusalem were spearheaded by the municipality: railway, road network, water supply (on a smaller scale: clock tower)
- City was linked to the rest of the world via telegraph lines, postal services, and banks

- *Preserving social peace:*

- Control of prices of basic food staples such as bread
- Access to water free of charge
- Cancellation of debts on the occasion of big imperial celebrations
- Financial support of very poor families
- Exceeding the municipal annual budget in order to finance important projects and commitments
- Hosting refugees and migrants from other parts of the empire

**From the municipal archives to the “Open Jerusalem” project:
some perspectives and questions**

municipal project stems from the **necessity to introduce a bottom-up and endogenous perspective** to the historiography of Jerusalem

analyze the city with the **tools of urban history** instead of approaching it as a “space of exception”, be it an “Islamic city” or a “historic battlefield”

this **epistemological and methodological approach** extends itself from the municipal to the “Open Jerusalem” project

- what is different, and essential, is the fact that the “**Open Jerusalem**” project aims to write a **connected history** of Jerusalem, using all available primary sources, comparing between them and creating links among them

the overall objective is to search for the “citadinité” of Jerusalem, this “urban citizenship” which includes a feeling of belonging

the **municipal minutes** give us important hints about the context in which this urban citizenship evolved, since they point to the local authorities’ preoccupation with maintaining social stability while opening up to the world

the council minutes are an essential primary source for writing the history of **public space**, public health, public education, public opinion and public time

- in the framework of the “Open Jerusalem” project, we will be able to see how the municipality interacted with **other local vectors of urban citizenship**, such as the chamber of commerce and local press
- by analyzing **local press and petitions** addressed to Istanbul, we will discover the complaints about the municipalities’ activities and initiatives
- by comparing with the **records of the tribunal of Jerusalem** (*mahkama shari’yya*) we will obtain more details about some financial transactions and court cases involving members or employees of the municipality

My hypothesis is that the **municipal council minutes will be the center-piece** of the historiography of Jerusalem’s urban citizenship

It is a primary source of an **interconfessional interethnic urban institution** interacting directly with the citizens and the imperial authorities

It was probably the most important **mediating structure** for Jerusalem’s urban society, translating imperial impulses into local activities and relaying local realities back to Istanbul

and by itself, it shows the **dynamic diversity** of that society

one of the major short-comings of existing historiography has been its **limitation** to the primary sources available for one community or in one or two languages

given the overarching reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this short-coming has often been exacerbated by **political or ideologically motivated focalisations and interpretations**

this project should be able to avoid this terrible pit-fall thanks to the fact that it will base itself on the **largest possible spectrum of local archives** and create connections between them

From the public to the private and back again: searching Jerusalem's Ottoman *citadinité* in collective memory and autobiographical writings

Another major short-coming of the available historiography on Jerusalem is its blind-eye to **local agency**, as Roberto Mazza pointed out in his recent presentation here

Autobiographical writings, diaries and oral memory narratives are the best source for discovering and describing local agency

Recent years have seen an **important number of publications** of autobiographies and diaries of Jerusalemites born at the end of the Ottoman period, such as Wasif Jawhariyya, Gad Frumkin, Albert Antébi, Khalil Sakakini

These documents, along with **family papers and family memories**, are at the center of my personal research project within the framework of the "Open Jerusalem" project

This project will advance in several phases:

1. Build up the **corpus** of the collective memory of late Ottoman Jerusalem by finding more autobiographies, diaries, family papers and soliciting memory narratives from the descendants of late Ottoman Jerusalemites living in Amman and Beirut
2. **Link** this corpus to the more institutional sources of Jerusalem's *citadine* history, such as the municipality's archives, the archives of the chamber of commerce, and also to primary sources which inform us of public opinion, such as petitions and local press.
3. Analyse the **social construction of the urban citizenship** of Late Ottoman Jerusalem and the balance between local identity and Ottoman identity during that period

Objective: connecting various autobiographical and memory narratives with other elements of social history to **produce a history focused on local agency**