

**"The Ottoman municipality of Jerusalem: how to reconstruct the history of a forgotten urban institution"**

Presentation, 18. June 2014 at the CRFJ in Jerusalem

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

Minutes report activities and decisions of the council for the period from **1890 – 1917**; in addition to a large roster of building permits

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

I will begin with an overview of the municipal archive project and contextualize it briefly, then I will tell you about the current state of my research in complementary Ottoman sources.

### **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 (this date is important to keep in mind for the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of my presentation)
- **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

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### **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 1917

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 (19<sup>th</sup> 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

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### **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 bancs

- *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

In **conclusion** of this part, I would say that:

the **municipal minutes** give us important hints about the context in which urban citizenship evolved in Jerusalem, 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 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

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## The provincial yearbooks as the imperial mirror of local authorities: the appearance and disappearance of Jerusalem?

Glimpse into current research, with lots of open questions!

Ottoman yearbooks (*salname*) published in most provinces (*vilayet*) after 1867 (Kushner, 1998, p. 125)

Mirror of administration, containing various sorts of information and differing levels of details according to year and province

Some categories of information found in the *salname vilayet suriya*:

- calendars, seasons, historical chronologies (both religious and secular)
- list of sultans, ministers and provincial administrators
- tax income and expenses per district (1299/1883)
- list of books published in the province (1299)
- list of books available in the public library of Damascus, by type (1305-6/1889)
- list of schools (1299/1883)
- tribunals (1299)
- villages paying the tithe (*'ushr*) (1299)
- weights and measures (1299)
- **district population statistics by confession** (1299/1883 – very detailed; 1305/1889 – less detailed)
- members of the chambers of commerce and agriculture (1305-6)
- members of different commissions (land registration and road construction) (1305-6)
- organisation of post and telegraph services
- military organisation (1305-6)

### Where to find Jerusalem in those yearbooks?

Districts (*mutassarifliks*) of Palestine (Jerusalem; Nablus/ Balqa; Acre) had belonged to *eyalet* of Sayda/ Beirut until the *vilayet* law of 1864 integrated them into the *vilayet* of Greater Syria (K, 1998, p. 126)

Mutassariflik (or sanjaq) of Jerusalem became **independent after 1872-3** and remained under the direct authority of Istanbul until the end of the Ottoman Empire

Jerusalem is thus contained in the salname of Saida/ Beirut until about 1863

**Between 1864 and 1873**, information on Jerusalem's local authorities can be found in the *salname vilayet suriya*, which I have consulted in the archival center of the Jordanian University in Amman

For **1286/ 1869**, I found information about the mutasarrif, the inspector of the liva, the accountant and the person in charge of the waqf foundations

The list of the members – elected and statutory – of the district council - **majlis idare** in addition to a list of the members of the *municipal council* (p. 64)

**After 1873**, there is very little information about Jerusalem in the *salname vilayet suriya* and there is no trace of separate yearbooks for Jerusalem

What I did find is:

- For 1312-3 (1895), the members of the commission for the registration of properties in Jerusalem (p. 146)
- For 1305-6, information about the military commander of Jerusalem (p. 86)

Are there any **salname kudüs şerif**? Apparently not.

All bibliographies and catalogues consulted do not show any separate salname for Jerusalem.

Where to find the information contained in the provincial yearbooks of other cities in the region?

Was it “classified”?

Was it destroyed? Accidentally or on purpose?

**Salname-i-devlet-i-aliyye** – yearbooks of central government – may provide us with an answer

In Amman, we can consult all of those published between 1263/**1847** and 1334/**1918** on microfiche

Other possibilities to fill in the gaps in our research on local authorities in Jerusalem:

- Court registers of Jerusalem – *mahkama shari'yya*
- Process verbaux of the *majlis idare*
- Local press and official Ottoman newspaper
- Archives of the chamber of commerce after 1908
- ???