The Ottoman Municipal and Central Archives for the History of Jerusalem: Creating the Perfect Match of Sources

Associate Prof. Dr. Yasemin Avcı
The Minutes of the Council of Jerusalem Municipality (Kudüs Belediyesi Meclis Zabıt Defterleri)

- includes eighteen unclassified registers of the decisions reached by the Jerusalem Council between the years 1892-1910 and the year 1917.
- The registers of municipal resolutions carried in the years 1309 (1893-1894), 1319 (1903-1904), and 1327-1330 (1911-1916) are missing.
- Together these registers contain almost 1300 pages.
- The total number of municipal resolutions is almost 4000.
apart from Jerusalem, one can find similar archival sources also for the municipalities of Nablus, Bursa and Istanbul. However, the minutes of Istanbul and Bursa municipalities include resolutions of a few years
A page from the Minutes of Bursa Municipality
By consulting the minutes of Jerusalem municipality, one can analyze the crucial matters such as

- the administrative mechanism of the municipality,
- the scope of municipal authority,
- the budget, municipal incomes and taxes,
- the relation of municipal council with the Jerusalem Governor (mutasarrıf), the Provincial Council (meclis-i idare), and with the other municipalities or councilor bodies functioning in the Province.
the range of the activity of municipal council
-the preservation of law and order in accordance with, the Law of Provincial Municipalities, 1877 (Vilayat Belediye Kanunu)
-urban planning and supervision of building area in accordance with the Building Code (Ebniye Kanunu, 1882), the Law of Expropriation, (İstimlak Kanunu, 1879) and the other legal regulations.
-the matters about public health, sanitation, cleanliness, urban infrastructure, water supply, lighting and electricity and so on.
Methodological Problems

the great majority of the resolutions recorded in the minutes of Jerusalem Municipality, are of an exceedingly trivial nature

a great many of the documents at our disposal are either beginnings or continuations of issues; rarely does a matter begin and end in one resolution.

we do not have resolutions in matters of obvious importance about the Jerusalem Municipal government. Some missing topics are these:

- municipal elections,
- the name of the members of Municipal council (we have the signatures, but we do not have the concrete member lists)
- name of the mayor
- visual sources (in the minutes, it is stated that, the plan or sketch of a building or street, or whatever it is) are produced, but we do not have them.
The decision-making procedure

- The imperial decree of Ottoman Sultan (*irade-i seniyye*)
- The central councils such as *Meclis-i Vala-yı Ahkam-ı Adliye, Meclis-i Has, Şura-yı Devlet*
- The Ministry of Interior or the Grand Vezirate
- The Administrative Council or The *Mutasarrıf*
- The Jerusalem Municipal Council
A letter of the Jerusalem governor addressed to the Ministry of Interior
IRADE DHİLITE

Tarih: 1312-5-21
No: 2
Nd: 21

[Handwritten text in Ottoman Turkish]

An imperial decree