

Reviews

Malek Sharif, *Imperial Norms and Local Realities. The Ottoman Municipal Laws and the Municipality of Beirut (1860–1908)*, Ergon Verlag Würzburg, Beirut 2014, pp. XIV + 247, ISBN 978-3-89913-997-6.

Malek Sharif holds a BA degree in History and an MA degree in the Middle Eastern History from the American University of Beirut. He also has a PhD in Turkic Studies from the Free University of Berlin. In 2004–2007 he was associated with the German Orient Institute in Istanbul, which enabled him to research the social history of medicine in the Ottoman Empire there. As a postdoctoral researcher he lectured at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Berlin and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. In 2008–2014 he was a lecturer and a visiting assistant professor at the American University of Beirut. His research interests are focused on the first parliament of the Ottoman Empire, its healthcare policy and its experience of World War I. With Christoph Herzog he co-edited *In the First Ottoman Experiment in Democracy*. He is the author of *Imperial Norms and Local Realities. The Ottoman Municipal Laws and the Municipality of Beirut (1860–1908)*.

The book is innovative because it sheds new light on certain issues. It is a very good source of historical data because it uses a variety of sources, both foreign and domestic, which is often quoted. It describes in detail a small segment of Ottoman history. The book can be very useful especially for historians and Orientalists working on this subject.

The literature on the Ottoman Empire's Tanzimat period merely mentions municipal institutions in these provinces. However, recently more and more books and articles have been published on this issue. Malek Sharif used the results of his predecessors' work but some of them were unsatisfactory.

In this book Malek Sharif presents his thesis that municipal institutions in Syria were not created in 1870, as many historians claimed, but decade earlier. He also argues that provincial municipal institutions were created from above by the authorities in Istanbul.

Sharif presents The author introduces the responsibilities and appearances of the municipality of Beirut examining archival materials (from Turkey, Germany and the USA), the contemporary press, Ottoman Yearbooks and Laws

and Ottoman almanacs. He also takes into account a large number of existing studies, memoirs and the correspondence of Western politicians.

Imperial Norms and Local Realities is divided into seven chapters. In the introduction the author discusses the methodology and primary sources. He explains the views of earlier researchers, such as Bernard Lewis, Roderic Davison and Richard Hill. They argued that the provincial municipal reforms were imposed by the capital, but not received with enthusiasm (p. 5).

In Chapter One Sharif describes the city of Beirut before the introduction of a municipal charter. He shows that the earliest account of the Council of Municipal Organization in Beirut dates back to 29 November 1860 (p. 32). He names the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire who traveled to Western Europe and their observations on reforms they wanted to apply in the Ottoman Empire (pp. 29, 31).

In Chapter Two the author presents yet another law governing the municipality of Beirut in 1876, that is before Abdul Hamid II's constitution.

Chapter Three discusses the Ottoman Provincial Organization Act introduced in Beirut in 1877 (pp. 79–90). A considerable part of this chapter In this chapter a lot of space is dedicated to those Syrians who held seats the Istanbul parliament (Niqal al-Naqqash pp. 92–94, and Husayn Bayhum p. 94).

Chapter Four is about municipal elections and mayors of Beirut, with the biographies of Ibrahim Fakhir Nami (the first elected mayor of Beirut, pp. 127–131), Muhyi al-Din Efendi Hamada (the second elected mayor of Beirut, pp. 131–134), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani (member of the administrative council of the district of Beirut, pp. 134–138), 'Abd al-Rahman Baydun Pasha (mayor of the city pp. 138–139), 'Abd al-Qadir al-Dana (president of the commercial court of Beirut, mayor of Beirut, pp. 139–142). Here Malek Sharif does not agree with the opinion of the historians Wajih Kawtharani and Jamil Musa al-Najjar, that the reforms were merely a dead letter (pp. 115–116). He claims that they were implemented and had an enormous impact on the development of the urban area.

Chapter Five discusses the fiscal policy and municipal finances. This chapter and the following one discuss foreigners' permits.

Chapter Six describes the relations between the municipality and provincial authorities as representatives of the central government in Istanbul. The book also focuses on everyday problems in Beirut, such as hygiene and health care.

One of the assets of this book is M. Sharif's research of municipality, based on the three perspectives. The first focuses on the local press and literature published in Beirut; the second on Ottoman material and official Ottoman publications from Istanbul's viewpoint; the third takes the European perspective, based on Western European archival materials and European politicians' memoirs. The author also draws attention to the perspective of different ethnic and religious groups. Sharif worked on different local newspapers managed by people of

different religions, e.g. Sunni Muslim, Protestants, and Greek Orthodox Christians (pp. 12–13).

Chapter Seven is very interesting and could be the kernel of further research on the municipal roots of the city's organizations. Municipal projects, such as the foundation of hospitals (pp. 190–194) set the foundation for its social welfare.

All the individuals mentioned in this book have their date of birth and death, or the dates of their reign, given. Frequently the chronology follows the Gregorian and the Hijra calendars (e.g. p. 71). The indexes of terms and names at the end of book are very helpful.

The book quotes many texts originally written in Arabic or Ottoman Turkish. They have been translated into English but not always in the same way. In one instance the official Ottoman text and its semi-official Arabic translation appears side by side in footnote (p. 8). Sometimes, the Ottoman text is cited and not translated into English, although it is discussed (p. 79). There are also cases when the English translation is adduced without the original text (p. 121). At the beginning of his book Sharif observed that Ottoman words have been transliterated according to the New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary. Arabic words have been transliterated according to the system used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

At the end of the book there are nineteen photographs from Yıldız Fotoğraf Koleksiyonu. These photographs show different images of the old Beirut. Such illustrations are always a good idea, as they diversify the book and inspire the reader's imagination.

Footnotes are both an asset and a drawback. They present a large number of bibliographical items and archival materials. In my opinion Sharif should have moved some of his material from the footnotes to the annex. It is always better for the book if footnotes are kept to a minimum.

Sharif's book has its weaknesses. As already noticed by Roberto Mazza, Malek Sharif did not mention that he used *Hamidian Palestine. Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872–1908* by Johann Büssow. This book is a very important study on the Arab lands under the Ottoman domination.¹ Despite the fact that Sharif provides various research results, he does not always take them into account in his discourse.

Despite some small shortcomings the book is thorough and well-written. A huge amount of source material has been used. Malek Sharif's conclusions are very interesting. Chapter Seven deserves an extension. Further research should be done on this issue. The book is addressed primarily to researchers in related fields because it is packed with facts and data.

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¹ R. Mazza, „Imperial Norms and Local Realities. The Ottoman Municipal Laws and the Municipality of Beirut (1860–1908)”, [in:] *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 51, 2015, p. 664.