

INTRODUCTION

OTTOMAN URBAN INSTITUTIONS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE: A FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY

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Today, perhaps more than ever before, cities have become laboratories for societies as a whole. Fueled by intense media coverage, the ways social groups claim “ownership” of the street, as well as the ways in which city governments and local inhabitants deal with societal challenges in specific urban areas, often take on great symbolic value. Think of the iconic urban squares that have become sites of resistance and utopias of political liberalization, such as Beijing’s Tienanmen Square or Kiev’s *Maidan*, or, for a case of counter-strategy, Myanmar’s new capital Naypyidaw, which was inaugurated in 2005, and was deliberately designed to *avoid* public gatherings of any sort.

Cities are also focal points where people, whether administrators, architects, political activists, or tourists, seek inspiration for questions pertaining to the ‘good life’ in its broadest sense, communal identity, and cultural heritage. In the context of rapid urban change driven by factors such as population growth, technological developments, market forces or war, the issue of what to preserve of existing structures, which features of urban life are desirable, and which should be remedied, comes to the fore. Think of civic activism and, later, gentrification, that turned dilapidated turn-of-the-20th-century housing blocks in European cities into expensive, trendy locations. Similarly, certain state-organized re-developments of old cities all over the world celebrate certain aspects of the past but commodify traditional

architecture for local and foreign consumers. Such practices in relatively small urban areas, individual neighborhoods or urban squares may in fact be prefigurations of possible socio-political futures¹ and set an example for political processes on the national and transnational levels.

In the Middle East, the years after the Arab uprisings that began in late 2010 were witness to protesters claiming central urban squares. While investors were changing the face of certain cities beyond recognition with large building projects, ongoing wars in Iraq, Syria and Libya destroyed large parts of other cities. In all these cases, assumptions about the past of today’s cities inform people’s thoughts and actions. Knowledge of urban life in previous eras will not automatically lead to better decision-making but can help sift through layers of meaning in the textual, documentary, and architectural record of cities everywhere, including in the Middle East. Ultimately, this will widen the horizons of choice of ways to deal with urban cultural heritage.

The studies in this volume seek to provide a better understanding of urban governance in specific cities in Ottoman Palestine and Syria,

* We would like to thank Astrid Meier, Thomas Welsford and Fruma Zachs and the anonymous reviewer of Tübingen University Press for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this introduction

¹ On the concept of prefiguration, see Uri Gordon, “Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise,” *Political Studies* 66/2 (2018), pp. 521–537.



a region referred to in the literature as Bilad al-Sham or the Levant, during the late Ottoman period (c. 1800–1920). They propose an outlook that responds to today’s heightened awareness of cities as crucial spaces in which socio-political processes on various scales interact with localized material structures. In so doing, this volume brings together several strands of research in Ottoman and Middle Eastern history on social and cultural history, political history and material culture that have been pursued largely in isolation from each other. We combine this with the ambition to map our cases onto larger historical processes, including region and empire, as well as global flows and connections.

Our entry point into this complex nexus is through *urban institutions*, which are anchored in concrete places and material structures that we call *urban nodal points*. We define urban governance, following political scientist Marc Hufty, as the ways urban societies make decisions on collective problems, and thereby create norms, rules, and institutions.² Institutions, in turn, as suggested by economist Geoffrey Hodgson, are understood as “systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions.”³ The specific historical cases presented in this volume can be analyzed through the prism of Hufty’s Governance Analytical Framework, which employs five analytical categories: *problems*, *actors*, *social norms*, *processes*, and *nodal points*.⁴ In Hufty’s framework, (1) *problems* are “sets of interrelated issues at stake;” (2) *actors* or *stakeholders* are “individuals or groups whose collective action leads to the formulation of social norms;” (3) *social norms* “guide, prescribe, and sanction” both collective and individual behavior, and themselves are modified by collective interactions; and (4) *processes* refer to

these “complex interactions over time.” These actors, norms, and processes can either be formally defined, which means that they are recognized by those in positions of authority in a given society, or defined informally, by everyday practices. The most telling places to observe these processes are what Hufty calls (5) *nodal points*, which refer to “the physical or virtual interfaces where problems, processes, actors, and norms converge.”⁵

Urban nodal points constitute the organizing principle of this volume and define its five sections: households, neighborhoods, institutions at the city level, urban public spaces and, finally, urban institutions in the fields of trade, transportation and public health, which create seminal links to the wider world. What we present here are thematic studies that do not take an urban locale simply as a backdrop of events and do not treat it as a self-enclosed geographical frame of study. Rather they address *urban governance* as such, which is seen as a complex process of interaction, with a focus on *institutions*, the *actors* that sustain these institutions and the *spaces and material structures* related to them. These studies make it possible to assess both the commonalities and the specificities through comparison and by capturing trans-local entanglements⁶ and connections. Figure 1 visualizes our heuristic framework.

Before addressing how to best study *urban nodes* in a historical perspective, it is worth reflecting on what it means to place a city in the center of a historical inquiry. This, in turn, necessitates a brief discussion of how Ottoman and Middle Eastern urban history has evolved as a field of scholarship over the last several decades. In inquiring into urban governance, we proceed from the understanding that a city is a *polity*; that is, a common frame of reference that poses problems that concern all its inhabitants and creates a common ground for collective identity. A unified leadership or legal autonomy are not preconditions for such a common urban

2 Marc Hufty, “Investigating Policy Processes: The Governance Analytical Framework (GAF),” in Urs Weismann, Hans Herni et al. (eds.), *Research for Sustainable Development: Foundations, Experiences, and Perspectives* (Bern: Geographica Bernensia, 2011), p. 403.

3 Geoffrey M. Hodgson, “What are Institutions?,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 40/1 (2006), p. 2. Marc Hufty distinguishes between social institutions such as kinship or property, and organizations, which are based on institutions but have formal characteristics such as staff and hierarchy, and are devoted to a specific purpose. Hufty, “Investigating Policy Processes,” p. 420, fn. 5.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, p. 401.

6 Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen, “Introduction: ‘Translocality’: An Approach to Connection and Transfer in Regional Studies,” in idem (eds.), *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective, Studies in Global Social History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 1–21.

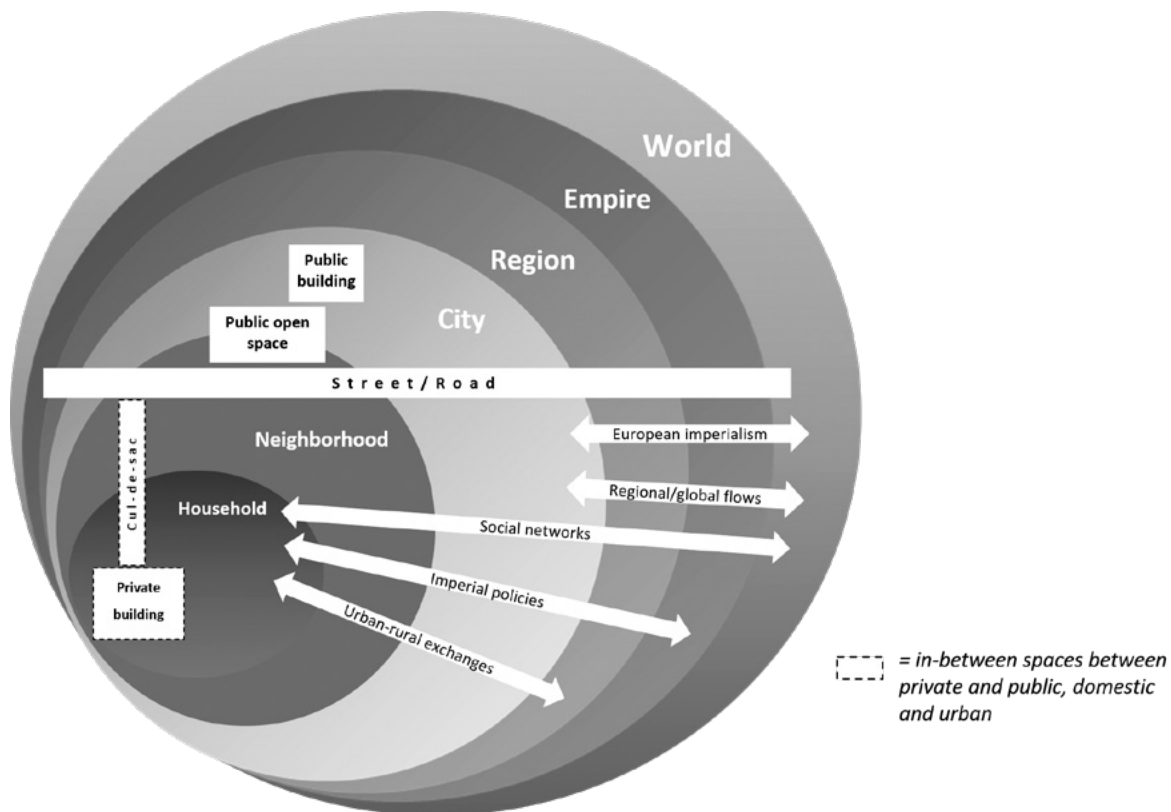


Figure 1: A Heuristic Framework for the Analysis of Urban Governance in Late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham.

frame of reference to exist. These issues, however, have been cornerstones of the academic debate on Middle Eastern cities for almost a century, since Max Weber famously made his ideal-typical distinction between the “Oriental” (i.e., Asian) and the “Occidental” city. This book does not adhere to this approach. However, as the “Oriental city” debate continues to cast its shadow over ongoing academic research, a brief detour is required to explain the rationale governing the present volume. Students in the field of Middle Eastern Studies as well as researchers from other fields still need to be cognizant of this debate, especially when dealing with older literature in the field.⁷

7 For more detailed analyses and assessments, see Nora Lafi, *Esprit civique et organisation citadine dans l'Empire ottoman (XVe-XXe siècles)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 1–28; James A. Reilly, “Ottoman Syria: Social History through an Urban Lens,” *History Compass* 10/1 (2012), pp. 70–80.

TRENDS IN MIDDLE EASTERN URBAN HISTORY: THE “ORIENTAL CITY” DEBATE AND THE DOMINANCE OF THE SINGLE-CITY STUDY

The European or “Occidental” city, Weber argued, emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages and marked a global historical departure from all previous cities and all contemporaneous ones in other parts of the world. For Weber, the main criterion identifying “Occidental” cities was not their form, but rather the way these cities were *governed*. In his own words, “[T]he emergence of the autonomous and autocephalous medieval urban commune” with its own administrative council and a mayor at its head was “a process of development essentially different” from that of both Asian cities and cities of the ancient Greco-Roman world.⁸ Weber

8 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, with a new introduction by Guenther Roth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), vol. 2, pp. 1249–1250. It should, however, be noted that Weber conceded that

was followed by many Orientalists, historians and geographers of the Middle East, who, in the same culturalist vein, went further to construct ideal-type descriptions of the “Islamic,” the “Arab,” or the “Ottoman” city as an entity distinct from the ideal-type concept of European urban culture.⁹

Early on in the debate, historians such as Claude Cahen¹⁰ and Fernand Braudel¹¹ showed that the differences in urban governance between Christian Europe and the Ottoman world were less marked than was commonly assumed.¹² Others voiced serious doubts as to whether cultural categories such as “Islam” could in fact explain anything about urban development. Since the postcolonial turn in the Humanities, both the dichotomy between “the West and the rest,” as well as the thesis of Islam-

in “Near Eastern” cities – in contrast to China, Japan, and India – a concept of an autonomous citizenry existed at least “in abortive beginnings.” *Ibid.*, pp. 1228–1229. On this topic, see Dirk Kaesler, *Max Weber: Eine Einführung in Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, 3rd edition (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2003), pp. 64–65.

9 For an overview of developments in both strands of research, see Giulia Annalinda Neglia, “Some Historiographical Notes on the Islamic City with Particular Reference to the Visual Representation of the Built City,” in Salma Khadra Jayyusi et al. (eds.), *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 1–46. Most influentially, the Arabist and historian Edmund von Grunebaum, inspired by contemporary American anthropologists, took earlier writings, especially French studies from the interwar period, as raw material to construct what has since become a conventional typology of the “Islamic city.” According to von Grunebaum, the “Islamic” urban pattern was “the adequate expression” of Islamic mores, which transcended time and space. See Edmund von Grunebaum, “The Structure of the Muslim Town,” in idem, *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 141–158. For a convincing reconstruction of the genesis of von Grunebaum’s influential essay (albeit overly downplaying the essentializing tendency of the French researchers), see Gregory Aldous, “The Islamic City Critique: Revising the Narrative,” *JESHO* 56 (2013), pp. 471–493.

10 Claude Cahen, “Zur Geschichte der städtischen Gesellschaft im islamischen Orient des Mittelalters,” *Saeculum* 9 (1958), pp. 59–76.

11 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme*, 3 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 457–458.

12 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 216. To do justice to Weber, he himself remarked that, before the 19th century, even in Europe, only cities north of the Alps conformed to the ideal type of the “Occidental” autonomous urban commune, whereas medieval southern European cities formed “a transitional stage” between Asian and northern European city types. See Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1240.

ic urban exceptionalism have been the targets of vigorous criticism.¹³

Today, after numerous critical analyses,¹⁴ it might be assumed that the debate on the “Oriental city” had finally been laid to rest.¹⁵ However, as Nora Lafi recently remarked, the critique of previous generations of urban historians has not led to pertinent new paradigms. In fact, this debate still continues to affect the way the history of Middle Eastern cities is written, directly as well as indirectly. Although a small fraction of studies indeed continue to apply the analytical categories of the Oriental city paradigm and its derivatives,¹⁶ the most enduring legacy of the “Oriental city” debate is indirect. Anxious to avoid the trap of reification, most urban historians of the Middle East retreat to single-city studies and refrain from comparison as a method. Certain authors expressly state that they consider this to be the only way of writing urban history,¹⁷ but the majority do so without much comment.

13 For perhaps the most influential historiographical critique of the Oriental/Islamic city paradigm, see Janet Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic City: Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,” *IJMES* 19/2 (1987), pp. 155–176.

14 For surveys, see Eugen Wirth, “Zur Konzeption der islamischen Stadt: Privatheit im islamischen Orient versus Öffentlichkeit in Antike und Okzident,” *Die Welt des Islams* 31/3 (1999), pp. 50–92; Peter Sluglett and Edmund Burke III, “Introduction,” in Peter Sluglett (ed.), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 1–42; Lafi, *Esprit civique*, pp. 1–28.

15 See Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 352, fn. 9.

16 For some examples, see Ruth Kark and Michal Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800–1948* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2001), pp. 367–373; Simon O’Meara, *Space and Muslim Urban Life: At the Limits of the Labyrinth of Fez* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 2–4. Another manifestation of the enduring power of the Oriental exceptionalist paradigm is the continuing partition of the field of Ottoman urban studies into studies of Ottoman Europe on the one hand, and the Ottoman Middle East on the other. See Lafi, *Esprit civique*, p. 26.

17 See, for instance, Ethem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters, “Was there an Ottoman City?,” in idem (eds.), *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–16.

SINGLE CITY STUDIES AS 'TOTAL HISTORIES'

The concentration on specific cities or aspects of these cities has led to a growing number of brilliantly detailed monographs and articles that strive to present more or less 'total' histories of particular cities, in the sense of a *histoire totale*,¹⁸ covering their political as well as cultural, social, economic and geographic facets. The literature is especially rich for the late Ottoman period, which largely overlaps what historians of many world regions call the "long 19th century" (c. 1775–1920).¹⁹ The increasing availability of local documentary sources – notably Ottoman administrative correspondence, Shari'a court records, *waqf* documents and petitions – has made this period particularly attractive, and the results provide dense data on the range of possible variations of urban life in the late Ottoman Middle East.²⁰

Typically, the scope of these studies is mostly defined by the specific body of sources that they draw on. The sources with the longest tradition are those of European origin, such as travelogues, consular and merchant reports, as

well as Arabic narrative sources; for example, chronicles and biographical compendia. European sources have been criticized for their inherently Europe-centered perspective. Many Arabic sources have shown to be no less problematic for their bias towards local elites. However, if used judiciously, both types of sources remain relevant.²¹ A veritable boost in innovation was triggered by studies of the Islamic (Shari'a) court records (*sijillat*, sg. *sijill*) that have been undertaken since the 1980s. Since then, historians have been able to counter narrative representations with archival evidence and to evaluate the agency of local people, including women and artisans, who were mostly disregarded by European observers and local Arab literati.²² The growing accessibility of Ottoman documents from the mid-1990s onwards has given another strong impulse to the field. It has contributed to a better understanding of Ottoman interventions in local urban dynamics.²³ Several pioneering studies have also paved the way for integrating the urban history of Bilad al-Sham into wider trends at the Ottoman imperial level.²⁴ Other investigations have focused on aspects of material culture, ranging from architecture to urban planning.²⁵

18 The term *histoire totale* goes back to the French *Annales* school and expresses the aim of uniting geographic, demographic, economic, social, political and cultural approaches into one study thus covering all levels of the human experience. See David A. Bell, "Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms," in Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds.), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 262–276.

19 See for example Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 8. Jürgen Osterhammel argues from a global history perspective that Hobsbawm's notion of a "long" 19th century, from the American Revolution to World War I, "remains a useful assumption or auxiliary construction, but it should not be taken as a natural or globally valid form of the past." See Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 906. Regarding the Ottoman world, several authors speak of a "long 19th century" as a period of transformation, starting from the beginning of the Ottoman reforms in the late 18th century and ending with political partition and colonial rule after World War I. See, for example, İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun en uzun yüzyılı* (Istanbul: Hil Yayınları, 1983); James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

20 For a more detailed overview of the literature, see Reilly, "Ottoman Syria," pp. 70–80.

21 For a study based on a combination of Arab narrative sources and European archival material, see Thomas Philipp, *Acre: The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian City, 1730–1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). See also the discussion of the term "local source" by Dotan Halevy in this volume, p. 233, below.

22 The pioneer of *sijillat*-based studies was André Raymond, who during in the early 1970s studied Cairo. See André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIII^e siècle*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973–1974). Exemplary *sijillat*-based studies on single cities in Bilad al-Sham include Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864–1914: A Muslim Town in Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); James Reilly, *A Small Town in Syria: Ottoman Hama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

23 See, for example, Yasemin Avcı, *Değişim sürecinde bir Osmanlı kenti: Kudüs (1890–1914)* [An Ottoman City in Transition: Jerusalem, 1890–1914] (Ankara: Phoenix, 2004).

24 For example, see Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp and Stefan Weber (eds.), *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002); Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

25 See, for example, Ruth Kark, *Jaffa: A City in Evolution, 1799–1917* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, Magnes Press,

Some have taken the *histoire totale* approach to the level of individual neighborhoods.²⁶ The field has also produced some extensive surveys that present the architectural repertory and urban planning patterns of cities,²⁷ inscriptions as historical sources,²⁸ or types of archival sources.²⁹

Thus overall, single-city studies have the advantage of treating cities as a whole that makes it possible to analyze the complex interplay between the material, spatial and social conditions unique to each city. Despite their merits, however, single-city studies run the risk of producing what can be seen as isolated islands of knowledge. This holds true in a dual fashion: historians working on one city rarely connect their findings to works on other cities, and as a result they tend to “reinvent the wheel” and lose opportunities to acquire a deeper understanding of their specific cases by failing to note instructive parallels or contrastive examples. In so doing, they may overlook structural factors; for example, trends in the regional economy or in imperial policy-making, which may have conditioned urban life in various places at the same time. Single-city studies are also “insular” in the sense that historians working on a city only rarely include developments in the surrounding rural areas³⁰ in their considerations.

As can be gauged from those studies that in fact do transcend the urban-rural divide,³¹ city-focused “insular” studies tend to miss the vital social networks of the historical actors under consideration and exclude a whole set of factors that shaped social realities in the city.

THEMATIC STUDIES

Another approach to urban histories that has been increasingly pursued over the past few decades is made up of thematic studies that deal with one particular political or cultural process or conflict in a certain city.³² These thematic studies are often very detailed and offer insights that have broad implications, yet their view of cities is usually very selective. Typically, they focus on the actions of specific kinds of urban elites with city centers as the geographic backdrop, but the connections to the countryside and the wider surrounding region are usually not well covered, and the extent to which the processes they describe are common or specific remain unclear. Thus, while they engage in dialogue with international research on their specific topics; e.g., Islamic endowments, municipalities, cities at war, and identity formation, with respect to urban his-

1990).

26 Hans Gebhardt et al., *History, Space, and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Quarter of Zokak el-Blat* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005); Brigitte Marino, *Le Faubourg du Midan à Damas à l'époque ottomane: Espace urbain, société et habitat (1742–1830)* (Damascus, IFPO, 1997).

27 For example, see Stefan Weber, *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808–1918*, 2 vols. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2009). For more titles, see Weber, *Damascus*, vol. 1, p. 20, fn. 27.

28 For example, see Heinz Gaube, *Arabische Inschriften aus Syrien* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978); Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae* (CIAP), vols. 1–6 (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2017).

29 For example, see Angelos Dalachanis and Vincent Lémire (eds.), *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Accompanied by a website that serves as a source-finding aid and repository of digitized texts, this volume showcases the wealth of source material that is available on Jerusalem today and the broad range of perspectives that this material can provide to perceptive and appropriately trained historians. See Open Jerusalem <http://www.openjerusalem.org/> (accessed 7 December 2021).

30 We prefer “rural areas” over the common term “hinterland,” since hinterland implies dependency if not exploitation of the countryside by the city, which need not always be the case.

31 See, for example, Abdul-Karim Rafeq, “City and Countryside in a Traditional Setting: The Case of Damascus in the First Quarter of the Eighteenth Century,” in Thomas Philipp (ed.), *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992), pp. 295–332; Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Reilly, *A Small Town in Syria*; Meltem Toksöz, *Nomads, Migrants and Cotton in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Making of the Adana-Mersin Region 1850–1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Astrid Meier, “The Materiality of Ottoman Water Administration in 18th-Century Rural Damascus: A Historian’s Perspective,” in Stephen McPhillips and Paul Wordsworth (eds.), *Landscapes of the Islamic World: Archaeology, History, and Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 19–33.

32 To name but a few recent examples: Stefan Knost, *Die Organisation des religiösen Raums in Aleppo: Die Rolle der islamischen religiösen Stiftungen (Auqaf) in der Gesellschaft einer Provinzhauptstadt des Osmanischen Reiches an der Wende zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009); Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem: From the Ottomans to the British* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Malek Sharif, *Imperial Norms and Local Realities: The Ottoman Municipal Laws and the Municipality of Beirut (1860–1908)* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2014).

tory, they are again restricted to “insular” accounts on single cities.

STUDIES WITH A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

Pioneering researchers such as Adnan Bakhit, Thomas Philipp, Abdulkarim Rafeq, and Peter Sluglett realized the potential of regional comparison across the cities of Bilad al-Sham early on, and since the 1980s have engaged in historical research projects about the region.³³ With regard to urban institutions and urban development, Antoine Abdel Nour’s French-language “Introduction to the Urban history of Ottoman Syria” 1982³⁴ sketched out a bold research agenda. Since then, several thematic studies have presented syntheses of various

city studies.³⁵ Perhaps the most ambitious advanced comparative study of two late Ottoman cities in Bilad al-Sham is Beshara Doumani’s study *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean* of 2017.³⁶ Doumani compares property devolution practices in Nablus and Tripoli (*Tarabulus al-Sham*) between 1660 and 1860. The result is a fine-grained account of similarities and differences, as stated in the author’s own words: “It is best to think of the discrete regional social spaces of Bilad al-Sham during Ottoman rule as variations on the theme: that is, the opposite of the popular metaphor of a mosaic of homogeneous spaces.”³⁷

Collective volumes and thematic issues of journals that have appeared since the early 2000s have proven to be very productive. They study Middle Eastern cities with a more or less strictly defined focus on topics such as local-imperial interaction,³⁸ municipalities,³⁹ Mediterranean relations,⁴⁰ the family,⁴¹ migration,⁴² or cosmopolitanism and conflict.⁴³ Many

33 Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, *al-Muṭamar al-duwālī al-sabī li-tarīkh Bilad al-Sham: 17–21 Shaban 1427 H. / 10–14 Aylul 2006: al-Awqaf fī Bilad al-Sham mundhu al-fath al-ʿarabī al-islāmī ila nihayāt al-qarn al-īshrin* [The 7th international conference on the history of Greater Syria, 10–14 September 2006: The endowments in Greater Syria from the Arab conquest to the end of the 20th century] (Amman: Lajnat Tarīkh Bilad al-Sham, 2008) [in Arabic]. For a partial overview of the many conference proceedings published by Bakhit and his team, see Muhammad Taysir Darwish and ‘Abd al-Salama Bakhit, *al-Kashshaf al-tahlīlī li-l-muṭamar al-duwālī li-tarīkh Bilad al-Sham: al-muṭamar al-awwal - al-muṭamar al-rabī, 1974–1987* [Index of the International Conference on the History of Greater Syria: The First Conference to the Fourth Conference, 1974–1987] (Amman: Lajnat Tarīkh Bilad al-Sham, 1990) [in Arabic]. Particularly influential collections of comparative studies include Antoine Abdel Nour, *Introduction à l’histoire urbaine de la Syrie ottomane (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Beirut: Lebanese University, 1982); Thomas Philipp (ed.), *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992); Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schaebler (eds.), *The Syrian Land, Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād al-Shām from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998); Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (eds.), *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004); Peter Sluglett (ed.), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

34 Abdel Nour, *Introduction*. On Abdel Nour’s book, including a note on the author’s premature death, see Suraiya Faroqhi’s review in *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 5 (1986), pp. 263–265. While Abdel Nour is a true pioneer in assessing the field from a regional and comparative perspective, his work nevertheless remains influenced by stereotypes such as that of the “Arab city” (*ibid.*, p. 155) or “Kurdish architecture” (*ibid.*, p. 128) and he lacked the Arab and Ottoman archival sources and manuscripts that we have at our disposal today.

35 Alexander Schölch in his landmark study on the Palestine during the mid-19th century (first published in German 1986), offers a systematic comparison between the urban economies of ten cities in that region. See Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation: Studies in Social, Economic and Political Development* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993). Gudrun Krämer has studied the changing status of non-Muslim city dwellers during the 19th century, drawing on examples from across the Arab Middle East. See Gudrun Krämer, “Moving out of Place: Minorities in Middle Eastern Urban Societies, 1800–1914,” in Peter Sluglett (ed.), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

36 Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

37 *Ibid.*, p. 271.

38 Hanssen et al., *The Empire in the City*.

39 Nora Lafi (ed.), *Municipalités méditerranéennes: Les réformes urbaines ottomanes au miroir d’une histoire comparée (Moyen-Orient, Maghreb, Europe méridionale)*, ZMO Studien 21 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2005).

40 Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz (eds.), *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, 2nd edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

41 Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi, “Daily Life and Family in an Ottoman Urban Context: Historiographical Stakes and New Research Perspectives,” (themed issue of) *The History of the Family* 16/2 (2011), pp. 80–87.

42 Ulrike Freitag, Malte Fuhrmann, Nora Lafi, and Florian Riedler (eds.), *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2011).

43 Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi (eds.), *Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2014).

of these collections have been directed by Nora Lafi and Ulrike Freitag. Building on this scholarship, in her 2019 monograph *Esprit civique et organisation citadine* Nora Lafi provides a sweeping, although highly generalized account of Ottoman ‘old regime’ urban governance and its transition over the long 19th century.⁴⁴

While the field has grown and diversified considerably, we are not yet at the point where a synthetic account of Middle Eastern urban history can emerge. There is still a need for single-city studies, simply because to date there are many cities in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham for which there are no scholarly monographs. This means we do not even know the entire breadth of variation of urban life in this region and period, to use Beshara Doumani’s phrase.⁴⁵ However, while writing on single urban localities, the goal should always be comparisons which can strengthen the sense of scale and proportion in research, and help avoid the dangers of parochialism.

A BOTTOM-UP PERSPECTIVE ON URBAN GOVERNANCE IN AN IMPERIAL FRAMEWORK

With this assessment of the current state of research in mind, we convened two international workshops on comparative urban governance in late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham that took place at the Universities of Tübingen and Haifa in May 2017 and March 2018, respectively.⁴⁶ In our own research project on late Ottoman Gaza which is still in many respects a terra incognita on the historiographical map, we were faced with three major tasks. The first was to immerse ourselves in local sources to tease out the specificities of the place. The second was to systematically look for trans-regional linkages and networks as factors that could help

44 Lafi, *Esprit civique*.

45 Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean*, p. 271.

46 Our research on the city of Gaza and the two workshops were financed by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF), Grant 1226 (“Gaza during the Late Ottoman Period”), funding period 2016–2018. We thank Gudrun Krämer and Yossi Ben-Artzi for acting as discussants during both meetings.

explain local developments. The third involved comparing and contrasting our findings with the literature on comparable cities. These two international gatherings, and a third meeting in Berlin in the Autumn of 2018, constituted a perfect opportunity for us to strengthen the comparative aspect of our study.

All the contributors to this volume share both the localized, bottom-up approach described above as well as our commitment to a broader comparative perspective. Our goal is not to enforce a new interpretative paradigm but rather to systematically connect the urban islands of knowledge to each other while relating them to their most pertinent contexts. This calls for a pragmatic framework of enquiry, which has clear objectives but at the same time is flexible in terms of approaches.

STUDYING NODAL POINTS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The conceptual map of *nodal points*, i.e. urban material structures in which the institutions that we discuss are anchored,⁴⁷ is illustrated in Figure 1 above, which serves as a conceptual map for the presentation of each of the five sections and individual articles in this volume.

The articles are ordered on a spatial scale, from local to global. Processes such as trade flows or imperial policies involve several or all of these spatial levels at the same time as they interact with each other on a regional or trans-regional level. Within the city, they manifest primarily in two sets of material structures: buildings and streets. The residential building and the residential street – often, but not exclusively, a cul-de-sac – define the realm of the neighborhood. Public spaces and buildings, such as streets connecting the different parts of the city to each other, markets and government buildings, define the city as a whole, and ideally, are open and available to all. The main overland roads connect the city to the wider world.

In section 1, we examine the urban household as the smallest nodal point of urban governance. This entity is commonly linked to

47 Hufty, “Investigating Policy Processes,” p. 401.

the notion of the private sphere. However, this should not obscure the fact that the large households of local and central elites could be crucial units of social organization and political decision-making at the micro level and were often deeply involved in public and political life across the city. Their social, economic and political relations could run the gamut of the spatial scale, from the neighbors on the same street to individuals and institutions throughout the Empire and beyond. In the historical literature on the Ottoman Empire, which traditionally focuses on single personalities and families or on larger political entities such as imperial or provincial governments, households are still an under-researched entity.

Mahmoud Yazbak discusses the case of Abu Nabbut's household in Jaffa as an example of a political household, a paradigmatic "old regime" institution that was based primarily on patron-client relations and not on biological ties or residence. During its heyday between 1805 and 1817, Abu Nabbut's household took on the trappings of a ruling household, similar to that of his superior Sulayman Paşa, the governor of Sidon and ultimately also that of their supreme overlord, the Sultan in Istanbul. Sarah Buessow's contribution highlights another type of household, namely residential households of local elite families in Gaza at the turn of the 20th century, which were based on biological and marriage ties and were often located in state-ly buildings. These households formed a sort of oligopoly in the city and competed for both political and economic resources. A fortunate combination of both narrative and statistical sources makes it possible to discern distinct political strategies of individual households. Read together, these two studies point to the enduring relevance of households as loci of political decision-making on the urban level. They are also suggestive of the degree of internal variety of this entity and call for more in-depth and comparative studies.

Section 2 deals with the neighborhood as the nodal point of urban governance. Neighborhoods in the cities of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham can be characterized as spaces on a continuum between private and public. The cul-de-sac (Ar. *hara* or *zuqaq*) that connected several houses to the next urban thoroughfare (*tariq*) constituted what Fruma Zachs terms an 'in-between' space. More generally, urban

neighborhoods were areas in which spaces defined by private or group interests intersected with public spaces and institutions, for example, in the form of pious endowments (*awqaf*, sg. *waqf*) or government infrastructure. The Ottoman administration treated the inhabitants of a neighborhood as a "group," or, more precisely a corporation (commonly referred to as *ta'ifa*), that had a right to political representation through a council of elders and a head man. This led to a complex situation in which the neighborhoods were treated as homologous entities next to other corporations, such as specific communities of non-Muslims, tribal groups or guilds of artisans or merchants. At the same time, they often overlapped with one or more of these other corporations.⁴⁸

Like households, neighborhoods are key basic concepts in Ottoman urban history. However, they are commonly used in a loose and highly undertheorized fashion even though they are an important site in which collective self-organization at the grassroots level met imperial norms and demands and where important political socialization processes took place. As in the case of households, the internal variety of this category was immense.

As Çiğdem Kafescioğlu remarked with respect to the case of Istanbul, Ottoman administrative documents tend to create the impression that neighborhoods were well-demarcated, "cellular" entities, yet countless social practices constituted links across neighborhood boundaries.⁴⁹ Feras Krimsti discusses the suburban neighborhood as a location that straddled the divide between the urban and rural spheres. 'Abdallah Babinsi, the key figure in Krimsti's discussion, built his political fortunes up to 1850 on the specific complexion of Aleppo's eastern suburbs, which hinged on urban and rural interest groups. Krimsti discusses Babinsi's rise to power through the house-

48 On corporatism as an interpretative paradigm with regard to the Ottoman Empire, see Johann Buessow and Astrid Meier, "Ottoman Corporatism, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries: Beyond the State-Society Paradigm in Middle Eastern history," in Bettina Gräf et al. (eds.), *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies: Studies in Honour of Gudrun Krämer* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 81–110.

49 Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis / Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp. 180–183.

hold of one of Aleppo's influential families and his close relationships with both Bedouins and villagers, which allowed him to secure his position by guaranteeing security in the city and its rural areas while accommodating both their interests. These ties simultaneously explain the seemingly anachronistic survival of the Janissary faction in Aleppo until 1850. Johann Buessow and Yuval Ben-Bassat use GIS technology to provide a snapshot of various neighborhoods in Gaza at the turn of the 20th century and to examine their social, administrative and political roles. They use their material to rethink the concept of the neighborhood more generally and to work out variables that made Gaza a special case of a city where neighborhoods were associated with factional politics. These variables include the geographic conditions and economic opportunities that defined the city's layout and the degree of economic competition between urban sub-centers. The resulting model is suggested to serve as the starting point for comparative studies that could ultimately lead to a more structured analysis of space-making, economy and politics in late Ottoman cities.

Section 3 surveys two nodal points that provide a view of institutions and governance processes on the city level. Drawing on both archival and architectural evidence, Tawfiq Da'adli describes how *waqfs* worked as agents of change in the city of Lydda (al-Ludd). Importantly, one of the endowments discussed enabled a woman to become a major player in this city's development. Yuval Ben-Bassat discusses the age-old institution of the petition writers, the *arzuhalcis*, while anchoring the discussion in the case of late Ottoman Gaza. This institution served as a crucial interface between the imperial government and the city's population. As in earlier periods, the *arzuhalci* did not require more than a simple stand in the street, but took on unprecedented importance in the new technological era of mail and telegraph, and in the framework of intensifying connections between the imperial center and the empire's subjects in the provinces. The Ottoman census of 1905 sheds light for the first time on the social background of two *arzuhalcis*.

Section 4 focuses on public spaces as a particular type of physical and virtual nodal point, where problems, processes, actors, and

norms⁵⁰ on the city level converged. We consider the categories of private and public as the anchors of a wide spectrum and devote special attention to the many "in-between" spaces. The four studies in this section systematically interrogate the interplay between a *public sphere* enhanced by communication in the local press and the *public space* "produced," to use Henri Lefebvre's terminology, by everyday social practices, architecture and urban design.⁵¹ The chapters highlight the different sets of actors involved in the production of the public space. They describe the creation of public spaces at the grassroots level of private residential buildings and small enterprises, and as representative public spaces designed to serve the interests of the most powerful agents in the city, such as the imperial government and the newly formed municipalities. Through "thick" descriptions⁵² of episodes in which urban space was contested, the authors offer models of how to read urban design, architecture and images from the period as shaped by past conflicts of interests.

As discussed by Fruma Zachs in her article, in contexts where European building styles and consumer cultures were adopted, such as in Beirut, balconies constituted "in-between" spaces of a new kind, as did coffee houses and department stores. During the final decades of the 19th century, a new and distinctly modern concept of public space was created. Zachs argues that in Beirut a new domesticity discourse and new building styles reciprocally influenced each other and contributed to a gendered reorganization of the city space. Evelin Dierauff draws on press articles, maps, and photographs to document coffee houses and beaches as places of leisure in Jaffa around 1900, and argues that these were locales where

50 Hufty, "Investigating Policy Processes," p. 420.

51 The concept of the 'production of space' was first defined by Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991). See Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 4th edition (Paris: Anthropos, 2001 [1974]). For adaptations to the urban history of Bilad al-Sham, see Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 10-12 and Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 21-22.

52 On the concept, see Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30.

norms of public culture were performed and simultaneously discussed in the press. Abigail Jacobson's and Johann Buessow's contributions both deal with the implementation of the two Ottoman reform concepts of the "government compound" and the "municipal compound" in Jerusalem and Gaza, respectively. These architectural complexes were the kernels of new representative public spaces at the entrance to the old city centers in the two cities. In both cases, the Ottoman sultan and the local municipality were the main agents in shaping this representative space.⁵³

Section 5 focuses on three particular nodal points in three cities. All document forms of modernization which, during the late 19th century, linked the cities of Bilad al-Sham to global economic and technological circuits. Two of these, the building of the electric tramway of Aleppo and the expansion projects for the port of Gaza, were compact material structures. The third, the public health sector of Jerusalem, was virtual but was manifested in a complex network of material structures, in particular the many foreign and local hospitals that were founded all over the city.

Nora Lafi discusses the complexities involved in the construction of the tramway in Aleppo and explores its social meaning. She argues that there was continuity in urban governance across the watershed moment of the Tanzimat reforms in the ways in which the notables of Aleppo reacted to the new system and the changes it brought about between 1850s and 1870s. The neighborhood-based system of administration, which was the basis of urban governance before the Tanzimat, continued to be relevant, although new actors and institutions emerged in the city. Dotan Halevy focuses on the small port of Gaza, which, in the context of globalizing trade, became a factor that changed the face of the city. As a (secondary) port exporting grain grown in the arid terrains of southern Palestine, Gaza was integrated into an imperial web of eastern Mediterranean port cities. The article explores two interrelated urban institutions, a maritime pier and a municipal hospital, whose construction exposed tensions and conflicts that radi-

ated outwards in concentric circles, from the urban to the provincial and from there to the imperial, bringing into play two central pillars of imperial modernity: public health and economic development. Yoni Furas delineates the emergence of health as a policy field in Jerusalem. This process helped to redefine and reevaluate public space in the city and led to the emergence of a new elite of medical professionals and to the development of a "medical community" as an interest group in urban affairs.

THE IMPERIAL FACTOR: THE POLITICS OF NOTABLES AND MEDIATION

Many of the above examples suggest that the localized bottom-up view must be complemented by the factor of Empire, or more concretely, the interests and interventions of the imperial government in Istanbul and its agents in the provincial capitals. How problems of governance were perceived and framed, who was recognized as a legitimate actor in urban politics, how urban institutions were run and similar questions were all determined by local and imperial agents. Where local and imperial interests met, or clashed, mediation was needed. In order to be recognized, local interests had to be conveyed to the imperial government, while government demands had to be communicated to, and implemented among, local communities.

Typically, this task was assumed by individuals who had the means to make themselves understood on both sides. Middle East historian Albert Hourani, in a highly influential article published in 1968, famously defined these mediators as notables and described their *modus operandi* in ideal-typical form as "politics of notables." Hourani defined notables in terms of their political role as "intermediaries"⁵⁴ between the central government and specific sections of the local population:

53 Tawfiq Da'adli's article, in section 2, shows the same model at work, albeit on a more modest scale, in the small town of Lydda.

54 Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in William Polk and Richard Chambers (eds.), *Beginning of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 48.

The political influence of the notables rests on two factors: on the one hand, they, must possess “access” to authority, and so be able to advise, to warn, and in general to speak for society or some part of it at the ruler’s court; on the other, they must have some social power of their own, whatever its form and origin, which is not dependent on the ruler and gives them a position of accepted and “natural” leadership. Around the central core of this independent power they can, if they are skillful, create a coalition of forces both urban and rural.⁵⁵

Hourani argued that these notables came from three typical social and professional backgrounds: Muslim religious and legal scholars (*‘ulama*), leaders of local military garrisons, and large landowners.⁵⁶ His model is considered to have high heuristic value and has inspired an impressive series of detailed studies of notables in various places and periods, thus profoundly shaping the way the research thinks of the political history of Ottoman cities, particularly in Bilad al-Sham. Since the late 1990s, however, it has also drawn an increasing amount of criticism. James Gelvin, among others, for example, convincingly argued that the focus on notables as defined by Hourani implies a bias towards Arab-Muslim actors from prominent urban elite families and thus can lead to an under-complex understanding of urban governance.⁵⁷ Indeed Hourani’s paradigm tends to neglect the existence of a specific form of ‘Ottoman-local’ elites that evolved over the centuries of Ottoman rule in Bilad al-Sham, as in other provinces of the Empire.⁵⁸ In addition, it fails to characterize the agency of key non-elite actors, for example representatives of rural and/or subaltern communities,

55 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

57 James L. Gelvin, “The ‘Politics of Notables’ Forty Years After,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40/1 (2006), p. 29.

58 Ehud R. Toledano, “The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700–1900): A Framework for Research,” in Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma’oz (eds.), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 145–162.

members of the educated middle classes and non-Muslims, and it completely ignores the dimension of gender. Finally, the ideal type of a “politics of notables” runs the risk of overlooking other crucial avenues of mediation, for example through the institution of petitioning.

However, the most problematic aspect of Hourani’s paradigm is rooted in the mistaken assumption it fostered that (Arab-Muslim) notables had a monopoly on mediation between local communities and the imperial government. This type of conclusion indeed appears logical from contemporary and near-contemporary narrative sources in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. Arab chroniclers and journalists from the late Ottoman period tended to emphasize the importance of Arab-Muslim scholars, merchants and administrators from prominent families and often glorified them as role models. When describing the Empire’s Arab provinces Turkish writers too often singled out the same individuals as crucially important, although they tend to emphasize that they were difficult partners in imperial rule. Only since the late 1990s, with the growing accessibility of Ottoman archival documents and with the methodological inspiration of subaltern studies, have historians of the Middle East been able to assess the agency of other actors who were largely “under the radar” of narrative sources. Nonetheless, a holistic concept of mediation in the late Ottoman Empire deserves further research.⁵⁹

Several studies in this volume propose a new perspective that does not reject Hourani’s concept outright but rather integrates it into a wider framework of mediation. To begin with, they show that the concept of “notables” was well-established in the local political imaginary and was often conflated with the notion of ‘men belonging to local elite families,’ or *a‘yan*. At the same time, the generic term *a‘yan* could refer to actors with very different social, economic and political strategies according to place and period. For example, the chapter by Sarah Buessow deals with classical notables in Hourani’s sense in

59 For some important considerations, see Henning Sievert, “Intermediaries and Local Knowledge in a Changing Political Environment: Complaints from Libya at the Turn of the 20th Century,” *Die Welt des Islams* 54 (2014), pp. 322–362.

the context of late Ottoman Gaza. She shows that notables cannot be understood purely as intermediaries but rather at times followed different logics, for example that of households as businesses. She argues that in order to understand this complex situation, as well as the precariousness of the “notable” status, three kinds of actors should be distinguished: the individual notable, who is defined as mediator, the household as a collective actor, and finally, the elusive category of the family. The family, Buessow argues, was not a collective actor *per se*, but rather a confederation of households that was capable of action only when there was successful cooperation between its household members.

Feras Krimsti demonstrates that in the local society of Aleppo around 1850, there was an uneasy coexistence between the urban-based *āyan* and a second, no less important category of mediators or power brokers with ties to the rural world. Whereas the *āyan* were considered to be a kind of patriciate, defined by eligibility for the local consultative council or *meclis*, mediators with ties to the rural world were not part of this status group and at least in one case, one of them even refused to be coopted into the *meclis*.

With regard to Aleppo’s *āyan* during the 19th century, Nora Lafi lists a set of practices and privileges that defined “notable” status, most importantly euergetism, aspiring to the status of a “benefactor,” and responsibility for the city’s water provision. She also explains how different economic and social ties divided the notables and led to the formation of political factions and how sometimes they formed other lobbies together with European investors. Very importantly, her study also shows that mediation and leverage could go hand in hand with more or less tempered mobilization of violence.

Finally, the chapter by Ben-Bassat makes it clear that the classical notables as defined by Hourani were only a subset of the many categories of people who mediated between local societies and the imperial government in Istanbul. The *arzuhalcis*, petition and letter writers, for example, facilitated dialogue and negotiations between the imperial center in Istanbul and the Empire’s subjects in the provinces, at a time when the Empire was intervening to an increasing extent in its subjects’ lives.

ACTORS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE: NEW INSIGHTS AND FAMILIAR ABSENCES

This brings us to the more general topic of the *actors* of urban governance and the extent to which the chapters in this volume reflect their different perspectives and voices. All the chapters foreground specific kinds of urban residents. In some cases, the scope is wider, in others narrower, largely as a function of the sources that are available to date for different places and periods.

In terms of class, two chapters focus on the classical propertied and military urban elites and their politics. In the case of Abu Nabbut, as examined in the chapter by Mahmoud Yazbak, an Ottoman ‘old regime’ military-cum-political functionary reshaped through his construction projects what at the time was the small port town of Jaffa in central Palestine, using architecture and urban planning to bolster his career. In the case of Janissary leader ‘Abdallah Babinsi, Feras Krimsti shows he was an outlier within this type of ‘old regime’ elite, who was able to shape the fate of Aleppo, one of the Ottoman Empire’s major metropolises. The main sources analyzed by Yazbak and Krimsti to study these two actors were Shari’a court records and reports by contemporary observers, such as Arabic chroniclers and European consuls. While court records provide archival evidence of local transactions, observers can provide distanced uninvolved assessments of their actions.

The notables and elite households in the cases studied by Sarah Buessow, Johann Buessow and Nora Lafi represent what is usually termed the *āyan* in Arabic texts, the civil urban elite of landowners, merchants, scholars and administrators with deep roots in their cities. They proved to have much staying power, produced a large paper trail and continue to dominate local memory and historiography from the book market to the history section in websites of municipalities. In this case there is rich narrative material at hand but its generally apologetic nature calls for caution. Sanjay Subrahmanyam makes some important remarks in this regard on the historiography inspired by such elites across the world:

History is thus the Siamese twin of memory, carefully guarded like a serpent's treasure. It is also constantly seen to play on, and sometimes against, memory. The result is a history that is often written in a solemn style, one that is moralizing and therefore rarely ironical, which takes it upon itself to "shape good citizens" or loyal patriots. If the historian who takes this road is not cautious enough, he or she can easily become the strident spokesperson of a group or an ideological standpoint, in other words, of an "identity." In this framework, concepts that are actually quite distinct are easily confused, such as "history" and "heritage."⁶⁰

Archival material can be an important source that can be harnessed to cross-check the information from narrative sources. In this volume, the exceptionally broad selection of later Ottoman census records for Palestinian localities were highly important. Not only do the census records provide independent evidence to compare against identity-centered accounts of history, but they can also provide insights into the social background and strategies of less prominent but no less important actors in urban governance. These include people with some higher education and middling economic resources who filled important economic and technical functions as merchants, master builders, and engineers, or kept the local institutions running as bureaucrats, lower-rank administrators or police officers. In the absence of documents testifying to a 'middle class' consciousness, they perhaps should be categorized as the 'middle sort of people.'⁶¹ In historical studies, they typically appear as anonymous functionaries or legal categories because no chronicler has sung their praises and no foreign observer found them interesting or controversial enough to report on them. The examples discussed in this volume are neighborhood head men (*muhtars*), a 'neighborhood scribe' (*mahalle katibi*) and

an *imam* studied by Johann Buessow and Yuval Ben-Bassat, as well as the petition writers studied by Yuval Ben-Bassat. A similar case is that of the two endowers, a woman and a man that Tawfiq Da'adli documents in his chapter on two *waqfs* in Lydda, each of which became the kernel of a new neighborhood. In this case, historical photographs play a key role in reconstructing the ways in which these endowers engendered urban development and expansion through their investments.

The articles on urban public spaces in Section 3 highlight another category of actors: modern-educated intellectuals born in the late 19th century who left diaries and memoirs behind as well as articles in journals and newspapers and who transmitted globally circulating liberal bourgeois ideas and ideals to their readership in Arabic or Hebrew. These sources shine the spotlight on specific actors. The articles by Abigail Jacobson, Evelin Dierauff and Fruma Zachs show how the discourses produced by this very vocal category of urban dwellers were not at all mere elusive words or "writing on water" (*al-kitaba 'ala l-ma'*) as one contemporary Arab journalist called it,⁶² but rather were intimately bound up with physical transformations of their cities. This included phenomena as diverse as the organization of public ceremonies in Jerusalem's main plaza as described by Abigail Jacobson, the design of residential architecture in Beirut as discussed by Fruma Zachs, and the use of beaches of Jaffa as places of leisure, as discussed by Evelin Dierauff.

Section 5 of the book is defined by another set of actors who changed the face of entire cities during the period of high imperialism and the first modern era of globalization (c. 1870–1920); namely, a globally connected and mobile elite of technical experts and professionals who promoted modernization in the domains of infrastructure and health. In these cases, the press, Ottoman state archival documents, consular records and company archives provide rich evidence on these crucial brokers of technical knowledge.

Although we cast our nets widely, this volume is nevertheless marked by some silences and absences. In terms of the range of actors in the articles, there are three major imbalances

60 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "On the Origins of Global History: Inaugural Lecture Delivered on Thursday 28 November 2013" (Paris: Collège de France, 2016), pp. 7–8.

61 The term is an alternative for middle class(es) and is used, for example, in Henry R. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

62 Yusuf al-'Isa, "al-Kitaba 'ala l-ma' [Writing on Water]," *Filastin*, 6 December 1911, p. 1 [in Arabic].

that are perhaps not surprising but need comment. First of all, women are highly underrepresented. They figure mostly as wives or daughters of powerful men, anonymous marriage partners, customers in city markets and objects of moralizing discourses. Notable exceptions are Hajja Sitt Ikhwitha, the endower of Lydda (in Tawfiq Da'adli's article), the female journalists who discussed gender issues in Beirut (studied by Fruma Zachs) and the women active in women's associations in Jaffa (described by Evelin Dierauff). Subaltern actors beyond the circles of the propertied and educated 'middle sort of people' are also underrepresented, especially those from rural backgrounds. However, it is interesting to note that those chapters that use the Ottoman census as a source (Sarah Buessow, Johann Buessow and Yuval Ben-Bassat's) regularly mention people with occupations such as workers, peasant, and fishermen as belonging to the family, sometimes to the same household of prominent middle and upper-class actors in urban governance. This should caution us against assuming the existence of clear-cut social boundaries between 'elite' and 'non-elite' milieus in late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham. Another feature absent from this book are forms of collective action such as demonstrations, strikes and petitioning. As is known from other studies, these were ways in which subalterns could make themselves heard in the Ottoman Empire, alleviate their grievances and at times negotiate an improvement in their living conditions.⁶³

In addition, the articles in this volume could not cover all the institutions and periods relevant to the framework sketched out above,

or all the key cities in the region. Readers of the volume will find little, for instance, about the role of local law courts or the legal systems in urban governance during the late Ottoman period, which include Ottoman state legislation, Islamic law, customary law, and the roles of legal functionaries such as *kadis* and *muftis*. With regard to the geographic scope of the contributions, Palestine is comparatively heavily represented, because several articles on the Syrian region which were presented during the two workshops on which this volume is based could not be included in this publication eventually. Absences and uneven geographic coverage have plagued Middle Eastern urban history from its inception as a field of academic study. However, as pointed out, we identified new pathways into previously uncharted historiographical territory, mainly through new combinations of sources and inventive ways of 'close reading.' We also believe that this exercise in self-critical stocktaking of achievements and shortcomings of our research will help to better define the challenges for future research.

Finally, all our efforts depend on access to primary sources. The box texts that accompany each article in the volume specify the key sources on urban governance, along with remarks on their strengths and weaknesses. Many sources have become more accessible recently through digitization. The combination of a heightened sensitivity towards biases in our sources and improved access to new source material due to ongoing digitization efforts,⁶⁴ may pave the way for more decisive breakthroughs.

⁶³ See, for example, the studies collected in Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁴ See text boxes 1, 2, 4, 5 and 9 for remarks on digital sources available online.