

## THE BOA Open Jerusalem database : how to deal with such an amount of documents ?

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For me, the real issue is not what we can do with a such an amount; but what the meaning of this amount is. In fact, it's not an amount of documents ; but, as we have begun to see yesterday in the BOA reading room, it's a system ; the output of an administrative system. The original and particularly brutal end of the Ottoman empire has produced a « Sleeping Beauty » effect of this system.

The problem is not to aim for a general awakening – it's not a Doomsday for archives... The purpose for me is to identify the main stream and some revealing affairs in order to open windows on Jerusalem's *citadinité*. Open Jerusalem Archives through the BOA : first, we'll have to open archival windows.

We have to understand how the house was built in order to be able to find the right manner to locate and then open the window. The right window.

Usually, and especially in France during the French Revolution, the only way to stop the administrative procedure, was to destroy a part of the documentation. The revolution of the alphabet, conceived by Atatürk, has permitted to preserve, keep and save this amount – like a « Pompei situation », you know, but not for the sake of history and heritage. It was a strictly juridical revolution. Of course. It's always a very strange moment for every great archival group of records, just like a purgatory : the revelation (here the progressive concentration of different offices in a central site), is in many ways bringing zones of darkness and opacity to the fore, rather than light.

The problem is to understand the process and the purpose of this administration, or its spirit. The question is : can we go far without a deep understanding of the system and of its history. We have to work and rework on the story of Ottoman administration.... and we can try to shed a light on the system by focusing on the indirect French procedures which could have influenced the Ottoman system during and after the Tanzimat.

Distribution and dissemination of « ewrak » is not only a principle and the application of Tanzimat, but a kind of memory of the work accomplished by the administration itself : the division and distribution of the documentation informs us the different elements and steps of the procedure and the circulation of information *and* decision between the center and the base, between the imperial and the local level.

For example, the difference between *Defter* and *Ewraak* has a real political function : the goal is to make a separation between the sphere and the field of administration and the sphere of political decision. The defter is a key *and* a wall ; a way to preserve the secret of the work done inside the office and between the different offices and the « Sublime Porte ». During the nineteenth century, the administration is supposed to become more and more technical. It takes time and effort to examine the affairs. Especially under the pressure of Europeans interests (private and imperial, it's the same). Because the defter shows the distribution of work and affairs, inside the administration : what kind of office, etc. For Jerusalem, it is supposed to concern many « offices » : especially the « Sublime Porte » – because of the sovereignty of the Sultan, protector of the Holy places. But the distribution is also political. And in almost all of the case, we don't even know what are the actual boundaries between the simple administrative problem (if it may exist) and the political issues.

As we could see yesterday during our visit of the BOA, the defter is like a key : its purpose is to record et follow the life of the « affair », in fact the part of it treated by the administration. A part then. For me the problem is not to identify all the pertinent *gomlek* on Jerusalem affairs, but to link some affairs between each other.

The *gomlek* seems to be like a « bordereau » in French – a tool to follow the pieces through their life inside the different offices. The problem is that one affair or « dossier » can have many steps of registration, in many *defters*. The last step is to find the traces of the final (or not final) decision.

We have a problem of scale : the *defter* record is the entrance into the system, but it's hard to follow. Because the office which has treated the affair, and the office who finally keeps the pieces of documentation can be very different. For example, many reports finish their life in financial archives....

The problem of a simple and general database is to miss out on other levels. And it's a very big problem. Because of « the sleeping beauty » effect no one tries to reconstruct the unity of affairs. Rebuilding the circulation of some of them, about very representative topics, is for me the only way to deal « with such amount of documents ». And for that, we have to produce a typology of manners of dispersion of gomlek and cross it with others archives, especially in Jerusalem or Amman.