The primary aim of Malek Sharif’s book *Imperial Norms and Local Realities* is to revise the perception of municipal institution in the standard literature of the Ottoman Tanzimat period, and to counter the common assumption that this institution was imposed on rather unwelcoming provinces from above, that is, the central authorities of the Empire. The formative years of a number of municipal institutions in Syria had so far been overlooked completely, and the widely held view among historians was that these municipalities were only established in the 1870s. The detailed examination of primary sources has revealed that the municipal institutions in Syria were established a decade earlier, and that the history of the municipality of Beirut is more nuanced than hitherto assumed. This study provides a differentiated picture of the Beirut municipality and its functions, achieved through the careful perusal of the consecutive Ottoman laws. The findings have been compared and contrasted with evidence derived from a variety of contemporary sources that included, among others, the local press, Ottoman almanacs, memoirs, Western consular correspondence, travelogues and Ottoman archival material.