In her introduction to this beautifully illustrated book, Zandi-Sayek presents the context of her work: the population of Ottoman Izmir (Smyrna) grew massively during the years under study. The city’s urban fabric and form were also hugely transformed, with new neighbourhoods and infrastructures built. In the age of steam navigation, the harbour was modernized, and the city itself underwent profound changes. The balance between confessional communities was the object of renewed tensions and negotiations. New populations arrived, and new commercial networks developed.

Zandi-Sayek enounces the core idea of her research project as such: “I explore how people from a wide spectrum of society, Muslims and non-Muslims, subjects and foreigners, new-comers and long-term residents, merchants, investors, civil servants, and press reporters engaged in the reorganization of the city’s physical space” (p. 3). She thus chooses to study questions relating to cosmopolitanism through the lens of an urban history with a strong concrete dimension. For that, she uses the central archives of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, BOA) as well as British (FO at Kew Gardens), US (DUSCS in Washington), and French (CADN in Nantes) consular archives. Zandi-Sayek’s introduction details how the city developed between the seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, underlining how the various quarters developed on a communal basis: Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, Greek, and Frank (European). A focus on Frank Street, the main artery of the city, serves as an entry to the reading of the functioning of local urban society.

Zandi-Sayek dedicates the first chapter to the crucial question of citizenship, based on a study of the entanglement of legal spheres (property records, real-estate transactions, and all related conflicts). The jurisdiction of the local mahkeme court (that of the qadi) was indeed limited by the privileges given to foreigners and to consular courts. Through the study of precise litigations, Zandi-Sayek follows the definition of identities which was locally negotiated on the basis of these different overlapping legal spheres. In taking examples from before the legal system was reformed in the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s and from all the phases of the reforms over the next two decades, she manages to provide a vivid picture of such processes. This stands in contrast with the available chronological narratives, which focus only on how the reforms were enacted, not on how their implementation was negotiated locally. The result is a picture of a city in which entrepreneurs, landowners, foreigners, protégés, and members of the various confessional communities use all legal resources to
defend and promote their interests. Zandi-Sayek shows how the reification of identities is also a result of all these processes.

What might be lacking in this description is a clear analysis of the old regime’s system. An attention to this dimension might have allowed the author to better qualify the novel elements that the second half of the nineteenth century brought and their consequences on the relationship between local identities and geopolitics. What might also be lacking at this stage is a reflection on the cosmopolitan dimension of this system. Details are given, however, on the study of the creation in 1849 of a cadastral commission in which Ottoman and foreign landowners were represented and that not only worked on issues of property rights but also acted as a body of urban governance. But information here again is lacking on the old regime’s municipal institutions, which the creation of this commission challenged and in which all confessionnal communities were represented except the foreigners. This has implications on the very definition of cosmopolitanism, and of course on the philosophy of urban governance.

The second chapter is about public space and urban governance. It begins with a description of the perils the city was subject to during the period, including fires, cholera epidemics, prostitution, disorders related to alcohol consumption, banditry, and street violence. But it soon returns to the reform of local governance that had begun in 1849 with the creation of the cadastral commission. This commission was “repurposed into a municipal body” in 1856 (p. 92). The formalization of the modern municipality’s birth happened in 1868. What is highly interesting in the study is the analysis of how the commission (and then the modern municipality – belediye – that began to emerge out of it) dealt with public space, street width, and urban planning. Even more interesting is the conflict at the end of the 1850s about street lighting, the concession for this public service having been given by the commission (in which foreign consuls were dominant voices) to a British company. A strike, organized by the city notables, followed, marking the emergence of the demand for a municipal system in which such conflicts of interest could not happen. A petition by 200 notables marks the culmination of this conflict. It is a pity that the author does not really analyze it. This endeavor might have helped her understand better the relationship between the old regime’s municipality, whose competences had been challenged by the creation and ambitions in urban governance of the commission, and the influence of foreign merchants. A detailed analysis of the signatories might also have helped understand better the sociology of the notability and the relationship between the various confessionnal communities. Here again, reflections on the nature of cosmopolitanism could have been suggested by such an effort. Insufficient details are provided.