

“Thousands great saints:” Evliya Çelebi in Ottoman Palestine

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Abstract

Evliya's description of his journey in 17th century Ottoman Palestine is a good example of the importance of travelogue, especially as it gives another viewpoint, that of a Muslim scholar. Through his eyes, it is possible to see the country, hear local traditions and get a better understanding of realities in that time and place. This article should be considered as an attempt to initiate either a greater research project on Evliya's Seyahatname concerning Palestine or a collection and publication of other Muslim travelers' narratives from the Ottoman period, which are scarce and not always accessible.

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Introduction

In contrast to the hundreds of books from the 16th to the 19th century, written by Christian travelers and pilgrims to the Holy Land in various European languages, and the dozens of books written by Jewish travelers and pilgrims in Hebrew, there are only few descriptions written in Arabic or Turkish. This lacuna could be well explained by the absence of a tendency towards travelling among Muslim scholars and moreover by the fact that Palestine was a province of minor importance in the Ottoman Empire. It was mainly significant as being the most relevant route from Damascus to Cairo and as the locus of various holy places, of which the *Haram al-Sharif* [the Temple Mount] and the *al-Aqsa* mosque in it, were the most important. Yet they did not generate a serious phenomenon of pilgrimage as did Jerusalem and other sites in the Holy Land for Christians and Jews through the ages.

Evliya Çelebi, an Ottoman learned person with good connections in the Sultan's court, was an exceptional figure who devoted forty years to travelling within the vast boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, and left a ten-volume book on his travels (*seyahatnamesi*). His work is unique in its scope, in its richness and the numerous possibilities to reconstruct Ottoman mentality and worldview. We still lack, even in Turkish, a scientific annotated edition of the passages

concerning his sojourn in Ottoman Palestine. One version was translated and published in English in the 1930s. Its importance lies in three areas: a) It reconstructs Ottoman Palestine – its cities, towns, fortresses, roads, and buildings – which hardly survived. Since Israeli archeology does not take an interest in it,¹ much is still to be done, and a written description might be of great help; b) It shows how a Muslim *'alim* [a scholar, religiously learned man] depicts the country and its dwellers, including Christians and Jews, and their holy places; c) It is an important source that might help reconstruct certain aspects of popular culture, including, for example, local traditions about the erection of the citadel in Jerusalem.

Early Ottoman Palestine

During the period of Ottoman rule, Palestine was part of the province of Syria (*vilayet al-Sham*) and the capitals of the province's sub-divisions were Damascus and Sidon. Its area was divided between the *sanjaks* [districts] of Safed, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Gaza. Each *sanjak* was divided into *nahiyas* [sub-districts] which in the mid-sixteenth century included between 150 to 300 villages, totaling 800 villages and a total of about another 1600 *mazara'a* [sown areas] in all four sanjaks.²

Palestine was distant from the central parts of the empire, a province of secondary importance serving as a route of transit between Syria and Egypt. With the exception of the *Haram al-Sharif* and a few other holy sites, it contained nothing of any strategic or economic value. For the Empire rulers the country did have some importance, since the route followed by the *hajj* [the pilgrimage to Mecca] convoys ran near its territory and local governors were obligated to accompany the convoys from Damascus to Mecca.³ Even though it served as a country of transit for people and goods, Palestine never gained decisive importance, especially after the mid-sixteenth century and the discovery of new trade routes to the Far East.

The sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam stemmed from its being the destination of Muhammad's wondrous Nocturnal Journey from Mecca on his legendary winged horse al-Burāq. In Jerusalem he met prophets who preceded him,

¹ *A historical archaeology of the Ottoman Empire: breaking new ground*, eds. Uzi Baram, Lynda Carroll (New York: Kluwer Academic – Plenum Publishers, 2000).

² For statistics based on Ottoman sources, see Bernard Lewis, "Some Statistical Surveys of 16th Century Palestine," in *Middle East Studies and Libraries: A Felicitation Volume for Professor J.D. Pearson*, ed. Barry C. Bloomfield (London: Mansell, 1980), 119-20. For an overview of Palestine during the Ottoman period, see *The History of Eretz Israel*, VII, *Under Mamluk and Ottoman Rule*, ed. Amnon Cohen, (Jerusalem: Keter, 1981), 93-199 (Hebrew). For the Jerusalem *sanjak* and the city of Jerusalem in the seventeenth century, see Dror Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 9-33.

³ On the subject, see Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans, 1517-1683* (London – New York: Tauris, 1994).

prayed in their company, ascended to Heaven, and returned to Mecca. During the first years of the Muslim calendar (*hejira*), Jerusalem was the *qibla* – the direction in which Muslims turned when in prayer. Only after Muhammad was unsuccessful in gaining the recognition of the Jews did he change the *qibla* to the Ka'ba in Mecca.

Jewish and Christian traditions led to a change in the status of Jerusalem in the eyes of the Muslim conquerors, and the corpus of literature known as 'Praises of Jerusalem' developed over the centuries, especially during the Umayyad period. In these works Jerusalem was a holy city and the center of the world, where the earlier prophets were active, as well as the scene of important events at the End of Days. The *al-Aqsa* mosque was held to be holier than the Dome of the Rock, becoming a focus of Muslim pilgrimage, the third in importance after Mecca and Medina, as recorded in *hadīth* [traditions attributed to Muhammad himself].

Despite this, pilgrimage to Jerusalem was not considered a *hajj* but only a *ziyara*, which is of a slightly lower degree of importance. This did not prevent the emergence of a parallel phenomenon – the increasing importance of Jerusalem to mystics and Sufi ascetics, many of whom came to the city to live in the shadow of its holy sites, an act that was not considered appropriate and befitting by Muslim religious scholars (*ulama*). It should also be borne in mind that the reconquest of Jerusalem from the Crusaders in a holy war enhanced the city's status in the consciousness of Muslims and in Islam, and that during the Mamluk period, which preceded that of the Ottomans, its religious importance and power of attraction increased greatly.⁴

Ottoman Palestine's population, comprised mostly of peasants (*fellahs/-in*), was about 250,000 people, a number that fluctuated from time to time; this is an average estimate of the population prior to 1800. Many areas remained untilled and those who passed through them with their flocks of sheep were primarily Bedouins, who numbered about twenty to thirty thousand. There were few

⁴ Israeli scholars wrote a lot about the subject. Among the many, see for example Ofer Livne-Kafri, *Jerusalem in Early Islam, Selected Essays* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2000) (Hebrew). The book relates to many subjects and reaches the 14th century, with many references for primary and secondary sources; among them Immanuel Sivan, "The Holiness of Jerusalem in Islam," in *Notes and Studies on the History of the Holy Land under Islamic Rule*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1976), 35–42 (Hebrew); Izhak Hasson, "The Muslim View of Jerusalem: The Qur'an and Hadīth," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period 638–1099*, eds. Joshua Prawer, Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1996), 349–85 (Hebrew). On a representative of the late Mamluk period see Donald P. Little, "Mujir al-Din al-Ulaymi's Vision of Jerusalem in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115 (1995): 237–247. For a recent overview of the Mamluk period see Sylvia Schein, "Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Mamluk Period (1260-1517)*, eds. Yvonne Friedman, Joseph Drori, (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi: 2012), 276–309 (Hebrew).

cities within the borders of Ottoman Palestine, the most important of which was Jerusalem. It served as a district capital, and its primary significance for members of the monotheistic faiths stemmed from its role in religious thought, its holy sites, and the many religious institutions located within its bounds. Many of Jerusalem's residents were religious functionaries who lived in institutions such as monasteries or theological schools (*madrasas*), or pilgrims who resided in the city for certain periods of time. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem from all over the Muslim world – especially the Maghreb – increased under Mamluk rule in Palestine and apparently continued to do so throughout the Ottoman period. With our present state of knowledge, it is difficult to ascertain whether the number of pilgrims increased once the Ottoman sultan became the ruler of the three continents [that is – 'the civilized world'], or to what extent was there change in the composition of the emigrants to Palestine. Naturally, during peaceful periods there were more pilgrims, while in times of war, in years in which pirates were more active, when security slackened, or in periods of famine their number declined.

In addition to Jerusalem, the cities of Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and Safed should be noted. It was only during the eighteenth century that important urban centers were newly established along the coastline, which had been purposely devastated by the Mamluks who were afraid of a new crusade: Jaffa, Acre, and to a lesser extent also Haifa. Until the mid-eighteenth century Jaffa was the major seaport, through which Jewish and Christian pilgrims arrived. The alternative was to disembark at Sidon on the Lebanese coast or at the port of Alexandria in Egypt, from where pilgrims travelled northwards overland.

After the Ottoman conquest in 1516 by Sultan Selim, the new rulers did give some thought to Palestine, particularly Suleyman I ("The Lawgiver") who shaped anew the landscape of Jerusalem. In addition to a surge of construction in Jerusalem and the supply of water to that city, other noteworthy efforts were improvement of the roads, the establishment of caravansaries along them, and the building of a number of citadels, such as those of Beit Govrin and Rosh Ha'ayin, for example.

Evliya Çelebi and his Travelogue

In contrast to the hundreds of books written by European travelers to Palestine in the pre-modern age, and a few dozen short itineraries in Hebrew, only a small number of descriptions by Muslim travelers and pilgrims have survived. We can only guess that there were others, yet their overall number is by far lower than European travelogues. The Muslim East lacks an Islamic parallel to the rich genre of European travel literature resulting from the journeys of tourists, adventurers, clergy, and pilgrims who aspired to relate their experiences and what they saw to their countrymen in Europe. This can be attributed *inter alia* to the Ottomans' sense of superiority reflected in a lack

of interest in anything outside their own immediate country, the lack of Muslim print presses (in Arabic, Turkish and Persian) and bookstores, the absence of a tradition of reading among the wider public, and more.

It is this state of affairs that makes all the more important the testimony of Evliya Çelebi, the most renowned Ottoman traveler who left us a detailed ten-volume description of his travels throughout the Ottoman Empire in the second third of the seventeenth century. Evliya Çelebi, born in Istanbul in 1611 and educated to fill a religious role, spent most of his adult life traveling through the Ottoman Empire. There are several manuscripts of his work, on the basis of which a few abridged versions, replete with errors, were published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To this day there is no scholarly edition of the full work, and only the sections dealing with certain regions have been published in full and authoritative editions.⁵ While there is no consensus among scholars of the Ottoman Empire as to the credibility of this work and whether it should serve as a source,⁶ even if Evliya Çelebi did exaggerate in his descriptions and the statistics he recorded, his book is still a valuable source of information about the Ottoman world from various standpoints. The stories which he cites from locals, should be treated as a mirror to their cultural world, and not necessarily judged as true or false.

Evliya Çelebi visited Palestine twice, once in 1649 and again in 1672, a decade before his death in Cairo (1682). During the 1930s Stuart H. Stephan translated the sections of the *Seyahatname* dealing with Palestine and published them in installments in the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine*.⁷ Though annotated, it is not a critical scholarly edition. For my following discussion I have used Stephan's English translation. I have also drawn additional details

⁵ See, for example, Korkut M. Buğday, *Evliya Çelebi's Anatolienreise* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Robert Dankoff, "Establishing the Text of Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*: A Critique of Recent Scholarship and Suggestions for the Future," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 18 (2000): 139–44; Erich Prokosch, *Kairo in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Istanbul: Simburg, 2000); Robert Dankoff, Robert Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions: Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid*, edited with translation, commentary and introduction (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004); Robert Dankoff, Sooyong Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller: Selections from the Book of Travels of Evliya Çelebi* (London: Eland, 2010). Evliya's journeys to Palestine and his person were lately treated by Hasan Baktir, "Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname* and the Holiness of Jerusalem," in *Through the Eyes of the Beholder: The Holy Land, 1517-1713*, eds Judy A. Hayden, Nabil I. Matar (Boston: Leiden, 2013), 111-124.

⁶ Scholars such as Hayim Gerber, Suraia Faroqhi and others incline to his credibility. See for example R. Dankoff, *An ottoman Mentality (Evliya Çelebi)*, Brill: Leiden-Boston 2006

⁷ Stuart H. Stephan, "A facsimile edition of the collected installments," in *Evliya Tshelibi's Travels in Palestine (1648–1650)*, ed. Nathan Schurr (Jerusalem: Ariel, 1980) (Hebrew and English). While providing a translation of vol. IX (Vols 85–101 of the manuscript of the Topkapı Sarayı Library in Istanbul), the editor at times adds passages from vol. III.

from Dankoff and Kim later and more exact translation, though he included only sections relating to Jerusalem and Safed.⁸

The part devoted to Evliya Çelebi's journey through Palestine begins in Tibnin, in the north of the country, and moves southwards to Jerusalem, noting the villages through which he passed, their size and the religious affiliation of their residents – Muslims, Druzes, Christians, etc. He also reports on the sources and quality of the water supply, what agricultural crops were raised, the difficulties and dangers of travel along the roads, and his encounters with local residents. In addition, he describes unique structures and records other details that he believes might interest the reader or the potential traveler.

Distances are measured by hours of travel on horseback, and at times by a “cannon’s range.” Dimensions of buildings are given in paces or Mecca yards. Evliya travels through Palestine as a devout Muslim tourist, but explicitly not as a pilgrim to whom Jerusalem is his destination. He punctiliously reports that at each of the many holy sites he came across he recited one prayer or another. It would be interesting to learn just how much his departure from Istanbul was connected to the fact that during the reign of Murad IV (1623–40) it was the Kadizadelis who called the tune and there was a climate hostile to Sufis, mysticism, and the veneration of saints.⁹ Perhaps something in the public atmosphere in the capital induced Evliya Çelebi to repeatedly stress that he carried out his religious obligations, first and foremost the five daily prayers.

Currently, we have only one additional published source that can be used as a comparison with that of Evliya Çelebi or at least can supplement his descriptions. Gideon Weigert published, in Hebrew translation, the travel diary of a Sufi shaykh of the Khalwatiyya mystical order in Damascus, written in 1710, about half a century after that of Evliya. A comparison of the two raises some interesting points. The author, Mustafa al-Bakri as-Sadiqi, then twenty-three years old, was greatly excited by what he saw but does not note his exact and detailed impressions, as did Evliya Çelebi. He was content with describing the beauty of the scenes he beheld; his diary is filled with spirituality, colored by the enthusiasm of a pilgrim to Jerusalem. Like Evliya, he prays often and reads passages from the Qur’an.¹⁰ Al-Bakri came to Jerusalem as a pilgrim, so that what he saw on the way and his impressions took second place to (and were less relevant than) his desire to reach the holy city. He stayed in Jerusalem for six months, during which he conducted diverse Sufi ceremonies in the various *khalwas* and *zawiyyas* in the city and its surroundings.¹¹ Weigert stresses

⁸ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*.

⁹ Madeline C. Zilfi, “The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-century Istanbul,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 45 (1986): 251–69.

¹⁰ Gideon Weigert, “An Eighteenth-century Travel Diary: From Damascus to Jerusalem,” *Cathedra*, 68 (1993): 49–56 (Hebrew).

¹¹ For the religious life and atmosphere in Jerusalem, see Gideon Weigert, “Muslim Religious

the fact that al-Bakri dutifully fulfilled all the obligations of the *Şari'a* (Muslim religious law), refraining from anything that would be considered idolatrous,¹² and visited only the tombs of prophets, i.e., those mentioned in the Qur'an, whereas Evliya stopped at every tomb he encountered on his journey. Evliya, too, does not mention lighting candles, kissing the tombs, or praying to the dead, only prayers recited for the exaltation of the deceased and the success of his journey. Later, al-Bakri returned to Jerusalem and lived there for forty years, as many other scholars did before and after him, as is evident from biographical dictionaries. It may be that he was not exceptional, but only few manuscripts similar to his travel diary to Jerusalem still exist.

In his concluding remarks of *Through the Eyes of the Beholder* Nabil Matar rightly speaks of a different holiness of Jerusalem and Palestine for Christians, Jews and Muslims – “all the travelers and pilgrims (...) viewed the land through their different histories, beliefs, and forms of worship”¹³ - and makes an important distinction: “the Euro-Christian combination of piety and conquest was in stark contrast with the view of the land by the peoples from the Ottoman Empire and beyond. For them *ard Filastin* [the land of Palestine] was part of their traveling and living space. Pilgrims and students, teachers and sufi masters saw *Quds Sharif* [holy Jerusalem] (...) as part of their destination for employment and prayer (...) [in a real territory between Syria and Egypt]. (...) For the Muslim population, along with eastern Christians and Jews of the Ottoman Empire *ard Filastin* was part of the *lebensraum* in which their personal history took shape.”¹⁴ I find that in this respect Jewish conceptions are closer to those of the Muslims for whom it's mostly Jerusalem and to a lesser degree some other places which are sites of holiness, rather than to the Christians who saw the country as a whole unit of sanctity.

Evliya's description is important from at least three aspects: a) The views of a Muslim scholar from the imperial capital on provincial Palestine, its administrative organization, and the presence of 'others' – non-Sunni Muslims, Druzes, Jews, and Christians; b) As a means of historical-archaeological reconstruction of roads, buildings (some of which have entirely disappeared or only partially survived), and urban daily life; c) Description, even partial, of the cultural and religious life of Muslims in Palestine as revealed, for example, in the most important site of popular ritual or in folk traditions relating to the origin, construction, and character of various sites, such as the citadel of Jerusalem.

Life in Eighteenth-century Jerusalem,” *Cathedra*, 49 (1988): 76–86, in particular 79 (Hebrew). For this particular matter see also Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century*, 69–72. Zeevi bases his discussion on the second chronicle mentioned by Weigert, that of Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi, which was written somewhat earlier than that of his disciple, al-Bakri.

¹² Weigert, “Muslim Religious Life,” 85.

¹³ Nabil Matar, “Conclusion,” in *Through the Eyes of the Beholder*, 225-227.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

Rulers and Residents of Palestine

Evliya Çelebi punctiliously notes exactly his present location in the vast Ottoman state and provides the reader with administrative details, probably supplied by representatives of the central authorities in every place. He informs us of the Ottoman conquest of the area that formerly was held by “the despicable Circassians” [the Mamluk Sultans],¹⁵ a subject to which he will return in describing Jerusalem, and then pays attention to the administrative division of the country into districts and the changes that this division has undergone. For example, he reports that the Safed district is part of the *vilayet* of Sidon, but in the past belonged to the *vilayet* of ash-Sham. He provides detailed information about the income of the local governors and *qadis*, the size of estates or fiefs allotted as *timar* and *zıa‘amet* to soldiers and officers who were obliged to accompany the *haji* convoys in return for these fiefs and their income.¹⁶ He reports about officials and the number of soldiers in the garrisons in various cities and citadels. In addition to recording the salaries of senior officials, he also informs about the income from taxes.¹⁷ He repeats time and again that the owners of the fiefs and the governors in this area are obligated to accompany the convoys to Mecca instead of paying taxes in cash.

Evliya reports, for example, about the administration of Jerusalem by the local *qadi* and his subordinates. This is an important testimony; even if it is not an actual description of the state of affairs in Jerusalem, it at least outlines what was supposed to be the situation in an Ottoman city. When Dror Zeevi refers to this passage he stresses that despite the fact that only a few of the officials mentioned appear in the *sicil* (Muslim court records), this does not detract from the credibility of Evliya’s report.¹⁸

The overwhelming majority of the residents were Muslims, especially in the cities. Here and there he mentions “others” among the rural residents – there were non-Sunni Muslims – and relates with suspicion to the Druzes or to the presence of various *Mazhabas* (the four schools of Muslim law) in Jerusalem. Moreover, the Jews and Christians are infidels, and there are also foreign Christians who are not subjects of the sultan. Evliya is far from being objective: when writing about Sunni Muslims, he does so in a positive manner:

¹⁵ Stephan, “A facsimile,” 18.

¹⁶ The *timar* was a fief with a small income, while that of a *zıa‘amet* was greater, generally allotted to senior military officers in the capital of the *sanjak* or *vilayet*. See Bernard Lewis, “The Ottoman Archives as a Source for the History of the Arab Lands,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 83/3–4 (1951): 146; Id., “Studies in Ottoman Archives,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16/3 (1954): 481–83.

¹⁷ His information could be compared to the figures supplied for the sixteenth century by Amnon Cohen, Bernard Lewis, *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁸ Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century*, 25–26.

“The inhabitants [of the village of Tīrzāt] are sympathetic and ‘well beloved’ Moslems.”¹⁹ But when relating to Muslims who are not of the *Ḥanafī* order or to other groups, his language is more denigrating: “Schismatics (*rāfiqīler*) are yet living in it. (...) Then comes the village of Jish, with one hundred houses of accursed believers in the transmigration of souls (...). From this village we had a narrow escape to the village of Yāzūn, which also consists of one hundred houses of schismatics.”²⁰

In describing the folk celebration at Meiron, in which Jews and non-Jews participate, he writes: “When the time of the Jewish feast approaches, i.e. the notorious [Feast of the] Tabernacles (*qāmīsh*), all people (*‘Arab ve ‘ajem*), mostly Druzes, Tīmānis, Yezīdis, and Mervānis, are wont to assemble there – a dangerous crowd, counting several thousands.”²¹

When he mentions that during “the infamous feast of Easter” some 5,000 to 10,000 Christians congregate in Jerusalem, he terms them infidels who will inherit Hell.²² Pejorative epithets are applied to Christian pilgrims in the continuation of his chronicle. In this he does not deviate from the customary terminology and rhetoric in the writings of the *‘ulema*. His depiction of the Christians is full of scorn. He is also critical of proceedings in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, whether because of the relations between the various denominations or from the standpoint of religious practice – there are too many statues, for example – and the manner in which the priests trick innocent believers. Notwithstanding that, he does admire some of what he sees,²³ and the fact that he is willing to go inside and look around, and even document it in his narrative, is meaningful in itself.

Evliya displays a negative attitude towards Jews, as well. He begins his description of Palestine in the *sanjak* of Safed, maintaining that this is the biblical Canaan, the historic land of the Jews - in fact, the Dankoff and Kim translation writes: “It was the original homeland of the Children of Israel (...). Nebuchadnezzar (...) massacred the Israelites.”²⁴ His hostility towards Jews comes through clearly in his chronicle; time and again he records pejorative descriptions of the Jews, their rituals, and their homes. In relation to Safed, which he believes to be the place of origin of the Jews, he maintains that they had an ancient temple there – perhaps basing himself on the name Beit El (an identification which also appears in the diaries of some Christian travelers,

¹⁹ Stephan, “A facsimile,” 9.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

²¹ Ibid., 17.

²² Ibid., p. 61. “Even now 5,000 or 10,000 hell-destined infidels gather here every year on their infamous Festival of the Red-Egg.” Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 332. See a similar version in Baktir, “Evliya Celebi’s Seyahatname,” 121 and note 25.

²³ Baktir, “Evliya Celebi’s Seyahatname,” 121-123.

²⁴ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 311, 314. And similarly in Stephan, A facsimile, 18.

probably grounded in information supplied by local Jews) – and even compares its importance and centrality to the Jews to that of the Qa‘ba to the Muslims, a comparison for which he apologizes.²⁵ While noting that the castle is ruined and has no one to command and defend it, he writes: “But there are many Jews.”²⁶

Description of the Country

Evliya Çelebi makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the cities, towns, and villages of Palestine in the middle of the period of Ottoman rule. Whether from what he personally saw and recorded or from the statistics he reported – even if his figures are generalized or exaggerated – the country seems to have been relatively densely populated in the rural hilly regions and fertile valleys. He places the villages in two categories: having either one hundred or two hundred houses or households – and most of them are Muslim. In addition, he reports on the ethnic or religious composition of the population in the villages. Despite his generalized statistics, it would seem that these are relatively large villages, so it is difficult to learn whether the population dwindled in this area due to the crisis of the seventeenth century.

There is no village without a source of water; Evliya mentions the sources and their nature for almost every village. The impression is that the country is blessed with water, at least in Galilee and the hill country, particularly naturally gushing springs. He is quite interested, almost obsessed, with the local water supply, a matter that calls for a question about the presence of this motif in other descriptions – springs, streams, and wells. He notes the water’s taste and medicinal attributes, as certainly reported to him by local residents.²⁷ He records local traditions about how the springs were formed but especially dwells upon what benefit accrues from drinking their waters.

In addition, Evliya notes the existence of groves and orchards, listing some of the important agricultural crops: grapes, olives, dates, figs, and berries. Surprisingly, he makes no mention of the raising of field crops – cereals, legumes, sesame, and the like, nor does he mention the extraction of honey or the raising of cotton. Here and there he refers to the large areas worked by *fellahin*, but without going into details. There is no reference in his chronicle to commerce in Palestine or the transport of goods overland or by sea. Nor does

²⁵ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 314 (whereas the old British translation is vague: Stephan, 18).

²⁶ Stephan, “A facsimile,” 18-19. On the importance of Safed, its past glory and present decadence, as well as the many holy sites within its bounds, see also the description given by Olf Dapper in 1677: Olf Dapper, *Asia, oder Genae und gründlich Beschreibung des gantzen Syrien und Palestins, oder Gelobten Landes* (Amsterdam: J. von Meursen, 1681), 94.

²⁷ Stephan, “A facsimile,” 12-13.

he touch upon the complex mutual relationships between villagers and city dwellers with the Bedouins.²⁸

Evliya does provide information about the roads – their condition, including the difficulty and personal risk of traveling along them, often from his firsthand experience. He records the citadels and caravansaries along the route, including what the latter supplied the traveler (food, feed for animals, a candle at night)²⁹ as well as the dimensions and his impressions of buildings: monasteries, ruined citadels (above all the splendid citadel of Safed, but also smaller ones), mosques, and caravansaries, supplying their dimensions in paces or Mecca yards.³⁰ He describes the decorations in bathhouses and mosques, most of which have now disappeared even if the structures have survived. At times he also records inscriptions on the walls,³¹ and more details. Surprisingly, he makes no mention of coffeehouses, even though we know they existed.³² Also noteworthy are the details he supplies about the restoration and repair of structures, such as the Red Mosque in Safed, carried out by Şaleh Bey in A.H. 1082 (1671/2), and about the interior decoration of such buildings: painted ceramic tiles, marble slabs, inscriptions, windows and more.³³ Most interesting are the details about a few small mosques, not in Safed, that had stained glass windows, colorful tiles, and domes and towers overlaid with lead.

As one coming from Anatolia, with its wooden houses, the stone structures in the villages and cities impress him. Only in the case of the Bedouins does he mention poor mud shacks, just as do European travelers, especially when describing the coastal plain.

²⁸ For an extensive and original analysis of this issue, see Zeevi, *An Ottoman Century*, 93–114.

²⁹ See the classification of public kitchens and the analysis of their operation in Amy Singer, “The ‘Michelin Guide’ to Public Kitchens in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Starting with Food: Culinary Approaches to Ottoman History*, ed. Amy Singer (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2011), 69–92.

³⁰ See for example the detailed description of ‘Ain e-Tujjar, within it “the mosque of Sinan Pasha, an artistically constructed work, with a lead roof, full of light. Its windows have light blue glass enamel fixed symmetrically with rock crystal (...) it measures eighty feet each side. The sanctuary has three graceful and lofty minarets” (Stephan, “A facsimile,” 32). Around 1630 Eugène Roger reported that Fakhr al-Din renovated the fortified *han* and stationed a garrison of one hundred soldiers there. Almost every Tuesday a market for cattle and other merchandise was held there See Eugène Roger, *La Terre Sainte* (Paris: Antoine Bertier, 1664), 68–69.

³¹ For the text of various inscriptions in Safed, see Stephan, “A facsimile,” 20–26.

³² This is surprising, for Evliya took great pains to note the number of coffeehouses in each city in other parts of the Ottoman Empire; see Yaron Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans: Ottoman Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 39. For coffeehouses in Safed and Jerusalem since the mid-sixteenth century, see Rabbi Moshe Mitrani, *Responsa*, 3 (Venice, 1630), #150, 169v (Hebrew); Amnon Cohen, “Coffee and Coffeehouses in Jerusalem,” in *Studies in the History of Muslim Peoples, Papers Presented at a Conference in Memory of David Ayalon*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 103–112; Id., *The Guilds of Ottoman Jerusalem* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2011), (see the term coffee in the index).

³³ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 312–313.

It might be interesting and illuminating to compare his description of the *Haram al-Sharif* in Jerusalem with pictorial depiction which were painted at that period,³⁴ as well as the remaining building in the twentieth century.

Culture and Religious Life

If the Holy Land of Jewish and Christian travelers is replete with many holy sites located primarily in the vicinity of Jerusalem, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee and its surroundings, and Nazareth, Evliya Çelebi completely changes the map of holy places. In almost every village through which he passes, as well as cities such as Safed, Nablus, and Jerusalem, he notes a site holy to Muslims. He lists hundreds of tombs, shrines, and monuments of holy figures – whether from the Bible, the Qur'an, or Muslim tradition and history relating to the conquest of Palestine.

He introduces the reader to an almost unknown area as he tells of the many holy places (*maqams*), tombs, and shrines dedicated to the memory of diverse figures from the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), the New Testament, and the history of Islam in cities and their surroundings, and to a much lesser extent also in open spaces – from the companions of Muhammad during the Muslim conquest to local religious figures or well-known personages who spent some time in the country. These are sites of popular religious rites.

Such rituals are not reserved only to Muslims, or to a certain Muslim sect. What stands out is joint worship by members of the three religions at some holy sites, and from Evliya's description we learn of the presence of Jews even at places not considered Jewish, such as the 'Grotto of Qetur' under the citadel of Safed, where tradition claimed that the sons of Esau (Ismā'īl) are buried (p. 26). His depiction of the joint festivities at Meiron by members of various ethnic communities and religions, as well as at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron or the tomb of the Prophet Samuel just north-west of Jerusalem, are not singular instances. We learn from him about many more local sites of secondary importance at which the same occurs, novel and important information about relationships between diverse groups in Muslim territories in general and in Palestine in particular. In rare instances, this important information is affirmed by other sources in relation to sites such as the Cave of Elijah on Mt Carmel and Jeremiah's Grotto in Jerusalem.³⁵

³⁴ Rachel Milstein, "Drawings of the Haram of Jerusalem in Ottoman Manuscripts," in *Aspects of Ottoman History*, eds. Amy Singer, Amnon Cohen, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* XXXV (1994): 62-69. For Evliya's enthusiastic description see also Baktir, "Evliya Celebi's Seyahatname," 116-118.

³⁵ Many other travellers note the joint rituals at Meiron, Hebron, and the tomb of Samuel. References to the itineraries of Christian travellers in this note and elsewhere are based on Michael Ish-Shalom, *Christian Travels in the Holy Land: Descriptions and Sources on the History of the Jews in Palestine* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965) (Hebrew). On the Cave of Elijah, see Antoine

What prompted Jews to come to a site identified with the sons of Esau? Did they have independent and different traditions concerning the identification of this and similar places? Reading Evliya suggests that in the Galilean Jewish tradition the landscape in which the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob moved was transferred to Galilee, as Elchanan Reiner has demonstrated in recent years. This assumption fits in well with the strange identification of Safed with Beit El in the chronicles of John Sanderson and other European travelers, a subject deserving of further study.³⁶

Another important element that stands out in religious life is the significant presence of dervishes, especially in Safed and Jerusalem, and the conduct of regular *Dhikr* ceremonies.³⁷ Even if the ceremonies were witnessed primarily by the urban population and pilgrims, they were undoubtedly influential in shaping the religious practice of all Muslims. A most interesting example is Evliya's short description of *Dhikr* ceremonies conducted by dervishes at nightfall in Safed twice a week, illuminated by candles and oil lamps and accompanied by tambourines.³⁸ Bearing in mind the circumstances of the time, the nocturnal ceremony must have had a great effect and left a tremendous impression. No less important are the various sufis living in Jerusalem, whose presence necessarily affected the city's character.

Evliya Çelebi also opens up new and important vistas on the world of native residents of Palestine. This he does by recording legends concerning local heroes, stories about miracles and wondrous acts, and narratives of battles and other events.³⁹ The number of stories about the Mamluk period and even of the Muslim conquest is quite impressive. He records them from local residents,

Morison, *Relation historique d'un voyage nouvellement fait au Mont de Sinai et à Jérusalem* (Paris: A Dezallier, 1705), 567; Johannes Aegidius van Egmond and John Heymann, *Travels through ... Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Mount Sinai &c.*, 2 vols. (London: L. Davis and C. Reymers, 1759), vol. 2, 7–8; and Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for the author, 1743–45), vol. 2, 56. In 1697 Henry Maundrell described Jeremiah's Grotto as a site revered by members of the three religions, and during his visit a *zawiya* of dervishes was located there; see Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter A. D. 1697* (Oxford 1703), 76.

³⁶ For Safed as Beit El, see John Sanderson, *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant, 1584–1602*, ed. William Foster (London: Hakluyt Society, 1931), 148–49, 164–65. On the transfer of traditions of sacred geography to Galilee, see Elchanan Reiner, "From Joshua to Jesus – The Transformation of a Biblical Story to a Local Myth: A Chapter in the Religious Life of the Galilean Jew," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First–Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arieh Kofsky, Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1998), 223–71. More on the subject has been published by Reiner in Hebrew.

³⁷ *Dhikr*, or *Zikr*, is a ceremony in Sunni Islam involving the repetitive and ecstatic recitation of the Names of God and of supplications adopted from *hadith* texts and the Qur'an.

³⁸ Stephan, "A facsimile," 25.

³⁹ Hasan Bakitr claims, without any examples, that "this feature is characteristic of other Muslim pilgrim-travelers" (Bakitr, "Evliya Celebi's Seyahatname," 113–114).

thus documenting and preserving in great detail local traditions of inestimable value, such as, for example, attributing certain buildings and pavings in Jerusalem to King Solomon. Their veracity is irrelevant for the cultural world-scene of Muslims and others in Ottoman Palestine, for whom these stories were part of their daily life.⁴⁰

Here and there throughout his chronicle additional information is scattered about local culture and daily life, such as the healing power of water for diverse maladies, and – in one specific case – a holy place (the site of Jesus' imprisonment) as able to heal mental derangement.⁴¹ Certain places have an extra-territorial status, where villagers deposit their valuables for safekeeping, as for, example, the mausoleum of Sheikh Dāhi, near Jenin.⁴²

Here and there one feels that Evliya is not resisting or denying the sanctity of other holy places, and this phenomenon reaches its peak in his visit at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

There is also an interesting passing statement about a library or archive in Safed, most likely the archive of the *Şari'a* court, where the writings of religious personalities who served in Safed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also kept, including those of 'Alemshah 'Abdurrahman Effendi, the *qadi* of Safed.⁴³ This fact should be borne in mind when we wish to draw the cultural profile of the local intellectual elite, comprised of religious functionaries: where they studied, what they wrote, where their works were kept, and the like. These are issues that have not been studied yet for the period preceding the 19th century.

Evliya does not mention food and eating manners, and only in a few cases does he refer to dress, music, and other matters, probably because what he encountered did not differ significantly from what he experienced in his home country, or from what he said during his travels in the empire's Arab provinces. Only here and there he unintentionally records something about lifestyles – for example, that afforested Mt Canaan, near Safed, is a place to which many go out for sightseeing, to rest, and to enjoy the scenery.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See Matar, *Introduction and Conclusion*, in *Through the Eyes of the Beholder*.

⁴¹ On maladies, mental illness, and healing in the Ottoman Empire, see Miri Shefer, "Insanity and the Insane in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–17th Centuries," in *Being Different: Minorities, Aliens and Outsiders in History*, ed. Shulamit Volkov (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2000), 191–204 (Hebrew?); Id., "Being Ill and Pretending to Be Ill in the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th Centuries," *Zmanim – A Historical Quarterly*, 73 (2000–2001): 60–70 (Hebrew).

⁴² Stephan, "A facsimile," 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

Appendix

*Description of the Country of the Jews, the Walled town of Safed*⁴⁵

It was the original homeland of the Children of Israel (...) it was governed by seventy successive states until, in the year [-] Sultan Selim I took it from the despicable Circassians without a blow. The troops who could not go on to Egypt he stationed there as a garrison, before himself proceeding.

It is now a *sanjak* in the province of Sidon (...) previously it belonged to the province of Sham (Damascus) and when it was registered had 106 *timars* and nine *zeamets*. (...) There are regiment commanders and commandants of janissaries in the city. It is a noble *kadi* district (...) the subdistrict (*nahiye*) consists of 400 rebellious villages (...) the castle is in ruins. It has neither a warden nor garrison troops, nor a colonel of the local cavalry, nor a janissary colonel, nor notables. But there are many Jews. Each of the four Sunni rites has its *seyhülislam*, and there is a chief of the descendants of the Prophet.

(...) These are besides the Friday mosques (...). Besides these there are neighborhood mosques. There are six *medrese* (...) one school of Koran recitation, seven primary schools and seven dervish lodges. There are six baths⁴⁶ (...) three *bans* including that of [Piyali] Pasha below the citadel. It is a large *ban* (...) four stores high. Previously 12,000 Jews lived in it, but at present they number only 2,000. The city has three *bedestans*, two of which are unoccupied, their shops being locked up they have now become guest houses for travelers. (...) Yet because of oppression, the inhabitants of the city are poor. Jews are more numerous than Muslims. The capitation tax from all the seven Jewish quarters is paid for 9,000. [!] with previously 70,000 Jews living here, this was a magnificent city (...) they have all migrated to Salonica.⁴⁷

In former times Safed boasted 3,000 felt manufactories, of which forty have survived. The felt of Safed was known all over the inhabited world. The reason for the large number of Jewish inhabitants is this, that it has been the original homeland of the Children of Israel, and – saving the comparison! – their Ka'ba and Hose of Sorrows. All the prophets and their descendants grew up here,

⁴⁵ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 311-314.

⁴⁶ See Martin Dow, *The Islamic Baths of Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 111–13. The paucity of information about remains of bathhouses shows how important is the testimony of Evliya.

⁴⁷ These numbers are exaggerations, but attest to the impression that remained in the memory.

and here too many are buried. In the Jewish chronicles there are seven volumes treating of Safed.⁴⁸

*Description of the Fortified Ancient Town of Nablus*⁴⁹

This is a Samaritan *sanjak* in the province of Damascus. (...) The *sanjak* has seven *zemets* and forty-four *timars*. (...) There are two hundred villages in this district (...) A janissary colonel and a captain are stationed here. There are also notables and the representative of the *naqibu-l-ashraf*, but the Mufti resides in Jerusalem. (...) Around the mosque are vaulted bazars (...) There are other mosques besides these, as well as seven Koran schools, seven dervish monasteries (*zanviya*), seven elementary boy's (or boys'?) schools and two public baths.⁵⁰ The 'Sultan's Bazar' (...) measures twelve hundred paces between its two gates and consists of three hundred and seventy shops on each side; (...) to the left stands a fortress-like huge caravanserai⁵¹ with one hundred and fifty contiguous hearths. In the very center rises a mosque with a lead roof. The buildings of this market as well as all the pious foundations belong to Quja Mustafa Pasha. (...) They are poor. The men wear a brownish overcoat (*'abaya*) or the like and wrap their heads with a white muslin turban. Their women-folk, too, envelop themselves in a white sheet.⁵² (...) His [Samson's] plastered shrine is situated amidst orchards north of the town. (...) Also to the north of the town (...) the shrine of the children of Isaac and those of Esau. (...) It is no marvel that the Jews visit this shrine (...) they visit also that one of the children of Isaac. Nearby is the shrine (*maqam*) of Yusha'. To the east of the town is the shrine of the Gate of Paradise (...) then comes the Well of Jacob ... near this place is the shrine of the prison of 'Isa⁵³ (...). The shrine of Sheikh Faqir is situated amidst orchards. To the right of it, (...) that of Sufyan et-Tauri of the noble companion of the Prophet. The shrine of Sheikh 'Imadu-d-Din rises on the crest of a high mountain east of the town. (...) The shrine of Sheikh Mujahid with that of Sheikh Mujir-u-d-Din beside it. (...) How many thousands of pious men of God are in this city, yet the humble writer has visited only those which he has recorded.

⁴⁸ Further on he mentions: "In this garden [of the shrine of Ya'qub, 'House of Sorrows', or 'beyt el-ahzan'], all around it, several thousand great saints, pious and godly people, sheikhs and notables are buried" (Stephan, "A facsimile," 25).

⁴⁹ Stephan, "A facsimile," 47-55. I made slight modifications in the spelling.

⁵⁰ It is interesting that Dow mentions eight baths, while stating that Evliya noted only two. Somewhat after Evliya's visit Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi related that he bathed in one of the bathhouses in the city, and Seetzen found five there in 1806. See Dow, *Islamic Baths*, 99.

⁵¹ Turkish: Kervansaray - an inn, square building built around an open courtyard.

⁵² This is the *izar* or *lizar* that urban women customarily donned over their clothes until the nineteenth century.

⁵³ Surprisingly, Sanderson and other seventeenth-century European travellers do not mention any Christian site in Nablus and its vicinity, though they do report the existence of several Jewish ones; see Sanderson, *Travels*, 191.

*Description of the Ancient Fortress and Former qibla, the Sacred House*⁵⁴

It is called [Jerusalem] (...) or al-Quds.⁵⁵ It contains the shrines of 124,000 prophets. Before and after the flood it was the *qibla* of mankind. After the prophet, in response to a divine order, fled from Mecca to Medina (...) thus the *qibla* was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca ... but the ancient *qibla* was Jerusalem and it is said to be the *qibla* of the poor (or the dervishes). This noble Jerusalem has been the object of the desire of the kings of all nations. In the year 922 (1516) when Jerusalem was in the hands of the Circassians, all the *ulema* and pious men went out to meet Sultan Selim I and handed him the keys to the Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. (...) Jerusalem was registered as capital of a province (...) there are nine *zeamets* and 106 *timars*. The Pasha of Jerusalem has 500 soldiers at his command and is the commandant of the pilgrim's caravan of Damascus, charged with taking them to Mecca and bringing them back. It is a prosperous province (...) the Molla⁵⁶ actually receives as much as the Pasha, because his district counts altogether 1,600 villages,⁵⁷ to all of which his deputies are appointed (...). There is also a colonel of the mounted troops in Jerusalem, a commandant of the janissaries of the Porte, and a commandant of the janissaries of Damascus, muftis of the four Sunni legal rites, a supervisor of the descendants of the prophet; and very many notables and nobles, *ulema* and pious men. There is also a castle warden and 100 garrison troops. (...) The Molla also has twenty officers appointed by imperial rescript for court service (...) in short, the sheikhs of all the tradesmen are daily present at the sharia court for duty.

Jerusalem has 700 *waqf*-endowments, each with its administrator who comes to the Molla with a gift and attends the court sessions. It is a grand civil government and a religious jurisdiction.

It should be known to the world-viewing lovers that this city of Jerusalem, although it appears small, yet contains 240 prayer-niches. Aside from the *Aqsa* Mosque and the congregational mosque in the citadel they are all *medreses* and dervish convents and small neighborhood mosques. There are seven Hadith schools, ten schools of Koran recitations, and forty primary schools. Each of the seventy dervish orders has a convent, including the Qadiri, the Badawi, the Sa'di and the Rufa'i. The most frequented is the Mevlevi convent just inside the gate of the pillar. (...) All of these have a contingent of dervishes who perform

⁵⁴ Dankoff, Kim, *An Ottoman Traveller*, 315-388.

⁵⁵ For a short discussion of the city's names see Baktir, 114-115. Baktir also mentions Evliya's claim that his grandfathers' brother emigrated to Jerusalem and died there, and he prayed at his tomb (id. 114)

⁵⁶ The *Molla* is a doctor of Muslim law, and a chief judge. Usually nominated in Istanbul and sent to Jerusalem.

⁵⁷ This despite that Bernard Lewis, on the basis of the official census lists of the sixteenth century, maintains that the Jerusalem sanjak contained about 170 villages; see Lewis, *Population and Revenue*, 473.

zikr (a Muhammadan ceremony) every blessed night, and all have sound endowments.

There are six great *bans* (...) there are six public baths⁵⁸ (...) there are three soup-kitchens that distribute food to sojourners. The Khassakiya soup kitchen has sound endowments.⁵⁹ There are eighteen fountains (...) the royal marketplace of this city contains 2,045 shops, according to the market inspector's register. But the roads are narrow (...) all the streets in that city are paved with pure white polished stone. (...) There are seven churches in this city, two Jewish, two Armenian, and three Greek. Among them is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, belonging to the Greeks (...). The wonder of that place is that with so much beautiful adornment, it lacks spirituality; it is more like a tourist attraction. After touring the Church and performing two prostrations in a corner, I prayed that it one day become a Muslim place of worship ...

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⁵⁸ Most information about bathhouses in Jerusalem relates to the late Ottoman period, but see Dow, *Islamic Baths*, 87–98. Amnon Cohen has published several articles on the construction of the walls and certain buildings in Jerusalem. For an extensive survey and description of Ottoman structures in Jerusalem see Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand, ed., *Ottoman Jerusalem, the Living City, 1517–1917* (London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2000).

⁵⁹ For the *waqf* of Khasseki Sultan in Jerusalem, see the studies by Amy Singer, especially *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).