Disliking Others

LOATHING, HOSTILITY, AND DISTRUST IN PREMODERN OTTOMAN LANDS

Ottoman and Turkish Studies

Series Editor
HAKAN T. KARATEKE (The University of Chicago)

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Edited by
HAKAN T. KARATEKE
H. ERDEM ÇIPA
HELGA ANETSHOFER

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Evliyá Çelebí's Perception of Jews

Hakan T. Karateke

Evliyā Çelebī's seventeenth-century travel account (*Seyāḥatnāme*) has served as an extraordinary resource for historians seeking to reconstruct the social, economic, architectural, and cultural realities of the Ottoman lands for more than a century. Fortunately, scholars recently have become interested in studying the worldview of the author himself, as Robert Dankoff did in his marvelous exploration of the "mentality" of this elite Ottoman man.[1] This article follows that lead as it seeks to track down the clues in the ten-volume travel account that reveal Evliyā's perception of Jews.

My goal in tracing Evliyā's perception of Jews stems from a fascination with "perception studies," which seeks to reconstruct a person or a group's perceptions of a given phenomenon. The object of these perceptions can be a single notable person, a group of people, a trend, or an idea—essentially, an issue or topic of enough import that an individual or a group of people formed an opinion about it. The difficulty inherent in reconstructing perceptions is obvious: they are deeply personal, difficult to quantify, and often ephemeral and unstable. My mode of inquiry seeks

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1 Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*.

to define those perceptions that can be construed as "plausible" based on certain indicators, including actions, utterances, or records left by the agents under investigation.

In one of my previous inquiries, I examined Evliyā's perception of the New World.[2] Subsequently, I became intrigued by his perceptions of ethnic and religious groups living in Ottoman lands—particularly Jews. The current article developed from my interest in reconstructing Evliyā's perceptions of the Jews of his time, and of Judaism in general. Can the modern historian, by studying Evliyā's narrative, penetrate the author's mind and make plausible suggestions about his personal stance toward "Jews" as a category? Certainly, authors of any era exercise self-censorship, consciously or unconsciously, when considering precarious topics. Nevertheless, Evliyā's personal and nonchalantly opinionated style—and his minimal concern with what we now think of as political correctness with regards to ethnic, religious, and racial differences—makes the narrative a particularly useful source for understanding his views on ethnic and religious groups. Moreover, the author's well-known penchant for relating amusing anecdotes arguably allows sardonic language more easily.

Several questions that we can pose to the text come to mind. How did Evliyā express his opinions on Jews when he interacted with them generally? How did he portray Jewish individuals he knew, or their actions? What were the elements of his stereotyping? In what ways did he generalize and essentialize certain historic features, or ascribe common clichés to Jews as a whole? The anecdotes or stories need not be specifically about Jews. He may have used a Jewish character, or a trait associated in his mind with "Jewishness," in contrast to a non-Jewish person. Even so, the way in which Evliyā situates such a character in his story may contain valuable details for analysis. While the elements used to reconstruct perceptions are difficult to quantify and often subtle, a careful examination of Evliyā's throwaway remarks, laden with overt or hidden value judgments, his choice of words, and even his general mood of narration will provide us with data to plausibly reconstruct his perceptions.

To state the obvious, I am not interested in the veracity of his stories, and I have not attempted to contrast them with other sources in order to reconstruct historical "realities"—some are clearly legends, with elements that are illogical, anachronistic, or beyond the laws of nature.

2 Karateke, "Evliyâ Çelebi's Perception of the New World."

The rhetoric surrounding these incidents is more important for my purposes than the realities on the ground. I have, however, compared relevant sections throughout the entirety of the travel account in order to understand his remarks on particular matters under consideration, noting whether he used the same kind of language regarding, or took similar stances on, comparable topics.

A wealth of data is recorded about where and how densely Jews lived, the kinds of professions they practiced in different towns, and the characteristics of several famed Jewish individuals. However, I deliberately have not included in this article *all* the information that Evliyā relates about Jews. I am interested specifically in those narrative sections that include judgmental comments or subtext, particulars that I conclude to be reflective of his perception of Jews. Therefore, this is not an article about "Jews in Evliyā Çelebī's travel account" but an attempt to understand the author's perceptions.

Evliyā's stories concerning Jews and Judaism are related to three time periods: first, the ancient history of Jews is retold in different versions on several occasions. While Evliyā's versions of most of these stories are aligned with the Islamicized biblical lore carried over from early historical works, he emphasizes and embellishes some features of those stories in peculiar ways. Furthermore, he explores Jews of the early Islamic era, and, finally, accounts of the Jews of his own time form the bulk of his narrative on Jews. Most of these remarks are based on his own observations, but they also include anecdotes and rumors that apparently were in common circulation in Ottoman society.

PROPHET KILLING

While relating the founding legends of the city of Constantinople, Evliyā mentions a priest in Jerusalem by the name of Makarios, who supposedly informed the Jews about Christ; afterward, they arrested and crucified him.[3] As the story goes, the priest lived through the time of Helena,

3 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:13b: "*Meger Yahūd ṭā'ifeleri ḥażret-i ʿĪsāyı bu papas üẕre ṣalb etmişlerdi.*" Because a definitive critical edition of the *Seyāḥatnāme* is yet to be produced, my references are to the manuscripts. However, I would like to acknowledge the Yapı Kredi Edition (1996–2007), without which I could not have written this article. That edition was carried out by Yücel Dağlı, Robert Dankoff, Orhan Şaik Gökyay, and Seyit Ali Kahraman.

mother of Emperor Constantine, the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire. The emperor dispatched his mother to Jerusalem after Jesus had appeared in his dreams and instructed him to build a temple in that city. Helena found a few artifacts belonging to Christ and later located Makarios, who led her to the place where Christ's cross was buried. They dug, and, sure enough, found not one but three crosses in the grave. In order to verify the authenticity of the cross, the party laid it on a grave, upon which the buried body was resurrected. Evliyā dates this encounter to 328.[4]

The legend of the True Cross became exceedingly popular in Christian mythology during the Middle Ages. Makarios is remembered in these traditions as the bishop of Jerusalem, and the person who was forced to help Helena and Makarios find the cross is believed to be a Jewish wise man named Judas (Cyriacus).[5] The similarity of his name to that of Christ's disciple Judas Iscariot must have caused Evliyā to confuse the Judas who committed the act of betrayal and the Judas with knowledge of the cross's whereabouts. However, the legend of the unearthing of the cross is of little concern for this article. I am more interested in Evliyā's casual reference to Jews as the crucifiers of Christ. To be sure, the narrative does not take an overtly accusatory tone toward Jews—the accusation is made only in passing. As will be evident below, however, this casual reference fits into a larger framework of Jews' alleged habit of murdering prophets. The accusation of deicide (that is, the killing of Jesus Christ) was essentially a Christian phenomenon, one of the frequent libels faced by European Jews in the Middle Ages. The common assumption has been that if the Muslim Turks in Anatolia also spread the canard, they must have learned it from the Christians of Anatolia. There is no doubt that Evliyā recounts the legend after Christian sources or informants. As a matter of fact, he declares that the tale was narrated in Greek histories (*tevārīḫ-i Yūnān*).

An incident related to the ancient Jewish history repeatedly quoted by the traveler is Nebuchadnezzar's expulsion and murder of Jews in Palestine, Syria, and as far away as Baghdad. In Evliyā's version, the king of the Babylonian Empire killed at least two hundred thousand Jews in an act of revenge for their murder of John (Yaḥyā), a prophet in the

4 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:13b.

5 Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood*, 42ff.

Islamic tradition to whom the king had pledged fealty. Upon slaughtering the Jews, the king proclaimed, "Thanks be to God, I have now taken the revenge of venerable John from the Jewish people (*ḳavm-i Yahūd*)."[6] In Safed alone, some 170,000 Jews of all ages were slaughtered, and, according to Evliyā, the rocks over which their blood flowed could still be observed when he visited the town.[7] The surviving Jews fled to cities near and far. Evliyā quotes this episode to make a case about the origins of the Jewish populations in Isfahan, Salonika, and other cities, and he argues that immigration to these cities took place at that time.[8]

In another tale, Zechariah (Zekeriyyā), father of John and, again, a prophet in the Islamic tradition, was falsely framed and subsequently gruesomely slain—sliced from top to bottom with a saw—by Jews. Upon hearing the news, Ptolemeus, whom Evliyā identifies as the ruler of Macedonia and a follower of Zechariah, set out for Aleppo from Kavala, the seat of his throne, with an armada of 1,700 ships. Docking at the port of İskenderiyye (İskenderun), the army marched to Aleppo and executed 160,000 Jews in one day, an act of revenge for the slain prophet. He then built a mosque in Aleppo—which is known today as the Great Mosque (Jāmiᶜ Ḥalab al-Kabīr) and is still believed to house Zechariah's remains—and took the Jews' wealth back to Kavala.[9]

As the aforementioned tale of deicide was replicated from Christian traditions, so too does the story of John eventually lead back to Christian sources. In the town of Sabastia, Evliyā chats with a monk who shows him the corpse of John and explains that blood oozes from the corpse every year on the Ḫıḍrellez—that is, May 6—because Jews murdered him near Jerusalem on that day.[10] On one occasion, when relating the martyrdom of John and the fate of his corpse, Evliyā explicitly states that Arabic and Turkish histories take their information on the ancient world from Coptic and Greek histories, especially the Greek history of Yanvān.[11]

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6 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 4:314a.
7 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 8:223a.
8 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:25a, 3:44b–45a, 4:314a, 4:324b, 4:407a, 9Y:118a ff., 9Y:198b, 10Y:9b, 10Y:282b.
9 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 8:215b.
10 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 9Y:205a.
11 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 9Y:118a. For Yanvān's *History*, see Yerasimos, "Enquête sur un héros."

That said, other tales that the traveler relates about prophets murdered by Jews could not have been influenced by Christian traditions. In fact, Evliyā seems convinced that the Jews of yore were repeatedly involved in the killing of prophets. He reports that Jews murdered most of the seventy prophets (*nebī*) who were active in Tiberias and imprisoned forty prophets in a cave near Damascus. The so-called Cave of Starvation takes its name from this alleged incident, and the disturbing wails of these prophets are said to have been heard coming from the cave—in which they eventually died of hunger—for seven years.[12] In the town of Nablus, Evliyā visits a dungeon where Jesus Christ was reportedly imprisoned for forty days by Jews who denied him water.[13] (It is worth keeping in mind that Jesus Christ is considered a prophet in the Islamic tradition, and so all of these incidents are thematically linked.) Notably, Evliyā declares, substantiating his knowledge on works of exegesis and chronicles (*cemīᶜ-i tefāsir ve tevārīḫlerde*), some 4,000 of the 124,000 prophets were martyred by Jews.[14] The pattern of Jews murdering prophets is more or less explicitly mentioned in the Koran (2:61; 3:112), and the exegesis literature uniformly interprets the pronouns in the related verses as referring to Jews. Having memorized the Koran, Evliyā was of course aware of this—but also of the verse which clarifies that Jesus was not killed, thereby clearing Jews from the accusation of having murdered him (4:157). Because Evliyā does not explicitly invoke any of these verses, there is no reason to superimpose the teachings of fundamental texts on him.

In sum, Evliyā's repetition of the accusations of deicide leveled against Jews seems to indicate a convergence of widespread Christian and Islamic traditions.[15] The Ottomans commonly consulted—and reproduced biblical stories and pre-Islamic history from—earlier Arab histories, like those of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) or Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233), who in turn appropriated biblical tales from Jewish and Christian traditions. It is well

12 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 9Y:252a, 9Y:235b.

13 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 9Y:207a.

14 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:44b.

15 Although I have not systematically expanded my research to other Ottoman authors in order to discern whether Evliyā's stories were in wider circulation, I would like to mention an example. Naᶜīmā, writing a few decades after Evliyā, quotes Abaza Pasha's (d. 1634) angry letter to the janissary agha's deputy, in which he uses Nebuchadnezzar's murder of seventy thousand Jews, to avenge John, as a metaphor for his intent to kill so many janissaries as revenge for their murder of Sultan Ahmed I (d. 1617). Naᶜīmā, *Tārīḫ*, 2:549.

known that the theme of Jews murdering prophets developed in early Christian traditions and was explicated by the Church Fathers,[16] but it is difficult to locate the origins of these popular tales in the mélange of Middle Eastern traditions. Evliyā held certain ideas about Jews' involvement in the murder of a number of prophets, and we can reasonably suppose that these ideas influenced his general stance on Jews.

CANARDS

A gripping story begins with the question of why there are no Jews to be found in the city of Trabzon. Evliyā claims that the people of this town are authorized by imperial rescripts to murder Jews who wander into the city. This elevated animosity apparently originated with an incident that transpired during the governorship of Selīm I (1481–1510).

According to legend, two Muslim youngsters go missing in the city. When the inhabitants and administrators of the region fail to find them, the search is called off. Twenty years later, a dervish notices barely legible writing on a piece of leather he is contemplating at the market. It turns out to be a message from the missing boys, who write that they have been held captive in an underground location by Jewish tanners. The dervish hastens to the governor, who swiftly orders raids on Jewish tanneries. The boys are indeed discovered alive in a cave-like workshop. However, the search party is shocked to find that the boys' backs are flayed, and the two are fastened to each other at their rears. While one worked, that is, the other waited on top of his brother for his turn. They had been working and suffering thus in the tannery for two decades. Furthermore, it is discovered that hundreds of boys named Meḥmed had been killed, locked up, or made servants by the tanners. Enraged, the people of Trabzon sealed the gates of the citadel, massacred all the Jews in the city, including women, children, and babies, and obtained imperial permission to kill them from then on.[17]

Blood libels were common accusations against Jews in Christian Europe, and evidence suggests that similar incidents were not unheard of in Ottoman lands. Although the Trabzon incident is not technically a

16 See, for example, Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*. Apparently the theme also found its way, for different purposes, to Jewish midrashic traditions; for an analysis, see Amaru, "The Killing of the Prophets."

17 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 2:253b.

blood libel, as the youths were not kidnapped in order for their blood to be used in a ritual ceremony, it is clearly a story in a similar vein. Because blood libel was essentially a Christian phenomenon, and because the city of Trabzon had always been home to a rather large Greek population, we might have assumed that the report would fit well with local Christian notions. Yet, in a separate reference to the incident, Evliyā explicitly mentions that it was the Muslim "Laz" population of Trabzon who slaughtered the Jews.[18] The author's views on the Laz are confusing: he thinks that the Laz (and the Jews) are wicked people (*şerīr*), but he also finds the formers' religious devotion praiseworthy, particularly with regard to their aversion toward Jews. The paragraph about the episode ends with high praise of Trabzon's Laz population: "The people of Trabzon do not like Jews at all. The reason for this is because they are zealous believers, monotheists and Sunnis. They are gentle and good-tempered too. May God be pleased with them all."[19]

To be sure, the author himself introduces the anecdote as a "strange story" (*ḥikāye-i ʿacībe*), which should make us think that he took its bizarre details with a proverbial grain of salt.[20] But apart from questions regarding the veracity of any part of the above-mentioned tale, how widely it circulated, and even which form it took, important for my purposes is that Evliyā chose to portray the murderers as Muslim Laz who committed the act out of piety. As Evliyā builds his narrative, Jews are depicted as devious and cunning, and he suggests a link between the kidnapped boys' identity as Muslim and the Jewish tanners' preference for them as victims. Furthermore, the trope that Jews killed people named Meḥmed recurs as an anecdote elsewhere in the *Seyāḥatnāme*. In what seems to be recirculated version of a story that was at least a century old, Meḥmed Pasha, the governor of Buda (d. 1551), is poisoned by a Jewish physician. Upon his arrest and interrogation, the doctor allegedly admits to killing forty people with the name Meḥmed.[21] In addition to

18 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:124b.

19 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 2:253b: "*ġāyet müʾmin ve muvaḥḥid ve ehl-i sünnet veʾl-cemāʿat . . .* "

20 Dankoff is also of the opinion that Evliyā himself did not believe the story; cf. Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 69.

21 The story was told by Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī (d. 1600) in the sixteenth century; see Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims*, 260. For Evliyā's version, see Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:47b.

these anecdotes, Evliyā clearly expresses his own belief in the veracity of this allegation.[22] The name Meḥmed, as is well known, is a Turkified version of the Prophet Muḥammad's name. Therefore, we may suppose that these tales insinuate an anti-Islamic motivation for alleged acts of this type, and they may also be seen as linked to the theme of prophet killings mentioned above.

ANTAGONISMS

Evliyā appears to have been aware of the antipathy toward Jews expressed by other ethnic and religious groups. He frequently claims that Jews do not live in this or that town because the townspeople would kill them.[23] Notably, Evliyā presents this explanation concerning several towns inhabited mostly by Greeks. Writing of Athens and of the monks of Penteli Monastery, on the outskirts of the city, the author praises their extraordinary hospitality to strangers—but notes that if a Jew stopped by he would be discovered in the morning, burned and charred.[24] He reports that Jews are afraid of Christians in Galata; that the Laz and Greeks (*Rūm*) do not like Jews and do not allow them to live in Yeniköy; that the Christians of Bucharest hate Jews; and that if the Jews left their quarter in Muğla, in the citadel, Greeks would murder them with pleasure.[25] Evliyā occasionally uses the same explanation for the absence of other groups from certain towns. While this seems to be a trope, it must reflect certain antagonisms toward Jews (and others) in those towns. This narration in and of itself does not say much about Jews themselves, though it does reflect Evliyā's removed stance, as a member of the dominant culture, toward enmities among minorities. The situation becomes more complicated when Evliyā begins comparing ethnic and religious groups.

The traveler quotes a curious poem in the context of presenting an anecdote that, he claims, transpired in the 1550s, during the construction

22 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:215a–b: "Her şeyleri ümmet[-i] Muḥammede, ḫuṣūṣan Meḥemmed isimli bir müslime ḳatl etme ihānetleri muḳarrerdir." Also see my article "An Ottoman Anti-Judaism," in this volume, for an imperial order mentioning this libel.

23 For example, Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 2:286b (Erzurum), 2:368a (Türbeli Gönlek).

24 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 8:255a.

25 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:129b, 1:137b, 7:102a, 9:Y61a.

of the Süleymaniye Mosque. When the Safavid Shah Tāhmāsb I (r. 1524–1576) hears that construction has halted for a year due to financial constraints, he sends a large sum of money and a case of valuable jewels, along with a letter asking the Ottoman sultan to consider the gifts a contribution toward financing the mosque. Sultan Süleymān (r. 1520–1566), humiliated, becomes furious, distributes the gifts to Istanbul's Jews, and, summoning the envoy who brought the gifts, quotes the following line (in Persian) to him: "*Rāfiżī*s will be donkeys underneath the Jews on the Day of Judgment." "Since," Süleymān further declares to the Persian envoy, "Jews will be your masters on that day, and having given your money to them now, they shall not whip you or spur you then."[26] "*Rāfiżī*," or heretic, as is well known, is a pejorative term that the Ottomans used to describe the Shiᶜi Safavids. The premise behind the episode is clearly meant to insult the Safavid envoy by stating that the Safavids will fare worse on the Day of Judgment than will Jews, who, if we are to make sense of the story, must have been regarded as the lowest of nations.[27]

In fact, Evliyā quotes the same Persian line at least twice more—once while discussing Crimean Jews, and another time when reporting on Hemedan. He states that Crimean Jews live in extremely filthy conditions, and that most work in the leather business; an additional few are meat vendors and *boza* sellers. Other Jews do not like these Karaite Jews, he states. They are "real" Jews, according to his account—they read the Torah but do not speak the "Jewish language"; critically, they do not observe Jewish dietary restrictions. The Karaites are therefore considered "redheads" by other Jews, and, quoting the above-mentioned line, he writes that these "heretic" Jews will not "ride" the "redheads"—that is, the Safavids—on the Day of Judgment. "*Ḳızılbaş*," or "redhead," is another pejorative designation that the Ottomans used to describe Shiᶜa Safavids, mocking the red headgear that the latter wore. The word, then, simply means "heretic" in the first instance in the sentence ("*bunlar* [Karaites] *Yahūdīleriŋ ḳızılbaşlarıdır*") but would refer to a Safavid person in the second ("*rūz-ı maḥşer günü bunlar* [Karaites] *ḳızılbaşa binmezler*"), echoing the same meaning as in the above anecdote.[28]

26 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:44bff.

27 The same line of poetry is quoted in at least one other eighteenth-century Ottoman source; therefore, it must have been widespread; cf. *Risāle-i ġarībe*, 41.

28 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 7:122a; for Hemedan, see 4:310b.

On the other hand, Karaites elsewhere are depicted in derogatory terms, according to the "false Jewish tradition." Writing of the holiness of the city of Safed for Jews, Evliyā reports that if a Jew does not make a pilgrimage to this town he or she will be considered a Karaite, not a Jew. Clearly, his impression is that Karaites are heretics within the Jewish tradition.[29]

CHARACTER TRAITS AND DEROGATORY ATTRIBUTES

The characteristics that Evliyā attributes to Jews and Jewish spaces provide a fairly good picture of his set of stereotypes concerning Jews. In one tale, because the Jews do not follow a prophet sent to them, God orders Gabriel to take their lives as punishment. Several centuries later, the prophet Ezra chances upon a large mass of bones around Ashkelon and is instructed by God to pray for the bodies' resurrection. He does so, and the bones are gradually covered with flesh and nerves again; the Jewish tribe is raised from death.[30] The trope of resurrecting people from bones is no doubt an ancient theme, which found its way into Islamic traditions—at least, the Koran records a version.[31] Importantly, Evliyā uses this episode as an etiological explanation for some of the unfavorable physical qualities he attributes to Jews. Evliyā writes that the reason why Jews are weak and have pale complexions and bad breath is that they were resurrected by the prophet Ezra's prayer after having been dead for a long time.[32]

Evliyā also ascribes cowardice to Jews. He declares that "Austrians are like Jews compared to Hungarians, they do not have the guts [lit. "heart"] [to fight]."[33] The castle of Gevher-Kirman on the Crimea is known as Çufud Fortress (*Çufud ḳalᶜe*), or Jews' Fortress, as some 1,500 houses in the fortress are inhabited exclusively by Jews; the officers of the fortress are likewise Jewish. Evliyā states that some non-firearm weapons are kept at the fortress gate, but that Jews do not have the courage to use them. Furthermore, he mentions that there are no firearms present in the

29 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:44b.
30 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:45b.
31 Koran 2:259.
32 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:45b.
33 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 7:49b.

fortress, because Jews not only do not have the pluck to use these guns, they cannot stand hearing the roar of a cannon or a rifle.[34]

In a peculiar anecdote, a madman known as Ḳoca Dīvāne chances upon a cortege of about three hundred people carrying a coffin. Not realizing that it is a Jewish funeral, he swaps headgear with someone in the party and starts walking in front of the group, reciting Muslim prayers. As he is rebuked and told that it is not a Muslim funeral, he begins acting up, spitting phlegm and mucus and causing an altercation. Finally, as he attempts to pass underneath the coffin, the Jewish party becomes extremely upset and drops the coffin to the ground. Evliyā explains that Jews believe that if a Muslim passes under a coffin or jumps over it, the deceased becomes a witch and is sent to hell. Unable to cope with the situation, the funeral attendees at first abandon the coffin in the middle of the street, but, through the mediation of others, they eventually shake hands with Dīvāne. Yet the madman then urinates on the corpse of the dead Jew and flees with the cap on his head.

Evliyā relays this story as a funny anecdote. In fact, he thinks that Dīvāne is not an ordinary mad person, but as a humorous character. He states that if one were to compile his jokes, they would compose a sizable collection, similar to that of Naṣreddīn Ḫoca. Moreover, we are given an important detail about the circulation of such jokes: jokes by and about Dīvāne are told by comedians at elite gatherings. We should then take a moment to understand what is being ridiculed here, and in what way. Of course, Evliyā would never present a Muslim funeral or deceased person in such a denigrating context and with such desacralizing vocabulary. Someone urinating on a corpse, even in a joke, is vilification of the highest degree. Evliyā furthermore uses the highly derogatory words "*lāşe*" and "*leş*" ("corpse" and "carcass") for the deceased. In fact, in the *Seyāḥatnāme* he describes deceased Jews with these words a few times, sometimes with the added adjective "*murdār*" ("unclean").[35] The respectful words for Muslims are "*naᶜş-ı şerīf*" and "*cesed-i şerīf*" ("noble corpse") as well as the rather neutral "*meyyit*" ("deceased"). In this case, the variety of words available to describe a dead person's body allows us a peek into the intricacies of jokes from a bygone culture, which

34 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 7:122b–123a.

35 He sometimes uses the same word for Christians and, rarely, for Muslim Ottomans who fell from grace before they died.

are generally difficult to grasp without the relevant linguistic and cultural references.

"No blacksmith's shop is without a chicken, no mill without a pig, and no mansion without a Jew" is an axiom Evliyā quotes within the context of an anecdotal incident that, he claims, took place in a Bulgarian village.[36] Even if not intended as a direct insult, the saying reflects the perceived lowly status of Jews, who are depicted as efficient assistant providers, or servants, in large mansions. In a similar vein, Evliyā comments on the fact that Jewish tavern-keepers walk at the very back of the line in the processions of guilds at imperial festivities. The traveler clarifies that their being at the end of the procession was due not to their detestable profession but so as to "denigrate them (*taḥḳīren*) because they were Jews." According to Evliyā, Jewish tavern-keepers are commanded by an imperial order to march at the very back of the line because they are the most dispensable—in fact, a breed of vermin (*ḥaşerāt*)—and because the sultan wants to keep track of their numbers. Still, three fully armed janissary colonels were appointed to the Jewish party in order to prevent spectators from throwing rocks, hitting them with wooden sticks, or committing other acts of physical assault.[37]

Jewish neighborhoods and homes are frequently referred to as "dirty," "filthy," "nasty," and "cursed."[38] In Salonika, for example, the Jewish neighborhood's filthiness is contrasted with the clean cobblestone roads in the rest of the city. Even the garbage superintendent cannot make the inhabitants clean the streets. Evliyā writes that the unclean streets and the Jewish homes, with their tiny doors, make the neighborhood a corner of hell.

One potentially surprising observation is that Evliyā does not replicate a widespread slander that Jews had an aptitude for money-forging, or that Jewish money-changers were exploitative. The anecdote that comes closest to describing Jews as greedy follows: after a blaze in Unkapanı that left many shops in ruins, a Jew named Küpeli ("the earringed") rented the

36 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:130b: "*naᶜlbend dükkānı ṭavuḳsuz ve degirmenleri ḫınzīrsız ve ekābir ḫāneleri Yahūdīsiz olmaz.*"

37 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:215a: "*herkes ṭaş atup taḥta ḳaḳup vażᶜ-ı yed etmemeleri–yçün*"; cf. Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 85.

38 For example, Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:124a: "*Yahūdīleriŋ ḫāne-i telvīsleri*" (Istanbul); 8:228a: "*Ammā çufud maḥallātlarınıŋ soḳaḳları hem daracıḳ dār-ı menḥūsḫānelerdir ve hem cümle zoḳaḳları pis ve mülevveṣdir*" (Salonika).

only shop that remained intact. The former tenant, Ḥüseyin Çelebī, a clog-maker, resisted leaving his shop during the fire, saying that the shop had been in existence since his grandfather's time. Ḥüseyin remained in the shop and continued to work on his clogs; miraculously, he and the shop-keeper survived the fire unharmed. Once rent prices increased, Küpeli took over the shop by paying a few more aspers to the administrator of the foundation that owned the block of shops. People in the neighborhood did not like the fact that "a Jew rented the place instead of Ḥüseyin Çelebī," remarks Evliyā. The story ends with a troubling incident: on his first day at the shop, Küpeli's head was smashed by the shop's pull-down shutter while he was trying to open it. The shop was then returned to Ḥüseyin Çelebī after the "unclean corpse" (*lāşe-i murdār*) was removed. Evliyā relates the story of Ḥüseyin Çelebī within the context of his enumeration of the holy men of Istanbul. The fact that a Jewish merchant was seeking a profit is not its focus, but common prejudices and perceptions concerning Jews are recognizable in these anecdotes.

MASTERS OF SECRET KNOWLEDGE

Evliyā refers to Jews a few times in a neutral, if not positive, light. One episode worth mentioning relates Jews' alleged insights into the secret art of alchemy. He describes the party of the nitric acid (*tīz-āb*, *aqua fortis*) makers—that is, alchemists—among the procession of guilds of 1638 in Istanbul. Nitric acid is used to separate gold and silver or to obtain pure silver, Evliyā explains. Even its fragrance turns Jewish alchemists' beards green or red, and their fingernails black. In the anecdote that follows, the author writes about a fire that breaks out in a Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul. When the commander of the imperial gardeners (*bōstāncıbaşı*) and the janissary agha, hastening to inspect the site, walk into the workshop of a Jewish alchemist, they are amazed to find hundreds of bottles on shelves. A party of thirteen people guzzles the bottles of liquid, which they take to be wine; they vomit up their insides and then burn to death spectacularly. To Evliyā, nitric acid is a cursed substance, but it is necessary for alchemists. He finally declares that some Jews have successfully attained this secret knowledge.[39]

39 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:187b.

This is only one of Evliyā's several stories about alchemy, and it does not necessarily distinguish Jews as the sole masters of occult knowledge. The sheikhs of Sufi brotherhoods sometimes are depicted as having access to alchemical knowledge as well. When, for instance, a few people try to warn the sultan about the possibility of a revolt by Sheikh Rūmī, financed by the enormous fortune of gold that he obtained through alchemy, the sheikh admits to his grasp of this secret knowledge. "It is among the doings of sheikhs," he declares, adding that they do not practice alchemy for the purposes of acquiring wealth but use small pieces of gold to resist hunger.[40] The corpses of sufis who swallow these golden bits do not decay.[41] Alchemy and alchemists are not depicted in a negative light; it becomes clear from the totality of stories that Evliyā presents men with such secret knowledge as existing within a mystical aura.

In another story, set in the time of Prophet Muḥammad and supposedly paraphrased from "historical works," Evliyā introduces a Jew by the name of İzāʾīl as a sorcerer with innovative ideas. İzāʾīl builds a waterwheel in Ḥama during a period of drought. When astonished townspeople inquire as to what use a waterwheel might be when there is no water, he tells them about his idea to bring water from the Nile to town. Subsequently, he travels to the town of Mansura, Egypt, obtains four bottles of water from the river, and casts a spell on them. One branch of the Nile follows him as he walks to the north, and water springs from wherever "that sorcerer" hurls a bottle on the ground. These springs become the sources for larger lakes, including the Dead Sea. As İzāʾīl reaches the foot of the Gülbin Mountain (Jabal Ansariya), the Prophet is alarmed by the likelihood of the Nile leaving the Holy Land, and calls out to his cousin ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib, who hastens to kill İzāʾīl. When the Jewish sorcerer drops dead, the final bottle also falls to the ground, causing another stream to spring from the mountain. Unlike other streams, which flow southward, this one flows westward. Evliyā finds the etymology of the name of the Asi River (Orontes), which means "rebel" in Arabic, in its decision, without warning, to flow initially to the west, then to the north, passing through Homs and Hama, and then to the south, passing through Antakiye before flowing into the Mediterranean.[42] Evliyā refers

40 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 4:209a.
41 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 5:133b.
42 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:23b, 3:48b.

to a certain book, which he calls *Tuḥfe,* as a source for this story, and he mentions that the Jews consider İzāʾīl a prophet.

A few pages later, Evliyā returns to this tale. Though the Asi River passes through Hama, as per the events related above, it does not have the surge to rotate the waterwheel. An "impure" (*nā-pāk*) son of the murdered Jewish sorcerer takes it upon himself to operate the wheel by praying in the name of prophets. The wheel rotates only when the name of Prophet Muḥammad is invoked. Thus, the son decides to become Muslim.[43]

Evliyā's keen interest in explaining the formation of lakes, inner seas, or straits is evident throughout the travel account. Of course, accounts laden with wonders and miracles, hypothesizing about the origins of the physical material of the earth, were no rarity before the development of modern geology in the eighteenth century. Evliyā occasionally attributes such wonders to great men like Alexander the Great or to the legendary figure Ḫıżr, who found the water of life. Notably, these two feature in a legend about the formation of the Bosphorus Strait. Unlike the legend of the Nile, however, the opening of the Strait is explained more or less within the boundaries of logical physical possibility: Alexander puts hundreds of thousands of professional diggers to work for three years, digging out the Bosphorus; no sorcery or magic was involved.[44] This contrast provides us with a context for Evliyā's attribution of sorcery to İzāʾīl as a Jewish magician.

OMISSIONS

It will not escape the careful reader's attention that Evliyā's narrative lacks two rather important themes, which could have brought interesting perspectives to his views on Jews in general. First, he does not seem to have considered the mass Jewish immigration from Spain and Portugal to Ottoman lands during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries an event worth reporting in detail. He certainly was aware of Jews who immigrated during Ottoman times, as he mentions, for instance, that the Jews of Muğla arrived in this town after the Ottoman conquest, and that there were no Jews there during the Genoese era.[45] Even if the Sephardic

43 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:26a.
44 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:9aff.
45 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 9:Y61a.

immigration were not an acute situation during Evliyā's lifetime, the lack of any substantial information in the travel account is especially intriguing in light of his general interest in the movements of peoples and their origins. For the pedigree of Salonika Jews, for instance, his explanation includes a substantial migration from ancient Judea and Israel to the Balkan town after Nebuchadnezzar's expulsion, as mentioned above. Apparently, the Jews arrived in Salonika at night, snuck into the walled city, and massacred the resident Greeks. A Karaite Jew, who, Evliyā says, was the lord of the flock, forged an agreement with the Genoese, promising mutual aid in subsequent battles with the Greeks. Eventually, the two nations reconciled, and Jews have lived in the city since.[46]

Evliyā's omission of Jewish immigration becomes especially intriguing in light of his mention of a mass emigration from Spain, but his knowledge seems to be confined to the expulsion of Moriscos. While enumerating the ethnic and religious groups living in Galaṭa, the traveler remarks that the anguished community of Moriscos, whom Evliyā calls *mübtecel* Muslims, does not like Christians at all. He leads us to believe that this animosity is rooted in their suffering under Christian rule in Spain, as a consequence of which they immigrated to Istanbul during the reign of Sultan Aḥmed I (r. 1603–1617).[47] This date coincides with the main expulsion of Moriscos from Spain in 1609 but again leaves us with questions as to why Evliyā would not have known or reported about the even larger Jewish immigration to Ottoman lands.

The other curious omission from the *Seyāḥatnāme* is any information on or commentary concerning Sabbatai Zvi (d. 1676) and the messianic movement associated with him. As is well known, Zvi was quite active and had a growing number of followers in the 1650s–60s, until he was imprisoned by the Ottoman government in 1666. It would be utterly surprising if such a well-connected person as Evliyā, who also had a liking for all sorts of rumors, did not hear anything about a movement which was a point of some concern for the Ottoman central government. Even if the theological intricacies of this messianic movement were outside the bounds of his interests, the social implications would have been worth discussing. Yet Evliyā never mentions Zvi or the movement, for reasons that remain obscure.

46 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 8:223a.
47 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 1:129a.

CONCLUSION

Looking closely at his references to Jews and Jewish history, it is evident that Evliyā Çelebī nurtured unmistakably negative feelings toward Jews on the whole. However, scrutinizing instances of the traveler's portrayal of Jews was only the first step of an inquiry that led to this conclusion.

Evliyā was educated partially at the palace and had strong connections to court society. It is obvious that, as a representative of imperial ideology, he cultivated a superior imperial gaze toward many groups of people who were not part of that social and cultural milieu. I therefore undertook a careful examination of what he had to say about other, potentially comparable, communities–for example, Christians, gypsies, Safavids, Kurds, or Yezidis.

Evliyā also describes Christians with some contempt. He repeatedly revels in illustrations of Ottoman soldiers slaughtering Christians, or reveals his detestation of them. However, these sentiments must be considered within a particular context; the Christians to whom he refers with derision are those enemies the Ottoman army is actively fighting, not those living in Ottoman lands, or Christians in general. Evliyā has a few good things to say about gypsies; some gypsies never lie, for example, and the Balat gypsies are the pride of their neighborhood. Moreover, he points out, gypsies are described in a positive way in some of the Prophet's traditions. Yezidis are perhaps the only other group that Evliyā discusses in such a distinctly denigrating manner. A detailed catalog of his views on these groups exceeds the scope of this paper; a comparison between his views on other groups and his views on Jews, however, reveals that his dislike of Jews was more direct and elevated than the run-of-the-mill contempt he displayed toward other religious or ethnic groups within this society.

The information discussed in this article aside, Evliyā's knowledge of Ottoman Jews and their customs is disappointingly limited. He was an otherwise inquisitive man who took pride in his ethnographic approach to people's customs. During his travels, Evliyā routinely took the trouble to veer off course in order to witness an unusual natural occurrence, chat with an out-of-the-ordinary person, or learn about a given population's customs. We are, then, justified in asking whether he ever visited a synagogue, for instance. If he did, he says almost nothing about his visits. He mentions existing synagogues (*ṣınaġo*) in a few towns yet gives little or

no description of them.[1] But because he reports that the Book of Psalms is read by rabbis with "straps" (conceivably *tefillin*) in synagogues, we can presume that he witnessed this.[2] Did he have any substantial contact with the Jewish subjects of the empire? None that he reports in detail. He did have sustained interactions with other "infidels," as he calls them; for example, he studied Greek histories with a certain Simeon/Simyon.[3]

This scenario arguably fits well with the widely held understanding of an Ottoman society in which different religious communities shared a common public space but lived rather segregated lives within their own cultural milieus. Most common people probably did not have access to the innermost spheres of other religious communities and, accordingly, knew little more about their customs and worldviews than what was visible in the public domain (colored, of course, by the stereotypes and prejudices in circulation at the time).

Evliyā's views, outlined in this article, can certainly be taken as a starting point for understanding perceptions about Jews held by elite Sunni Ottomans of the seventeenth century. It is perhaps surprising that the perceptions of this individual, otherwise known as a moderate and nonchalant person, display coherently and unequivocally negative feelings about Jews. As mentioned above, Evliyā heard some of the tales from his Christian sources or informants, but evidence suggests that Islamic/Ottoman traditions were also at play. Although confirming this hypothesis requires further study, the analysis of Evliyā's views concerning Jews in this article certainly challenges the received wisdom that Jews had a perfectly sanguine experience in Ottoman lands.

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1 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 4:341a, 5:131a, 7:128a, 7:141b, 8:229a, 8:248b.

2 Evliyā Çelebī, *Seyāḥatnāme*, 3:44b.

3 Cf. Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality*, 27.

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