



Crafting History

Essays on the Ottoman World
and Beyond in Honor of
Cemal Kafadar

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How Did Evliya Çelebi Write His Travel Account?

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More than a decade ago I sat in on Cemal Kafadar's seminar on Evliya Çelebi's (1611–after 1683) travel account the *Seyahatname*. The course was open to all interested parties—students, of course, but also visiting scholars and regular faculty at Harvard—and as such it generated a rich exchange of views. I remember many things from that delightful seminar, but one particular discussion stuck with me for years, instigated me to develop a close eye to the potential particulars related to that issue while reading Evliya Çelebi's travel account, and eventually to write this article.¹

One student gave a presentation exploring the circumstances around the composition of the travel account, and argued that our assessment of this work needed to be *completely* reevaluated, mainly because Evliya wrote the book at the end of his life reflecting back. It was a memoir, so to speak, chronologically earlier parts of which were likely heavily adjusted by the author to the course of events that took place later in his life. We needed to view his depiction of events, and even his errors, through that lens.

The student's methodological query was critically important: Pondering the circumstances in which the work was composed is essential to understanding

¹ I am grateful to Helga Anetshofer and Robert Dankoff for sharing their thoughts on this article.

the text. Ascertaining that the work in its entirety was or was not composed at the end of Evliya's life in Cairo would necessarily complicate our view of his account. Remarks made by a mature man some sixty years of age and decades after an event would likely be entirely different in character than those jotted down in the heat of the moment or shortly thereafter. This issue boils down to two major questions: 1) Did Evliya turn his notes into a full-blown narrative later in his life in Cairo? Or, 2) Did he write his travel account during his travels?

The general assumption has been that Evliya took notes (the precise nature of which remains obscure) while traveling, and wove them into his work when he sat down to write it in Cairo after 1673. Apart from his conscious or subconscious fine-tuned presentation of events, a work this size will inevitably contain errors, inconsistencies, skipped lines, missing words, orthographic mistakes, and more. In fact, an approach that views the *Seyahatname* as a pure mine of information for extracting numbers and descriptions is bound to encounter occasional disappointments. Discrepancies are not solely a natural consequence of the genre in which the work is composed—a genre that customarily shifted between the realms of fact and fiction—or because Evliya himself had a penchant for exaggeration. Rather, many errors stem from the very natural process of redaction and editing (or the imperfections thereof) of any work of this magnitude. One might argue that Evliya was further disadvantaged by his working conditions. He traveled long distances on horseback, and would presumably have had to take quick notes as he proceeded on occasion.

Students of history learn early on that all source texts are composed in diverse circumstances and as a result of a multitude of motives. Autobiographical works are particularly prone to distortions or attempts to whitewash the author's reputation. Therefore, it would be no surprise if Evliya indeed calibrated his narrative in a way to reflect well on himself and those he held dear. However, the fundamental question of how this remarkable man composed his travel account, which amounts to some thirteen thousand A4 pages in Latinized transliteration, still remains an unsolved problem in scholarship. Insights into the circumstances of its composition would provide us with new perspectives on the work as a whole, but also potentially the particulars therein.

The procedure of copying the travel text into volumes, the first eight of which we today suppose are the autograph copies, has been meticulously studied by Richard Kreutel, Pierre MacKay, and Robert Dankoff.² According to Dankoff's

2 Richard F. Kreutel, "Neues zur Evliyâ-Çelebi-Forschung," *Der Islam* 48 (1972): 269–279; Pierre A. MacKay, "The Manuscripts of the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi, part 1, 'The Archetype,'" *Der Islam* 52 (1975): 278–298; Robert Dankoff, "Where

hypotheses, a secretary initially copied out the consonantal skeleton of the work (initial fair copy), and later, Evliya himself went over the text, added diacritics and vowels, but also made some interlinear and marginal corrections and additions (final fair copy).³ How the final product came into being is crucial and holds clues to my arguments here. However, this article is *not* directly concerned with the final copying process in Cairo. Rather, I scrutinize clues in the text which indicate *when* certain parts were composed.

How do I do it? The fact that the narrative follows Evliya's travels over the years largely in chronological order, with some flashbacks, allows us to test whether certain of his observations actually fit within the timeframe he is supposed to be writing, or if they seem to be composed retrospectively in Cairo. I suggest two strategies that can be used to help us understand the circumstances around the composition of Evliya's account: To scrutinize the attributes of persons Evliya knew well and compare them with real-time happenings.

I will list my hypotheses at the end of the article, so suffice it to summarize my final argument here: Evliya did *not* compose most parts of the travel account in Cairo. Rather, the traveler wrote sections of his travel account on the road—either during and between trips or a short time thereafter—as *complete sections* to be incorporated into the finished product. They were, therefore *not* (at least not all of them) taken as haphazard incomplete notes to be formed into a coherent narrative *later*. Equally importantly, it seems most of these complete sections were included in the text with minimal stylistic editing or no editing at all. There is evidence to support the position that Evliya worked in this way. This would also arguably have been the efficient way to write a book of this magnitude. A man who traveled so often would have easily forgotten or mixed up details of his travels. So, he wrote them as complete sections with the intention of compiling them into a travelogue later.

What, then, did Evliya do in Cairo? He primarily arranged the order of the text and worked on transliterating the final fair copy on the large sheets that would constitute the final product. He also composed the sections based on his recent travels from his base out in Cairo. Since a large part of the text is in chronological order, it is reasonable to assume that his notes and chapters were organized according to years or trips. They were perhaps loose leaves of paper stacked or bound together. With an assistant clerk's help, he undertook the

is Evliya Çelebi in the Autograph Manuscript of the Seyahatname?," unpublished paper, n.d., accessed November 27, 2012, https://www.academia.edu/12820485/Where_is_Evliya_%C3%87elebi_in_the_autograph_manuscript_of_the_Seyahatname.

3 Ibid.

arduous task of copying these large chunks of prewritten texts into what would eventually become the fair copy. His assistant first transcribed the consonantal skeleton of the work on to the sheets. Evliya later put the diacritics, made some corrections, and added a few marginalia, interlinear sentences and transitions between sections.⁴ While doing this, Evliya reworked the order of the volumes. His actual travels start in volume 2. Most probably, the complete travel account would have opened with that volume in the original arrangement. Inserting volume 1 on Istanbul at the beginning of the account and volume 10 on Cairo at the end of the work were probably late decisions.⁵

My strategy below is to compare “time sensitive” information about a few individuals in the travel account. I deliberately chose people Evliya knew well, since I assume that he would be well-informed about them and up to speed about their appointments. Moreover, since these were people for whom he had a special affinity, I would expect him to refer to them using the proper prayers to denote their passing. In the two cases that I focus on, the clues demonstrate that Evliya refers to these people with the information concurrent to the time of his travels. Therefore, he must have written these sections as he travelled, and not later in life in Cairo.

Seydi Ahmed Pasha’s Execution

Having met him first in 1057/1647 during Seydi Ahmed’s tenure as the provincial governor of Tortum in eastern Anatolia, Evliya later developed a special attachment to the pasha, who was also a friend of Evliya’s patron Melek Ahmed.⁶ The traveler narrates in detail about the raids he participated alongside Seydi Ahmed and portrays him in a fairly sympathetic way. The pasha was executed on the orders of grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha on 19 Şevval

4 For instance, he occasionally introduces topics that are digressions from the main narrative with “As the following fits the topic, I include it here” “*Bu mahalle münasib olmagıla tahrir olundu*” or similar formulae; cf. Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, 10 vols, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 307, 5:103b, passim.

5 See Hakan Karateke, “How Did the Volume Arrangement of Evliya Çelebi’s Travel Account Evolve?” *Evliya Çelebi in the Borderlands: New Insights and Novel Approaches to the Seyahatname (Western Balkans and Iran Sections)*. Vjerran Kursar, Nenad Moacanin, Kornelija Jurin Starčević, eds. (Zagreb, 2021), pp. 129–148. For a possible timeline of the volume organization that article and the present one are complementary and should be read in tandem.

6 Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588–1662): As Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi’s Book of Travels (Seyahat-name)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 11–12.

1071/17 June 1661. Evliya had joined the ranks of Melek Ahmed in Timișoara a few days earlier and was present when the events leading up to Seydi Ahmed's execution unfolded. He included a long and captivating narrative of the reasons and circumstances of the pasha's death in the travel account.⁷

A close scrutiny of Evliya's references to Seydi Ahmed with the adjective *merhum*, or "the deceased," provides us with some clues of the composition dates of certain sections in his travel account. Several references particularly in volume 2, but also a few in volumes 3 and 4 never mention the pasha as *merhum*. Evliya's first meeting with the pasha occurs in Tortum, as mentioned above, and is narrated in volume 2.⁸

Volume 5 begins with the night of *mirac* 27 Receb 1066/20–21 May 1656 in Mosul and ends with a lengthy description of Seydi Ahmed's execution on 19 Şevval 1071/17 June 1661. This volume is also replete with references to Seydi Ahmed, but *not once* is the pasha referred to as *merhum* until his execution is related at the very end of that volume. Obviously written only a little time after the unfortunate event, volume 6 contains vivid expressions of lamentation on the pasha's execution. Hereafter, Evliya consistently mentions him as *merhum* throughout that volume. Volume 7, as well, refers to the pasha as "deceased," but the frequency of references to him decreases, as, we can assume, the pasha's active participation in Evliya's life and psyche gradually faded away. Looking at Evliya's references to Seydi Ahmed, it is reasonable to argue that most of these sections were written on the go, as he travelled, and as events unfolded.

Volume 1 presents an anomaly. Of the six times Seydi Ahmed gets mentioned in this volume, it is clear from context or attributes that these sections were written after the pasha's demise. Evliya refers to him as *merhum*, as "*şehid efendimiz Seydi Ahmed Paşa*" ("our master Seydi Ahmed Pasha, the martyr"),⁹ and once alludes to his execution.¹⁰ On the other hand, the pasha's name gets mentioned three times without any attribute that would indicate that he had passed away.

I have hypothesized elsewhere that there was *no* volume 1 dedicated to Istanbul in Evliya's initial plan and that it was a late decision in Evliya's arrangement of the volumes.¹¹ The account would have opened with his travels in chronological time, which begin in volume 2 in the current arrangement. When he decided that volume 1 would be devoted to Istanbul, the change pushed the

7 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 307, 5:183b.

8 Idem, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 304, 2:328bf.

9 Ibid., 1:51a.

10 Ibid., 1:85b.

11 Karateke, "How Did the Volume Arrangement of Evliya Çelebi's Travel Account Evolve?"

original arrangement of volumes 1 and 2 one volume ahead. This hypothesis is buttressed by Evliya's references to Seydi Ahmed's demise in current volume 1. Volume 1 was probably partially written earlier, but also was rearranged with many additions at the end of the process of organizing the volume order.

Did Evliya have to include the attribute *merhum* every time he mentioned Seydi Ahmed after his passing? He did not have to, but his close friendship with the pasha, the fact that he had to witness the pasha's execution, which probably left a scar in the traveler's psyche, should all be taken as indicators that he would refer to the pasha with the formula *merhum*, which means "one whom God has taken into his mercy."

The other possibility is that Evliya carefully marked Seydi Ahmed *merhum* only in the sections after his death in the narrative, which does not seem likely to me. My premise here is that if Evliya indeed "composed" the entirety of the travel account, that is, wrote whole sections anew based on his notes at the end of his life in Cairo, he would spontaneously refer to Seydi Ahmed as *merhum* every time he mentioned him—before or after his execution in the narrative. Yet, his references to him with or without the attribute fit exactly to the chronology of the events. Therefore, the likelihood that the traveler wrote complete sections during his travels and that they were incorporated without (much) editing is very high.

Dahki Efendi's Career¹²

Dahki Efendi was the head judge of Istanbul and later served for a short period of time as military judge of Rumelia. We can follow his career from contemporary sources. He was appointed the head judge of Istanbul for the first time on 15 Zi'l-ka'de 1070/23 July 1660, dismissed from that post on 17 Rebi' I 1071/20 November 1660, appointed to the military judgeship of Rumelia on 4 Zi'l-hicce 1080/25 April 1670, and then dismissed from that post after seven months on 15 Receb 1081/28 November 1670.¹³

12 An earlier version of this section appeared in Hakan Karateke, *Evliya Çelebi's Journey from Bursa to the Dardanelles and Edirne: From the Fifth Book of Seyahatname* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2013), 11–14.

13 Abdurrahman Abdi, *Vekâyi'-nâme: Osmanlı tarihi 1648–1682: Tahlil ve Metin Tenkidi*, ed. Fahri Ç. Derin (Istanbul: Çamlıca, 2008), 337; İszade Abdullah, *İsâ-zâde târîhi: Metin ve Tahlil*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz (Istanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1996), 65, 67, 106, 109. The dates in *Sicill-i 'Osmani* are not accurate: Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i 'Osmani*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: 1308–1316/1890–99), 401.

Evliya evidently knew Dahki Efendi personally. He mentions that he received medication from him for his ailing eyes and, on another occasion, obtained a letter of introduction from him when Evliya visited Tire, a town whose revenues were allocated to Dahki at the time. In total, Evliya mentions his acquaintance Dahki three times in the *Seyahatname* with reference to his rank: (1) in Muharrem 1070/October 1659, as the military judge of Rumelia (*kadı'asker-i Rum*);¹⁴ (2) in Zi'l-ka'de 1077/May 1667, with a statement of well-wishing (“may God bring him to a happy end”)—probably in reference to his less than triumphant professional career at the time (*Allah 'akıbetin hayr eyleye*)¹⁵—and (3) during Evliya's pilgrimage in 1082/1671, as a dismissed military judge of Rumelia.¹⁶ Below are the relevant sections:

(1) Muharrem 1070/October 1659; SN 5:92a

[*Bozcaada*] *Misket üzümü olur kim rub'-ı meskunda yokdur. Hatta Kadı'asker-i Rum Dahki Efendi bağlarında olan on yedi güne mümessek üzümü olur kim cebel-i Sincarda olmaz.*

[The muscatel grapes are matchless [on the Island of Bozcaada]. The seventeen different types of fragrant grapes that grow in the vineyards of **Dahki Efendi, the Military Judge of Rumelia**, are not even to be found on Sinjar Mountain.]

(2) Zi'l-ka'de 1077/May 1667; SN 8:203b–204a

Hikmet-i Bari bir hafta içinde ta'undan altı nefer ad[ed] 'abd-i memluklarımın güzideleri merhum olup hakir kamil iki ay göz ağrısı çeküp Allah 'akıbetin hayr eyleye Dahki Efendi hazretleri meger üstad-i kamil kehhâl imiş, hakire guna-gun şaflar ve guna-gun münciler ile gözlerime deva edüp hamd-i Huda gözlerim 'Arab meşali gibi münevver oldu.

[By divine wisdom, six of my outstanding slaves passed away from plague in one week. I also suffered from an ache in my eyes for a full two months. **Dahki Efendi—may God bring him to a happy end**—as it turns out, is an expert eye doctor. He gave me several different medications and cured my eyes. Thanks be to God, my eyes became as bright as an Arab torch.]

14 Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 307, 5:92a.

15 Idem, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 308, 8:203b.

16 Idem, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Bağdat 306, 9Y:80a.

(3) 1082/1671; SN 9Y:80a

[Tire] *Ve şehri beş yüz akçe mevleviyyetdir. Zamanımızda Rumeli kadi'askerliginden ma'zul Dahki (---) Efendi hazretlerine ber-vech-i arpalık ihsan olunup kendülerinin mektub-ı dürerbarları ile bu şehirde ka'immakamı olan Yusuf Efendiye gelüp mahkemede mihman olup. . . .*

[[The town of Tire] is a *molla* district with a salary of five hundred akçe. Nowadays, its income is allocated to his excellency **Dahki Efendi, who was a Military Judge of Rumelia—currently out of office**. I arrived in this town with an eloquent recommendation letter from him and stayed at the courthouse as a guest of Yusuf Efendi, the deputy governor of the town.]

Evliya's latter two references mirror Dahki's actual contemporary occupational situation: his blessing of well-wishing, apparently uttered with some empathy for his friend, comes at a time when Dahki had been unemployed since having been dismissed from the judgeship of Istanbul some seven years prior. The third time Evliya mentions Dahki, he is referred to as the dismissed military judge of Rumelia, six months to a year after he was discharged from that office.

However, the first time Dahki's name is mentioned, Evliya refers to him as the current military judge of Rumelia; the date of that journey is 1070/1659, that

TABLE 1. Dahki Efendi: Timeline

Appointments	Date	Evliya mentions
	October 1659	"kadi'asker-i Rum"
<i>Istanbul kadi'sı—appointed</i>	23 July 1660	
<i>Istanbul kadi'sı—dismissed</i>	20 November 1660	
	May 1667	"Allah 'akıbetin hayr eyleye"
<i>Rumeli kadi'askeri—appointed</i>	25 April 1670	
<i>Rumeli kadi'askeri—dismissed</i>	28 November 1670	
	1671	"zamanımızda Rumeli kadi'askerliginden ma'zul"

is, some eleven years before Dahki would be appointed to that position. How are we to understand this? There is no solution to this conundrum other than assuming that either

- a) Evliya edited this section during Dahki's eventual seven-month tenure as the military judge of Rumelia, that is, between 4 Zilhicce 1080/25 April 1670 and 15 Receb 1081/28 November 1670; or
- b) He actually wrote this section later, based on his notes from that time.

The latter seems unlikely; it is illogical to suppose that Evliya would refer to Dahki as the military judge of Rumelia *after* his dismissal (that is, writing in Cairo after 1673), when he referred to him as a *dismissed* military judge (*ma'zul*) a year after his dismissal in 1082/1671, as mentioned above.

These three references clearly suggest three different composition dates for these sections. It would be safe to assume that Evliya had up-to-date information about his friend Dahki's appointments. The first safe conclusion we can arrive at, then, is that Evliya did not rewrite or sweepingly edit these sections before he inserted them into the final version of the *Seyahatname*. As was mentioned above, probably a secretary transcribed these chapters into the final manuscript in any case. It is safe to assume he would not have had authorization to change the text, even if he were to spot any awkwardness therein.

If it was *not* Evliya's preferred method to incorporate the previously written sections into the final product without editing, that is, if he in fact constructed a narrative out of years-old notes, one would imagine he would have updated the various titles of his friend while copying them into the manuscript. Certainly there may be other reasons why the references to Dahki are varied, but to my mind, the assumption that he inserted them into the text wholesale, without further editing, is the most plausible.

Conclusion

By scrutinizing "time sensitive" information about individuals mentioned in the *Seyahatname*, it may be possible to glean clues as to when the traveler composed the relevant sections. I availed myself only of two examples here and probed the concordance of this information with events in real time. More examples are available in the text. Admittedly, this method is not completely free of error, but it nevertheless provides us with some data regarding Evliya's working method.

My preliminary findings suggest that the traveler composed at least some parts of his travel account during, between, or a short time after his trips. He wrote them as *complete sections* and, later, incorporated them in Cairo into the book that would be the final product. He probably did not undertake major stylistic copyediting during this process. Therefore, viewing the entire *Seyahatname* exclusively as an elder man's reflection upon his life's travels is not the correct approach. That said, the natural process of copyediting a book would require that some missing sections would be filled in the final stages of compilation. Therefore, there may have been sections that Evliya composed for the first time in Cairo. Keeping Evliya's circumstances and working methods in mind, scholars should closely examine the sections of their interest and decide whether they were written at the time of Evliya's travels or much later, in Cairo.