

# Turkish Philology and Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels

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## Summary

The *Seyahatname* or *Book of Travels* is the longest and fullest travel account in Islamic literature - perhaps in world literature. It is also a vast panorama of the Ottoman world in the mid - seventeenth century. The core is an autobiographical narrative, full of adventure and humor. The town descriptions cover not only topography and fortifications, with extensive descriptions of monuments and amenities, but extend to human geography - dress and cuisine, occupations and class structure, medicine and hygiene, naming practices, speech and reading habits, etc. - the social fabric of the city. The work is a mine of folklore, hagiography, dialectology, onomastics. It is a primary source for Ottoman imperial administration; for the social organization of the Sufi orders; for architectural history; for the role of dreams and portents in Ottoman daily life; and for much else besides. Indeed, it would be hard to overstate the importance of the *Seyahatname* for the study of the Ottoman Empire and of the early modern Middle East and the Balkans. Given its central importance, the fact that the bulk of it remains unedited, or poorly edited, is a source of frustration and even scandal.

## “Shall We Tear Down That Observatory?”

In connection with the Astrologers' Well (Müneccim Kuyusu) in Tophane, the section of Istanbul which housed the imperial gun foundry, Evliya recounts an anecdote in which Sultan Murad IV sends a note to Sheyhülislam Yahya Efendi inquiring whether to tear down an observatory whose construction was begun by

Ali Kushçu. Since the handwritten note is without diacritics, there is some controversy among the scholars as to what it says. Finally a simple door - keeper deciphers the message. (I 133a19 - 133b2)

For our purposes the anecdote serves as a parable and a warning. It was Evliya's sensitivity to the philological issues implicit in this story that led him to take such care in pointing his own text. In this paper I examine certain issues involving textual scholarship on the *Seyahatname*. These include:

## Publishing the Text: A Historical Overview

Textual study of the *Seyahatname* can be divided into two periods: before and after Kreutel, the pivotal point being Kreutel's 1972 article.

## Establishing the Text: Books 1 - 8 (autograph = series S)

I develop the hypothesis that much of Books 6 - 8 represents the initial fair - copy stage, at which Evliya - or an amanuensis - first copied out the consonantal skeleton, only noting the pronunciation of unusual proper names and foreign words with careful diacritic pointings and vowel markings. Most of Books 1 - 5 represents the final fair - copy stage, at which Evliya went back and added diacritics and vowels, also interlinear and marginal corrections and additions.

## Establishing the Text: Books 9 - 10

I develop the hypothesis that when Evliya's autograph was brought to Istanbul in 1742, the volume containing Books 9 and 10 was damaged, with the result that some portions of the text were illegible. This

accounts for the large amount of garbled text in the two copies made at that time (= series P and Q). In 1751 an Ottoman official, perhaps Mehmed Rasim, tried to remedy the situation. He must have realized that: (1) the autograph of Books 9 and 10 was in bad condition and probably unsalvageable; (2) the 1742 copyists had simply leapt over the illegible portions without even leaving gaps to indicate where they had been; (3) those copyists had also failed to render exactly all of Evliya's detailed pointings and vocalizations, with the result that much information in the original was in danger of being lost. And so he had one of the divan scribes with an excellent hand, a certain Haci Mehmed, recopy these two books with careful attention to all of these matters. This accounts for the excellent quality of this copy (= series Y) which ought to serve as the basis for any future edition.

This paper is in part a development and expansion of one originally presented in 1997 at the 35<sup>th</sup> ICANAS Congress (Budapest). That has now been published in *Archivum Ottomanicum* 18 (2000) (unfortunately printed without the page of samples).