

## ISTANBUL AT EVLIYA ÇELEBI'S *SEJAHATNAME*

Evliya Çelebi, whose real name was Dervish Mehmed Zilli was an Ottoman civil servant, traveler, intellectual and writer, who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He is thought to have been born in 1611 in the city of Istanbul and died in 1684. For about forty years he travelled almost everywhere in the Ottoman Empire and European countries and brought back important information about their lives, society, culture, language, traditions, history and religions. Çelebi had a broad intellectual perspective since in *Sejihatname* he speaks of matters falling in different fields and sciences, cultures, religions, architecture, gastronomy, etc. His name and work were appraised by UNESCO by declaring 2011 as the year of Evliya Çelebi.

His work *Sejihatname* emerges as a work of special importance, as it introduces an economic, administrative, cultural and historical picture of a considerable part of the territorial space of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire. This work is an example and first hand source to understand the cultural and social history of the regions in particular and that of the entire Ottoman Empire in general. Its significance is best shown by its numerous editions, translations in various languages, and several academic articles, writings and monographs.

The Travel Book consists of ten volumes and begins with the description of the city of Istanbul and continues with the places Evliya Çelebi visited separated in nine volumes. The places he visited and he described in his volumes are: 1. Istanbul and its surroundings; 2. Anatolia, Caucasus, Crete and Azerbaijan; 3. Syria, Palestine, Armenia and Rumelia; 4. North of Anatolia, Iraq and Iran; 5. Russia and the Balkans; 6. Hungary, Bosnia and nearby countries; 7. Austria, Crimea and the Caucasus again; 8. Crimea and various places of Rumelia; 9. Hajj towards Mecca; 10. Egypt and Sudan. Turkish scholars have translated the first seven volumes in modern Turkish, whereas the last three are still in the Ottoman language.

For the Albanian reader this work is not unknown. Earlier, some sections of *Sejihatname* were translated on the Albanian regions by Sali Vuçiterni entitled "Albania three centuries ago". Also, the scholar of Albanian studies Robert Elsie, together with Robert Dankoff, published the volume *Evlîya Çelebi in Albania and Nearby Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)*, in 1999, where volumes V, VI, VIII of the *Sejihatname* were summarized. It's important to point out that the data on Albanians and Albanian territories are found in almost the ten volumes of this important work.

Çelebi is believed to have visited the Albanian territory during 1660, 1662 and 1670, bringing important data on language, dialects, customs, culture, cities, forts, architecture, religion, food, roads, fairs, recreational areas and many other elements of social history. From this point of view, the data that we draw from *Sejihatname* serve us to better understand the Albanians' geography in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the elements of their everyday life and their living. The data he gives us for Gjirokastra, Vlora, Berat, Elbasan, Shkodra, Ulqin etc. serve us as important sources of the history of Albanian cities and help us understand the situation of Albanian territories during the Ottoman rule.

Besides the publication of fragmentary excerpts by the colossal work of Evliya Çelebi, mentioned above, for the first time in 2018, the *Fan Noli* publishing house decided to print this valuable source in Albanian. Thus, the first step was to translate the first volume of *Sejihatname*, which refers to the city of Istanbul and the surrounding areas. Nearly a thousand pages depict this magical city from its founding until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Çelebi was living.

Regarding the translation of the *Sejihatname* it is worth introducing some criteria we followed during this process. Initially, the source text to be translated into Albanian was modern Turkish. In most of the text we remained faithful to Evliya Çelebi's style of long sentences. The verses, lyrics or poems written in Persian and Arabic were adapted into Albanian. This work is also used as a source by many scholars when dealing with this period. Therefore, the names of people, toponyms and numerous terms in the text were not translate but left as in the original Ottoman terminology. We applied the same methodology to musical instruments and working tools, titles and professions which do

not have the Albanian equivalent and frequently are typical of Evliya Çelebi's period and have not reached to this day. However, when we deemed necessary, we gave a brief explanation to some of the terms in brackets.

Because of the voluminous work, we divided each volume into two parts to be more helpful to the readers, a method which was also applied by the Turkish scholars when translating the work from Ottoman into modern Turkish.

In this volume we find plenty of information about Albanians, their character and distinctive features, the places where they lived in Istanbul, their professions, the Sadrazams or Viziers of Albanian origin and other related elements. Thus, Çelebi himself, whenever he speaks of Albanians, he says that they are a ruthless nation, whose determination and persistence differs them from other peoples. On the other hand, he makes unfounded assumptions when connecting the Kurveleshi area with the Arab Kurejsh tribe.

Çelebi describes the ruling period of each of the Ottoman sultans, citing the names of the most prominent sadrazams, viziers, scholars, poets and architects. There are many Albanian names starting from Ibrahim Pasha, who put order in Egypt in the 1520s, Sultan Suleiman's intellectual vizier Lutfi Pasha, the great sadrazams from Kopryly's dynasty, the well-known poet Jahja Bej Dukagjini, Admiral Kara Mustafa Pasha and many other viziers and officials. The author emphasizes their origins, their official functions, their successes, their charity works that they left behind.

Evliya Çelebi writes about the crafts by which the Albanians lived and earned a reputation in Istanbul. Starting from the preparation of drinks and stews such as boze, salep, hardalli, cheese production and trade, liver preparation, etc., to cobble stone flooring, diving under the sea to extract clay to be used in pottery and in tile manufacturing.

These and many other data found in the *Sejihatname* pages do not only give us important information about the magical city of Istanbul, the center of the world for more than a thousand years, but they also show the great contribution that Albanians made in this magnificent city.