

CHAPTER SIX

EVLIYA ÇELEBI'S *SEYAHATNAME* AND THE HOLINESS OF JERUSALEM

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There were many a *çelebi*¹ in the early modern Ottoman Empire, but only Evliya Çelebi visited and subsequently wrote an account about Jerusalem and other parts of the *sanjak* [provincial subdivision] of Damascus. Evliya Çelebi was born on 10 Muḥarram 1020 [25 March 1611]. On his 30th birthday, he had a dream in which he begged the Prophet Muhammad for help, but instead of asking for *şefa'at* [spiritual blessing], he mistakenly asked for *seyahat* [travel]. The Prophet granted him his prayer, and travel became a key part of his life. He died in 1682, having written about history, geography, biography, medicine, and sociology. Suraiya Faroqhi argues that Evliya Çelebi is unique in Ottoman history since there were only 'a few' Ottoman travel writers before the eighteenth century who had traveled as widely as he. Not only did he take travel writing as a profession, but he also enjoyed it as a vocation. "His work included a broader spectrum of human types than many conventional Ottoman literary men."²

Before him, there had been Haydar Çelebi, an Ottoman scholar who lived during the reign of Selim I and took part in his war campaigns. He recorded his experiences in *Ruzname* [Diary]. Although he did not include much information about his life, he reported the conquest of Jerusalem and Egypt in 1516–1517 in a letter his father sent to Suleiman the Magnificent, who was not yet Sultan. There was one sentence about the conquest of Jerusalem at the end of the letter written by Selim I: "Praise be unto God, the creator and owner of life, who made it possible for us to conquer Egypt, Aleppo, Jerusalem and the whole Arab territories."³ Another Çelebi, Katip, also an Ottoman traveler and a contemporary of Evliya, was born in Istanbul and attended the Eastern War Campaign during the reign

¹ Çelebi means a well-bred, educated gentleman.

² Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 170.

³ Haydar Çelebi, *Ruzname* (Istanbul: Tercuman Binbir Eser Publishing Ltd., 1980), 129.

of Sultan Murad IV as a clerk [*katip*]. In 1635, after settling in Istanbul, he joined the court and remained active for twelve years. He was a great bibliophile and returned from Baghdad after its 1638 conquest by the Ottomans with a vast collection of Arabic and Turkish books by Muslim scholars, many of which he used in writing *The Book of Cihannüma*. This book, first printed in 1732, included numerous maps, one of which was a map of Egypt, Palestine, and Arabia.⁴

Evliya Çelebi, however, visited more countries in the Empire than any other Ottoman scholar. He visited Palestine twice, in 1648–1650 and in again 1672, and in his *Seyahatname*, he wrote a well-knit account of Jerusalem and other parts of *arḍ Filasṭin* based chiefly on his later sojourn.⁵ This is the first document in Ottoman-Turkish to include detailed information about Jerusalem and Palestine after the 1516 conquest. Evliya mentions the entry into the city by Sultan Selim I and emphasizes its holy status by reference to the *ulema* [scholars] and “pious men” who “handed the keys of Mosque al-Aqsa to Selim Shah,” who then

made presents to all the notable people, and exempted them from the onerous taxes. Sultan Selim then prostrated himself and exclaimed, ‘*Elhamdu-lillah*’ Praise be to God, I am the possessor of the first Qiblah (230).

Because Jerusalem was a holy city, Selim proceeded to embellish it “in small ways by restoring and adding to its edifices.”⁶ He also began a tradition of sending the inhabitants an annual royal gift [*şurre*] from Istanbul, thereby confirming himself the servant, rather than the master, of the holy places. The Jerusalem *şurre* remained in effect for centuries, and in 1671, it included tax money for supporting the servants, clerics, scribes, and imams of the Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, as well as hundreds of devotees from all over the Islamic world, who lived and prayed

⁴ Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: the World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 228.

⁵ *Seyahatname* was first revised by Ahmet Cevdet Pasha and published in 1848 in the original Ottoman language. The complete, recent and most comprehensive translation of *Seyahatname* into modern Turkish in ten volumes, was made by Yücel Dağlı, Seyit Ali Kahraman and Robert Dankoff. (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Publishing, 2005). All references are to the ninth volume of this edition and will be cited parenthetically hereafter. There is an English translation of the section on Palestine, based on an earlier edition, by St. H. Stephan, published in the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* in the 1930s.

⁶ Beatrice St. Laurent and Andras Riedlmayer, “Restoration of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock and their Political Significance, 1537–1928,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 76.

in the city.⁷ Selim realized that with the conquest of Jerusalem, the three holy sites of Islam had come under Ottoman rule, and pilgrimages and visitations would become practicable for Muslims from as far as Morocco, Bosnia, and Iraq.

But, according to St. Laurent and Riedlmayer, it was during the reign of his son, Sultan Suleiman (1520–1566), that the holy city was renovated on a much grander scale. He had the two chief Muslim shrines decorated in an Ottoman manner, thereby appropriating Jerusalem symbolically; this Ottoman restoration was part of the imperial policy to ensure control over the administration of the region.⁸ For them, Suleiman was the new Solomon who “enclosed the city in a stunningly powerful curtain wall.” As they explained, the high status of the Ottoman builders who restored the town also confirmed the significance given to Jerusalem.⁹ The Prophet’s *isrā’* [night journey] to Jerusalem had led to the Umayyad construction of the Dome of the Rock, with ‘Abd al-Malik, who reigned from 685 to 705, viewing himself as another Solomon.¹⁰ So, too, did Sultan Suleiman since inscriptions in Jerusalem call him the Second Suleiman in recognition of his attentiveness to the city.¹¹ Later sultans also continued the celebration of the Haram, and in 1597, 1603, and 1617, sultans Mehmet III, Ahmed I, and Mustafa respectively renovated the Dome to mark Jerusalem’s holy history and its centrality for pilgrims. They saw it as one of their paramount duties to ensure that the employees were pious, that repairs were completed in a timely fashion, and that all revenues from the *evkaf* [religious foundations] went to maintenance and upkeep.¹²

Evliya had a sharp eye, but also an imaginative pen, and so he records in his account precise observations along with popular legends and traditions. This feature is characteristic of other Muslim pilgrim-travelers, too, who, while they describe their journeys with great precision and emphasize the seriousness of their reports, they do not hesitate to include outlandish

⁷ Suhayl Sabān, “Şurraṭ ahāli al-Quds al-Sharīf ‘ām 1082 AH/1671 AD,” in *Al-awqāf fi Bilād al-Shām*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Adnān al-Bakhīt (Amman: University of Jordan Press, 2008), 185–208.

⁸ Laurent and Riedlmayers, “Restoration of Jerusalem,” 77.

⁹ Laurent and Riedlmayers, “Restoration of Jerusalem,” 79.

¹⁰ John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (London and Westport: Praeger, 2008), 197.

¹¹ See the inscriptions of 1527 and 1531 in Mehmet Tütüncü, *Turkish Jerusalem (1516–1917)* (Haarlem, Netherlands: SOTA, 2006), 32–39.

¹² As K.J. Asali notes, “The Ottoman *Muimme defterleri* contain many firmans and orders which show the attention given by the authorities to the sanctuaries”; see “Jerusalem under the Ottomans 1516–1831,” in *Jerusalem in History*, ed. K.J. Asali (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1990), 212.

accounts of miracles or unverified hearsay. In his description of various sites, Evliya also includes stories he hears about past events, as well as ‘histories’ of the ‘Franks’ and biographies of the prophets, a popular genre in Islamic religious writings as full of incredible episodes about the prophets of monotheism as was the genre of saints’ lives in medieval Christianity. Without any apparent inconsistency, Evliya and other Muslims combine such stories with empirical descriptions of villages, regional governors, and military commanders, along with data about taxation, natural resources, and communities (in the case of Evliya, Muslim, Christian, and Druze). As an Ottoman Turk, Evliya had access to officials and government functionaries, received assistance from local scholars, and stayed at many religious foundations and *tekke* [lodge]. His account furnishes information that does not appear in any other writing of a pilgrim-traveler.

Evliya scheduled his visit to Jerusalem in the holiest month of the Islamic year: Ramadan. He then spent the 27th night of that month, the Night of Power, in which he recited the Qur’ān and invoked God’s blessings (242). Jerusalem, he believed, was so holy that it was mentioned in the Qur’ān many times,¹³ which is why from the start of his account he establishes a connection between himself and the city through his ancestors. He writes that his grandfather was Ahmet Bey whose brother, Salimi, had migrated to Jerusalem and devoted his whole life to the service of the holy mosque. Evliya finds his grave and records the verses from the Qur’ān that had been carved on it (243). For him, Jerusalem is part of his personal history and worship.

Having linked the holy city to his own life, Evliya turns to describe the historical character of Jerusalem. He starts with the ancient pre-Judaic history of the city and identifies the names given to it by different civilizations: *Beyt-i Mukaddes* from Arabic, *Makdina* from Syriac, *Iliad* from Greek, and *Has* from Hebrew, all of which, he explains, mean “a holy town” (230).¹⁴ For Evliya, Jerusalem is the threshold on which earlier prophets stood and was the holy direction of prayer both before and after Noah’s Flood (230). One term he uses to describe the city is *asit-hane*, a Persian word with several meanings, including dervish-lodge, threshold,

¹³ The name of the city does not appear in the Qur’ān, although there are many references that have been applied to it, including 17:1. See Abdallah el-Khatib, “Jerusalem in the Qur’ān,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28.1 (2001): 25–53.

¹⁴ See also Angelika Neuwirth, “Jerusalem in Islam: The Three Honorific Names of the City,” in *Ottoman Jerusalem: The Living City 1517–1917*, ed. Sylvia Auld and Robert Hillenbrand (London: Altajir World of Islam Trust, 2000), 77–93.

sacred place, bridge, and temple. Istanbul, too, was identified as *asit-hane* with respect to Rome because the Ottomans considered Istanbul a bridge that would enable the conquest of Rome.¹⁵ In *Seyahatname*, Evliya deliberately uses the term *asit-hane* to explain the common history of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; after all, the city had served as the *asit-hane* of 124,000 prophets. The Qur'an explains that prophets had been sent throughout history to all mankind, and so, given the holiness of Jerusalem, many of them visited the city, as did the Prophet Muhammad, who used the threshold of the Aqsā Mosque to ascend to heaven. For Evliya, the stone on which the prophet set his foot to ride his horse, *al-Burak* or *Ref-ref*, is also *asit-hane* (230).

Evliya viewed Jerusalem as also *hassı humayun*, a word consisting of *hass*, which refers to the lands owned by members of the Ottoman ruling dynasty, and *humayun*, which means 'blessed.' It is because Jerusalem was *hassı-humayun* that it was the only city, after Mecca and Medina, where the Ottomans did not impose their imperial symbols. They contributed to its restoration and upkeep, but minarets, for instance, which are decisive symbols of Ottoman sovereignty, were not added to any mosques, as Evliya noted. The Ottomans did not add a minaret to the Aqsā Mosque either, and they so cherished the city that the vizier Ali Pasha asked the Jerusalemite scholar, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khiḍr al-Maqdisi (d. after 1561), to write him an account in Arabic about the Aqsā Mosque. The text records the city's history with its rich traditions and legends about prophets and holy men, some of whom lived and died there.

The Ottomans divided the region of Jerusalem and its environs into three administrative units: *Liva-i Gazze*, *Liva-i Leccun*, and *Liva-i Nablus*.¹⁶ The city was controlled by a pasha, also designated *Emir-el Hacc* [leader of the pilgrimage caravan]. The pasha oversaw the military presence in the city and was responsible for the safety of Muslim pilgrims from Damascus to Jerusalem, as well as of the residents of the city. Having access to administrative information about Jerusalem, Evliya gives the number of the inhabitants as 46,000. He also mentions 240 mosques, seven schools for Hadith, ten schools to teach the Qur'an, and 70 dervish lodges in

¹⁵ A. Ragıp Akyavaş, *Asithane* (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2000), 1–10. Akyavaş discusses the meaning of the term *asit-hane*, arguing that Kodus, Mecca, Medina, Istanbul, and Rome were regarded by the Ottomans as *sacred places*.

¹⁶ Fahameddin Başar, *Osmanlı Eyalet Tevcihâtı 1717–1730* (Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1997); and E. Çakar "The Administrative Divisions of The Beylerbeyilik of Damascus in The Sixteenth Century," *Fırat University Journal of Social Science* 13.1 (2003): 351–74.

Jerusalem. There were 'pious foundations,' which provided the poor with food and financial assistance, as well as baths, one of which was exclusively for clerics. Two baths, however, were the best: one named after the Virgin Mary and the other after the Sultan. Because the old water cisterns were 'dry and dirty,' Sultan Suleiman 'ordered' the pasha to supply water to the city whereupon "the pasha had his architects build eighteen street fountains inside the city" (245).

The Ottoman sultans venerated all the holy sites in Jerusalem – and not only those associated with the history of Islam. The holy places of Judaism and Christianity were carefully identified and regulations were implemented to protect them. Fourteen different Christian sites were selected, each of which was subject to special regulations, at the same time that certain numbers of Jews were allowed to settle in the city. In the wake of the 1492 expulsion from Spain, some Jews moved into a small district where they could have their own cemetery.¹⁷ Along with Muslims and Christians, Jews were permitted their own scholars, leaders, and judges.

Evliya uses dreams in *Seyahatname* to describe very special occasions, twice with reference to the Prophet. In the unit on Jerusalem, he refers to the dream of Sultan Suleiman, when the sultan saw the Prophet Muhammad who told him: "You will rule for forty-eight years with glory and victories." The Prophet then asked Sultan Suleiman to restore Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina, adding:

O Suleiman, you will make many conquests. You should spend the spoils on embellishing Mecca and Medina and fortifying the citadel of Jerusalem in order to repulse the unbelievers, when they attempt to take possession during the reign of your successors. You should also embellish its sanctuary with a water basin and offer annual gifts to the dervishes there, and also embellish the Rock of Allah and rebuild Jerusalem (235).

Promptly, Sultan Suleiman had his master architect, Koca Sinan, and his grand Vizier, Lala Mustafa Pasha, carry out the restoration of Jerusalem. He ordered them to find and bring to Jerusalem all the famous builders, architects, and sculptors of the empire. He then appointed Lala Mustapha as the governor of Damascus and held him responsible for the cultivation, prosperity, and restoration of the city. Having selected the best architects, he oversaw an impressive restoration of Jerusalem. In the *Seyahatname*, Evliya is eager to make the point that as the Old City of Jerusalem owed its glory to the Hebrew Prophet Solomon (Suleiman in Turkish), so the

¹⁷ Ahmet Akgündüz, "Ottoman Model in Jerusalem," osmanli.org.tr/ 20.06.2010.

new Ottoman Jerusalem of the seventeenth century owes its prosperity and glory to the second Solomon [Suleiman I].

Evliya visited seventeen countries in thirty-eight years, but, he stated, he never saw a city comparable to Jerusalem in beauty and prosperity. The wall around the city had seven gates, and there were forty houses and numerous neighborhoods, belonging mostly to the non-Muslim inhabitants. The rest of the houses belonged to Muslims. Houses were made of stone and were painted in white-lime. There were two big mosques and various small ones (232–35),¹⁸ but the biggest mosque was Al-Aqsā. According to Evliya and the biblical/Qur'ānic history on which he drew, it was the Prophet David who started its construction as an expression of his people's gratitude to God for deliverance from the plague. David died before the completion of the construction, and so his son Solomon [Suleiman] continued the project. Like his father, he died just before its completion, but his vizier, Asaf-i Berhiya, restored and enlarged the temple. Further additions were made by later kings until the building reached 300 feet in length and 400 feet in width. The temple is ornamented with precious white marble columns reaching a height of about forty *arşın* [twenty meters]. Above it rises the highest dome in the city in the shape of a flagon, reaching almost more than a hundred feet. Ten gates lead to the temple, and there are 120 vaults of varying sizes within it.

The magnificence of the temple is shown in its "fine decoration" and "precious stones" that ornament the *mihrab* [prayer niche]. "It is impossible to write enough about the beautiful decoration the Sultan ordered in the mosque," Evliya declares (231). The pulpit is made of wood, but the master-carpenter of the Sultan designed it with such beautiful figures that the observer "mistakes it for the work of a magician" (234). The Serhos Ibo, the royal glazier of the Ottoman court, "embellished the windows with wonderful colors" and designs, "reflecting the immense and innumerable colors of the sun." In addition, there were precious candles, silks, and chandeliers that illuminated the mosque (234). After describing the decorations that were added by the Ottomans, Evliya turns to the laborers who were hired for the service of this holy place. There were 800 servants, four imams (one for each Sunni school), four preachers, and numerous dervishes, scholars, and cleaners, all of whose incomes were sent annually from Istanbul. Evliya also describes the cave in which the Virgin Mary took

¹⁸ Evliya claims that the Ottoman Pasha had the workers bring stones as big as elephants from abroad to build the mosque, *Seyahatname*, 231.

shelter to avoid the malediction of people during her pregnancy. She also rocked the baby Jesus in the stone-cradle in the cave. Twenty feet below ground are the twelve seats of the apostles. Although the cave had no windows, it was a holy space illuminated by God (240).

The second largest mosque in Jerusalem is *Mescid-i Sahratullah*, the Dome of the Rock of God. Evliya refers to the holiness of the white stone/rock in the center of the building, and he quotes from *Tevarih-i Tuhfe* [*History of Eccentricities*] about its legendary past.¹⁹ The stone is an *asit-hane*, which the Prophet Muhammad used to mount his horse before his heavenly journey. He became Imām/leader in prayer of the 124,000 prophets and prayed to God in the cave under it – the same place Mary had sheltered. After he finished, he saw that the stone was trying to rise to heaven with him, and so he commanded it to remain on earth, which it did, hanging in mid-air above the cave from which it had been quarried. Evliya explains that this white stone was one of the two stones brought from Eden (234). In height, he explains, the vault is comparable only to the Suleimaniye Mosque in Istanbul.²⁰ On entry, visitors to the Mosque recite passages from the Qur’ān (105:25), and “struck by the beauty of the scene,” they forget all their misery and grief. Evliya mentions other sacred spaces in the mosque, including the prayer niches [*mihṛāb*] of David, Samuel, and the Archangel Gabriel.²¹ Evliya mentions a magic mirror, too, which people call the mirror of Alexander the Great and through which the onlooker can see the whole universe.

Since the Ottoman Empire extended into various non-Turkic regions, Jerusalem had to accommodate the diversity of believers, and so Evliya mentions that there were forty rooms for forty men from India [Hindustan], Mongolia, Kurdistan, Persia, and from among the Tartars, Turks, and Arabs, all “continually praying, reciting the Qur’ān and fasting.” They lived their lives in solitude near the holy temple, which is why Evliya calls them “saints” [*sahib-i suluk canlar*], who knew the “secret of life” (249). Near the Mosque, there were also “200 classrooms for young men”

¹⁹ Evliya refers to *Tevarih-i Tuhfe*. However, there is no record of this particular title. According to the Ministry of Culture, the book referred to is *Tacüt Tevarih*, whose author was Hoca Sadeddin Efendi (1536–99), author of the first history of the Ottoman Empire until 1521 (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of Culture, 1999).

²⁰ The mosque with the highest vault in Istanbul. According to Evliya, the Ottomans were called to prayer from the highest point of the mosque (241).

²¹ For the *mihṛāb* of David, see H. Busse, “The tower of David/Mihrab Dawūd: Remarks on the History of a Sanctuary in Jerusalem in Christian and Islamic Times,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 142–65.

studying Islamic theology. The holiness of Jerusalem, a center of trans-continental and intra-Islamic piety, attracted Muslims from all parts of the world. Evliya is clearly proud that the Ottomans confirmed the city of the *mi'rāj* [second part of the night journey] as a center of world Islam, adding to what the Ayyubids and Mamluks had established and constructing numerous sultanic religious schools, so much so that there was a total of nearly 360 *medrese* [schools] and dervish lodges in and outside the city (239–40).

For Evliya, there is no mosque greater in beauty than *Sahratullah* and no empire greater than the Ottoman (237). To emphasize the holy status of Jerusalem, he especially refers to the development and prosperity of the city under Ottoman rule, but he also writes about its Judaic and Christian past. Given his extensive travel, Evliya would have been familiar with Jews and Christians before visiting Jerusalem and clearly knew some of their legends. One of those legends, which dated back to Israelite lore, was of the 'column-bridge.' Before the conquest of Jerusalem by Muslims, there was a column-bridge between two giant rocks. A criminal was made to walk on the column. If he succeeded in crossing it, he was forgiven; but if he fell, the people believed he was guilty, and so they left his carcass exposed. People used to call this column *Sirat köprüsü sutiin* [Straight Way]. The "wailing wall," which for Evliya is '*Makam-ı Bab-ı Tevbe*' and '*Makam-ı Bab-ı Rahmet* [Place of the Gate of Contrition or Gate of Mercy], is near the column (241). Later, the Ottomans used the column in the construction of the fortifications of Jerusalem. Evliya wrote about *Melik Gadir* [King Gadir], a figure in Israelite legend, who "died 300 years" before the birth of Christ. The Jews asked Jesus to re-create him and promised to believe in his revelation if he did. Jesus re-created the king who lived seventy more years. Evliya claims that he saw with his own eyes Christian hermits who lived in the grave of Melik Gadir (241–43).

Evliya dedicates much space to the Christians in Jerusalem. Because the holiness of Jerusalem was Islamic and because Islam had accepted the previous monotheisms, he, like the Ottoman administration, recognizes the holy sites of those monotheisms and offers descriptions that combine legend with piety, observation with measurement. According to him, the tomb of the Virgin Mary was in the left side of the halls at the bottom of the temple of the Dome of the Rock. Jesus Christ "took this place as a shelter to escape the curse and violence of the people" in the city. It was there that Gabriel came to "reveal the holy verse to Christ" (241). Evliya visits the monastery where, miraculously, food was sent from heaven to

Jesus and his apostles. He visited the monks in the monastery, who still kept in a large chest the tray and pots that Jesus had used (244).

Of the seven important churches in the city, Evliya writes, the most magnificent was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher [*Kumame Kilisesi*] which belonged to the Greek patriarchate (244).²² Evliya claims to have read the Greek inscriptions on the plate in front of the gate of the church, which told that the church had been built by Madyan, the son of Yanko, a legendary character, who “constructed the church out of stones he ordered from Greece” (244). Evliya compares this church to other monasteries and churches he had visited in other countries, concluding that in beauty and magnificence, it was comparable only to the Monastery of Stephen in Bach, land of the Germans [*Alman Diyan*].²³ Having been given permission to visit the church by the patriarch, he describes “seven vaults,” the highest of which is above the altar and was made by a Greek architect. “The pillars and the highest vault are precious and covered with gold” (246). But what strikes him most is the beauty of the icons in the church where, he admits, he was “overcome with admiration” for the figure of Christ upon the highest vault, fascinated by the figure, which took his breath away (246). Evliya composes a Sufi-imbued poem to Jesus, showing the same kind of veneration that other Muslims travelers, both before and after him, also showed: “It is possible to write about the beauty of the beloved / but it is not always possible to avoid falling in love with her beauty” (247). Evliya reflects that it may not always be possible for the common visitor to resist falling in love with the beauty of the icons representing Jesus and his mother. In expressing such emotions, Evliya is unique; no other non-Christian visitor to Jerusalem demonstrated the veneration that Evliya shows here to Christian representational art.

Evliya affirms that the church was the holiest place for Christians. That he is particularly struck by the icons is significant; as a Muslim who rejected pictorial representations of the holy, he could not but view them as *haram* [sacrilegious]. It is possible, however, that the holiness he had experienced in the other Jerusalem sites now extended to the icons. Earlier, Evliya expressed similar admiration to Christian representation in his travelogue about Western Europe, many sections of which are more than

²² The name ‘Kumame’ was derogatory. Whether Evliya was aware of the word’s association with ‘garbage’ is unclear.

²³ It could also refer to Beç near Vienna. I am grateful to Brill’s anonymous reader of this manuscript for this suggestion.

likely to be inventions, in which he described positively church music and ornamentation.²⁴

In Jerusalem, Evliya is not only fascinated by the holiness of Christian figures and objects, but also intrigued by Christian rituals, especially the celebration of the Orthodox Easter. "The governor [Pasha] opens the Church once a year for three days during the Easter," Evliya records.

On that day and until the evening there is pandemonium, as the infidels celebrate their infelicitous festival. After the evening prayer the pasha shuts the door and everyone leaves the Church. But armed guards remain stationed in the rest of the city and at the fortifications, because sometimes 20,000 infelicitous infidels are gathered here.²⁵

The description corresponds to Christian accounts about the celebration and the role the Turks assumed in keeping the peace among fractious Christian denominations that often fought with each other. Whether there were as many Christians as he mentions cannot be verified, but it may not be too far off the mark since less than half a century earlier, the English traveler, George Sandys, was amazed to see "a thousand Christians, men, women, and children," celebrating Easter Sunday "with joyfull clamors, according to their severall customes."²⁶ Jerusalem was a city full of *kuffār* [infidels], but Evliya admired the beauty and festivity of the infidels' worship.

The church was a common space for all Christians from different patriarchates: Orthodox, Catholic, and Armenian. "The south... belonged to the Greeks, while the Catholics occupy the East and the Armenians occupy the north part of the altar" (245). Since the time of the Caliph 'Umar, the clergy were free from paying taxes – and the Ottomans did not change that concession (245). Evliya repeated some of the common Christian lore about the history of the church, and as he was credulous about Muslim

²⁴ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London and New York, 2005), 89. There is an English translation of Evliya Çelebi's *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, in the Seventeenth Century*, by Evliya Efendi, trans. Joseph von Hammer, 2 vols (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1834, 1850).

²⁵ The original transcription is as follows:

Hala her sene Beyza-i Ahmer günleri ya'ni Kızıl Yumurta dednamlarında beş on bin küffar-ı feccar-ı düzah-karar cem 'olup ekalim-i seb'a dan Urum ve Ermeni ve on sekiz krallıktan Freng-i bedreng dahi cem olduğu günler paşa ve molla ve şeyhülislam dahi ve ayan-ı vilayet ve cümle asker-i sultanî pür-silah bu Kumame mahallinde hazır olurlar... (245).

²⁶ George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun an: domini 1610: Foure Bookes. Contain- ing a description of the Turkish Empire, of Ægypt, of the Holy Land, of the Remote parts of Italy, and Ilands adioyning* (London: Printed [by Richard Field] for W. Barrett, 1615), 173.

legends of the Rock, so was he about the Holy Sepulchre. Three hundred and twenty years after the birth of Christ, he states, the mother of Constantine, Helen, left Constantinople for Jerusalem where she searched for what was left by Christ. She met an old clergyman, Magaryos, who took her to the tree under which Jesus was crucified. They dug there and found three pieces of broken wood in the shape of a cross. They laid each part of the broken wood upon a dead body in the grave where Jesus had been buried. Only one was efficacious in resurrecting a corpse, which identified it as the cross of Jesus. That is why, Evliya explains, Helen ordered a monastery to be built on that spot, after which she took the pieces of the cross to Constantinople and presented them to her son. Evliya claimed to have read the same story in Greek sources (248).

Evliya demonstrates particular sympathy for the Armenians of Jerusalem, the most hospitable community among the Christians, as he describes them. After visiting an Armenian monastery, he observes:

The monastery consisted of five vaults and the highest one, which is covered with precious gold, is above the altar. There are beautiful icons and figures, and candles are covered with jewels. The monastery is always open to worshippers. It is not as big as *Kumame*, but it is as beautiful as *Kumame*. The windows are elegantly designed. Although permission was not granted to restore the Jewish and Christian temples, the Armenian Monastery was restored by the order of Sultan Selim I. Also, the governor of the city allowed the Armenians to donate money for the upkeep of the temple (248).

Half a century later, and in his second account about Palestine in 1693, the Syrian Sufi, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nābulusī, also praised the Armenian monastery where he and his companions stayed, and he remembered with gratitude the monks who had shown both "love and sincerity."²⁷ Evliya remarks that the church was very similar to an Ottoman Mosque since the floor was covered with Turkish rugs. Of the nuns, he notes:

The women of the Armenian Convent: These also not to be missed. They shine as the rays of the sun, with mascara-shaded eyes like those of a doe, and with the sweetest voices. [And yet] they are virgins of such celestial purity that each one sets the example of Mary or Zuleykha (248).

Their "beauty came from the Virgin Mary [spiritual] and from the wife of Potiphar [physical]." There were "300 women in the monastery from different parts of the world," some of whom were almost 100 years old (249). Evidently, Evliya asked about the nuns and learned about their origins

²⁷ 'Abd al-Ghani Al-Nābulusī, *Al-Haqīqa wa-l- majāz fī-l-rihla ila Bilād al-Shām wa Misr wa-l-Hijaz*, introd. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Majīd Harīdī (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Misriyya, 1986), 147.

and backgrounds since he explained that many of them were promised to God by their parents after recovering from mortal illnesses. They “never eat meat; and they spend all their life in the monastery” (249). Such and other observations about the Armenians, the nuns, and the Christian sites in Jerusalem reflect the generally open attitude that Evliya had during his journey, perhaps intensified in the holy city, which he and others before him viewed as another metropolis of religious coexistence in the Ottoman Empire.²⁸

The holiness of Jerusalem and its environs was at the center of Evliya's pilgrimage and travelogue. Importantly for him as an Ottoman official, the holiness was demonstrated by the administration of Jerusalem and the privileges that authorities granted, not only to its Muslim population, but also to Jews and Christians, who had freedom to exercise their religions in the city more than in any other space in the Empire. The special status of the city was safeguarded by royal declaration [*fermanlar*].²⁹ The Ottomans not only restored al-Aqsa mosque and the ancient walls of the city,³⁰ but they also restored the sacred areas as far as the *mihrāb* [prayer niche] of the Prophet David. It became an honorable custom for Ottoman rulers to protect the city venerated by Muslims, Christians, and Jews.³¹ For Evliya, prophetic traditions, Ottoman history, and deep personal piety all joined in ensuring for Jerusalem and Palestine a status as holy as that of Mecca and Medina. It was a city of holiness and beauty that recalled incredible legends of the past, along with deep piety and breadth of vision.

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²⁸ See Carmen Caruso, “Sixteenth Century Jerusalem: A Model of Coexistence?” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 29 (2007): 33–52.

²⁹ Ahmet Akgündüz, *The Ottoman Model in Jerusalem, The Common Capital of All The Religions*, osmanli.org.tr/20.06.2010.fff.

³⁰ See Mohammad Ghosheh, “The Walls and Gates of Jerusalem before and after Sultan Suleyman's Rebuilding Project of 1538–40,” in *Governing the Holy City*, ed. Johannes Pahlzsch (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004), 117–37.

³¹ In the records (*kilise defterleri* [Church Documents]) of the churches of Jerusalem and other parts of the Arab east between 1869–1922, permission was always granted to rebuild, restore, or build new churches and moasteries. See *Al-kana'is al-'arabiyya fī-l-sijil al-'Uthmānī, 1869–1922*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Abū Husayn and Sālīh Sa'dāwī (Amman: The Royal Academy, 1998).

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