

# THE “LIES” OF COURTIER: A PERFORMATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ALEPPAN TALL TALES IN EVLIYA ÇELEBİ’S BOOK OF TRAVELS

Musahip “Yalan”ları: Seyahatname’deki Halep Mavallarının Performans Açısından İncelenmesi

Michael D. SHERIDAN\*

## ABSTRACT

Evliya Çelebi’s *Book of Travels* (*Seyāhatnâme*) is not simply a record of the journeys of a traveler, but also, in many ways, the memoirs of an Ottoman courtier. As such, it records a number of instances of courtiers in the act of performing at courtly gatherings, which were, to a great extent, oral gatherings where products of oral culture were exchanged in a living environment. In this article, I will be focusing on one instance of such a gathering; namely, the section of the third volume of the *Book of Travels* that Robert Dankoff has called “Tall Tales in Aleppo”. This section is noteworthy in that it inscribes a back-and-forth oral storytelling exchange—specifically, an exchange of tall tales—that occurred during the course of a gathering of courtiers, Evliya Çelebi being one among them, and their lord. I will analyze this exchange in terms of the oral performative environment typically associated with tall tales, in an attempt to see what this might tell us not only about the oral environment of courtly gatherings, but also about certain of Evliya Çelebi’s authorial (and hence, by implication, performative) strategies in composing the *Book of Travels*.

## Key Words

Evliya Çelebi, *Book of Travels*, tall tales, oral performance

## ÖZ

Evliya Çelebi’nin *Seyāhatnâme*’si yalnızca bir seyahatçinin yaptığı seyahatlerin kaydı olmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda pek çok bakımdan bir Osmanlı musahibinin anılarını da içererek aktarır. Böylece *Seyāhatnâme*, birkaç örnekte doğrudan görüldüğü üzere, saray meclislerinde toplanan musahiplerin gerçekleştirdiği sözlü icraları da kayda geçirir. Nitekim bu meclis anlatımlarına yakından bakıldığında, aslında bunların büyük oranda sözlü kültür alanına ait ürünlerin karşılıklı alışverişine sahne olan canlı sözlü icra ortamlarını yansıttığı görülür. Bu yazıda metinde aktarılan bu meclis ortamlarından, *Seyāhatnâme*’nin üçüncü cildinde yer alan ve Robert Dankoff’un “Halep’teki Mavallar” diye adlandırdığı bir örneğe odaklanılacaktır. Bu bölüm, aralarında Evliya Çelebi’nin de bulunduğu bir grup musahip ve onların maiyetinde görev aldıkları efendilerinin de içinde bulunduğu bir meclis ortamında geçen karşılıklı sözlü hikâye –özellikle de karşılıklı maval okunmalarını yazıya geçirmesi bakımından dikkat çekicidir. Bu yazıda, karşılıklı sözlü icraların gerçekleştiği bu meclis, mavallar açısından belirleyici ve tanımlayıcı olan sözlü icra ortamı özellikleri açısından incelenecek ve bu yolla inceleme konusu olan bu icra ortamının, yalnızca söz konusu meclislerin sözlü kültür alanı özellikleri açısından değil, Evliya Çelebi’nin *Seyāhatnâme*’yi oluştururken kullandığı yazarlık (ve dolayısıyla elbette icraya dayalı) taktikleri açısından da bize neler söylediği ortaya konacaktır.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, maval, sözlü icra

When introducing Evliya Çelebi, we tend to describe him in terms of what we see him as now; thus, he is “a 17th-century Ottoman traveler” or “a 17th-century Ottoman author”, or variations on the same. The former is, of course, an appellation that Evliya gave to himself—specifically, “world traveler” (*seyyāh-ı ‘ālem*)—and is what Robert Dankoff has referred to as Evliya’s “avocation” (114,

146–51); while the latter is what Evliya became when he began to develop his undoubtedly voluminous notes into the *Book of Travels* (*Seyāhatnâme*), thanks to which we now know him as an author today.

However, in Evliya’s own time, he was a writer of little if any note, while his being a traveler was something largely, though by no means entirely, de-

\* Bilkent Üniversitesi Türk Edebiyatı Bölümü Doktora öğrencisi, mdsheridan@bilkent.edu.tr

manded by what we might, albeit with a few misgivings, call Evliya's "vocation": fundamentally, Evliya Çelebi was a courtier (*musâhib*). Robert Dankoff, again, rightly points out Evliya's multiplicity of identities (114 ff.)—e.g. traveler (*seyyâh*), dervish (*derviş, fakîr*), muezzin (*müezzin*), and so on—and in fact revealingly structures his book *An Ottoman Mentality* around this multiplicity, but it was Evliya's "vocation" as a courtier, and a multitalented one at that, that procured him the opportunities to realize to the full these many different identities. As a courtier who served a number of different notables in the course of his life, Evliya would of course be expected to perform a variety of different duties, both official and unofficial. Among the former were duties attendant upon whatever his official appointment might be: customs clerk, muezzin, messenger, and so on. Unofficial duties, on the other hand, involved putting on display a number of different skills with the aim of entertaining and/or edifying the master, a fine summary example of which can be seen in Evliya's bravura performance upon first being brought into the presence of Sultan Murad IV (I:68b–71b; cf. Dankoff 33–43). Such unofficial duties were performed as a part of the Persian-inherited "feasting and fighting" (*bazm o razm*) tradition, a tradition which very broadly defined the spheres of activity of rulers, and involved taking part in the ruler's or master's banquets and entertaining and/or edifying him through the telling of tales and jokes, poetry and Qur'anic recitations, musical performance, and so on. With regard to this aspect of Evliya Çelebi's "vocation", and specifically its relation to the *Book of Travels*, Gottfried Hagen has this to say:

The *Seyahatname* was certainly in large parts narrated by Evliya in the courts of his patrons. Its unique character has much to do with the way the style of oral delivery is preserved in writing,

with all it[s] nuances, and its movement from factual and serious to anecdotes and tall tales and back. As such, the *Seyahatname* stands in a long and living tradition of Turkish conversation and storytelling. (2011)

For a long time now, much of Evliya Çelebi's negative reputation as a fantasist, exaggerator, and even liar almost on a par with John Mandeville has rested on this aspect of his work. This negative perception is thankfully beginning to be eroded as more and more of what Evliya wrote is proven accurate, or at least as accurate as he was able to make it. However, the *Book of Travels*—voluminous and genre-bending as it is—still stands in need of having its reputation renewed in the other direction as well. That is, we need to recognize and analyze it not simply as the memoirs of a traveler, but also as the memoirs of a courtier, with all of the amusing fantasy, exaggeration, and even lies that such a vocation necessarily entails.

In this article, I will be looking at one particular instance of Evliya Çelebi being a courtier; namely, at a gathering that took place in the winter of AH 1059–60/1649–50 CE at the court of Murtaza Pasha, the governor-general of the province of Aleppo and Evliya's master at the time, and that is described in the third volume of the *Book of Travels* (III:51b–53a). This episode is especially noteworthy in that it inscribes, not to say transcribes, a back-and-forth oral storytelling exchange that occurred (or is presented as having occurred) during the course of a gathering of courtiers and their lord. Perhaps even more noteworthy, however, is the fact that—as Robert Dankoff was the first to point out (*v.* Dankoff 170–71)—the stories in question can perhaps most accurately be described as tall tales. As such, I will be analyzing this exchange in terms of the performative environment typically, though by no means always, associated

with tall tales, in an attempt to see what this might tell us not only about Evliya Çelebi as a courtier, but also about certain of his authorial (and hence, by implication, performative) strategies in composing the *Book of Travels*.

The first story in the exchange is told by Yahya, a mullah recently removed from his post in Damascus who has come to Aleppo and worked his way into the graces of Murtaza Pasha, becoming his courtier and companion. Yahya describes an event supposed to have occurred in the winter of AH 1045/1635–36 CE. According to Yahya's account, 40,000 soldiers under Tabaniyassı Mehmed Pasha were in winter quarters at the castle at Erzurum when word came that the castle at Yerevan, then under Ottoman control, was under siege by the Safavids. A relief force was sent out, but in seven days' time, owing to the severe winter weather, was only able to get as far as the pass at Deveboynu, normally just two days' journey from Erzurum. They were then, despite all their efforts, prevented by the weather from continuing on their way. At this point, there was a general insurrection by the suffering soldiers, who said to Tabaniyassı Mehmed Pasha, "Hey pasha, are you trying to kill us? If the [Safavid] shah takes Yerevan castle, we'll just come back in spring and take it back from that blasted heretic of a shah, like it or not. So come on, let's get back to Erzurum now".<sup>1</sup> Tabaniyassı Mehmed Pasha is unable to dissuade them, and so the force turns back. However, one of the soldiers, Yavaşça Mehmed Agha by name, has been worn out by the weight of his money belt, laden with two thousand gold pieces, and so "he looks up at the sky, draws a bead on a small cloud overhead, and digs into the ground with his dagger, burying his belt with its two thousand in gold in the small hole [he has dug] and saying, 'That cloud there in the sky marks the spot below which my

gold is'".<sup>2</sup> Later, in Erzurum, word comes to Tabaniyassı Mehmed Agha that the castle at Yerevan has fallen.

At this point, Murtaza Pasha interrupts Yahya's story to confirm that the fall of Yerevan occurred precisely because the relief force, of which he claims to have been a part, was unable to get there, but he also asks Yahya a question: "But sir, what happened to the money belt and two thousand in gold that Yavaşça Mehmed Agha buried in the snow at Deveboynu?"<sup>3</sup> To which Yahya replies:

My lord, ten months later Erzurum was free of snow, and, together with many of his dependents, Yavaşça Mehmed Agha traveled in two days' time and sought out the place in Deveboynu where he had buried his gold during that wintry uproar, and he saw in the sky the azure cloud he had drawn a bead on—it had stayed fixed in its place from ten months before—and he dug in the ground with his hand and found his belt there with all its money and not a penny missing from when he had put it there ten months before, and he returned to Erzurum.<sup>4</sup>

At this, everyone present at the gathering—which, Evliya notes, includes a number of local men noted for their intelligence and wisdom—laughs up a storm, and one of Murtaza Pasha's companions says, "We know Yavaşça Mehmed Agha. He's an upright fellow and a pious man. He found that gold because he'd come by it lawfully".<sup>5</sup> Murtaza Pasha, too, testifies to Yavaşça Mehmed Agha's good character, and with this Yahya's story comes to an end.

In terms of the way this story, as recounted by Evliya Çelebi, develops, it is clear that what seems to be a rather unassuming and apparently factual tale about a failed attempt to relieve a siege turns out to be hiding, in a brief digression, quite an incredible incident; *viz.* Yavaşça Mehmed Agha's recovery of

his gold thanks to a cloud that failed to change its position in the sky over the course of ten months. Now, if we briefly accept the most basic dictionary definition of a tall tale as “an improbable (unusual, incredible, or fanciful) story”, we can say that, even if Yahya’s full story is not itself a tall tale *per se*, it does contain something of a tall tale within its frame. Turning to look at some other, more developed definitions of the tall tale, we come across, for example, this one, found under the entry “tall story” in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*: “A story which is extravagant, outlandish or highly improbable. Usually regarded as false, however good it may be” (900). Although, importantly, this definition does explicitly include something about the tall tale’s reception by its audience, in those terms it hardly seems to apply to Yahya’s story of Yavaşca Mehmed Agha insofar as Yahya’s audience—with the important exception, as we will see, of Evliya Çelebi—appears to regard that story as true, or at least as credible. The somewhat more extensive definition provided by Christine Goldberg not only takes fuller account of the tall tale’s performance environment, but also—and in fact because of this fuller consideration—fits Yahya’s story rather better: “*Tall tales* (tales of lying, [Aarne-Thompson] 1875–1999) are anecdotes that begin realistically but culminate in the incredible. When they are performed, the narrator takes the role of the con artist, and the audience becomes the dupe” (357). Considering this in terms of Yahya’s story, which indeed does “begin realistically [with the frame of the Erzurum relief force] but culminate[s] in the incredible”, it would seem that Evliya is the one member of the audience not taken in by the con: after all, not only does he introduce this episode by describing Yahya as “a spouter of nonsense and purveyor of lies”<sup>6</sup> (Dankoff 170), but he also describes him

as “Yahya Efendi the Liar”<sup>7</sup> and finishes Yahya’s story of Yavaşca Mehmed Agha by saying that “he [Yahya] told a lie like this and I was utterly astonished”<sup>8</sup>.

But there is even more to it than this. In her study *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*, so far the only book-length theoretical study of the nature of the tall tale, Carolyn S. Brown distinguishes tall tales from such other folk productions as myths, legends, and folktales by offering the following definition:

The tall tale [...] is a fictional narrative, told as fiction. Its peculiarities are, first, that it masquerades as a true narrative, for it is told in the form of a personal narrative or an anecdote, and, second, that it is sometimes heard as true, not simply through the mistakes of children or fools but by the design of the narrator. Finally, listeners who hear the tall tale as fiction often act as though they believe it to be true. We may begin, then, not with a definition that simply calls the tall tale a comic lie or an impossible exaggeration, but with the notion that the tall tale is a fictional story which is told in the form of personal narrative or anecdote, which challenges the listener’s credulity with comic outlandishness, and which performs different social functions depending on whether it is heard as true or as fictional. (10–11)

This deepens Goldberg’s definition of the tall tale by observing that, at least sometimes, it is not only the teller who is in on the con, but some of the audience members—“act[ing] as though they believe [the tall tale] to be true”—as well. What this, in turn, necessarily implies is an ingroup (*i.e.* those who are in on the con and pretend the tale is true while knowing it is fiction) and an outgroup (*i.e.* those who are the marks of the con and refuse to accept the tale as true despite the ingroup’s insistence that it is). Like all cons, such a tall tale environment is

ultimately a form of play, and, although the stakes of this con are nowhere near as serious as those of legally fraudulent cons, it is not entirely a no-stakes game, either. One of its functions, in a social context, is to cement the already existent bonds between members of the ingroup in the audience: effectively, they are “in the know”, and they know that they are in the know. Another major social function of the tall tale is its ability to enlarge the ingroup by providing outgroup members with an opportunity to join:

As the tall tale binds and identifies a folk group, it also offers outsiders a way of joining. While one important function of folklore of almost any type is the initiation of group novices, the tall tale initiates new members only if they play the game properly. The tale assumes a quick wit and a familiarity with the genre and the subject matter, and operates as a test of that wit and knowledge. The outsider who never comprehends the humorous intent of the tale, or who perceives it and is offended, remains an outsider. (Brown 35)

The final sentence here is a perfect description of Evliya Çelebi in terms of his initial reaction to Yahya’s story about Yavaşca Mehmed Agha. Not only does he call Yahya a liar in his narration of the exchange, but he also, after Yahya’s story is done, raises a series of rational objections. Firstly, he points out that, on the relief force, there were thousands of men who were not worn out by the bows and swords and money belts at their waist, and, more importantly—even if Yavaşca Mehmed Agha *was* worn out—he could have just put his money belt in the saddle bag of one of his servants or entrusted it to one of his retainers; so “what on earth was he thinking, burying the gold in the snow in a wasteland?”<sup>9</sup> Secondly, he mentions that, with the ground frozen solid by the

weather, not even a pick, let alone a dagger, would be able to break its surface. Finally, he says that clouds were created so as to traverse the heavens, so, over ten months’ time, “how could a cloud remain fixed?”<sup>10</sup>

In relation to the role of the “outsider” in tall tale performance, Carolyn S. Brown points out the following, a phenomenon that occurred on a few occasions during her own fieldwork:

In folk culture, the tall tale challenges the listener to prove himself clever or dull, in or out of the group to which the tale belongs, through his ability to recognize and appreciate the fiction. [...] [Some] outsiders [...] ask stupid or impertinent questions and seem confused or offended by the moral atmosphere of [the tall tale]. (77)

Similarly, after Yahya’s story has finished, we see Evliya Çelebi attempting to apply a degree of rationality to a tale that does not, and is not meant to, have any connection with rationality, thus indicating that he has failed “to recognize and appreciate the fiction”. While his questions may not, at first sight, seem either “stupid” or “impertinent”, they actually are if we consider that, essentially, Evliya has missed the point of Yahya’s story, which is told merely as entertainment, a yarn spun primarily to amuse Murtaza Pasha, and perhaps also, incidentally, to impress upon the governor-general Yahya’s ability to amuse (which might make sense considering that, according to Evliya, Yahya had recently been dismissed from his post in Damascus).

In any case, Evliya’s out-of-place objections immediately compel a member of the ingroup to answer in kind, providing his own “rationalistic” explanation—which is itself just more tall talk—in

support of the truth of Yahya's story, thus continuing the game:

One of the companions spoke, saying, "That year the winter was of such severity that, for several months, the light of the world-illuminating sun was frozen, its rays failing to reach the ground, and that winter's clouds, too, were frozen in the air, and that is why Yavaşça Mehmed Agha was able to find his gold in the ground, having located the cloud on which he had drawn a bead." And to this nice piece of flattery the simple-minded Murtaza Pasha replied, "Oh yes, that year the winter was just like that, with the clouds unmoving and fixed in the sky for months," confirming Mullah Yahya Efendi's lie.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, everyone is closing ranks against Evliya, who restates, but now in more detail, two of his previous objections. Firstly, he claims that in Erzurum, when a man dies in winter, they first pile loads of wood onto the spot where he is to be buried, and then burn the wood until the ground is soft enough to dig into, and that even then they have to dig with picks, not daggers, for five or six hours just to open a grave. Secondly, he points out again that clouds, just like "all the stars and the seven planets and the sun and the moon"<sup>12</sup>, were created so as to traverse the heavens, so no cloud could have remained fixed in the sky for ten months. But in this last objection, Evliya makes a mistake that Murtaza Pasha immediately picks up on and, temporarily playing Evliya's game on its own terms, throws back in his face:

But don't you know that the pole star is fixed above the face of the earth? The pole star is fixed like that because the winds around it are [like those of] a very severe winter. That said, the province of Erzurum is a very cold place,

too. And that's why, in that season, the clouds above Erzurum remained fixed and Yavaşça Mehmed Agha drew a bead on that azure cloud in the sky and found his money belt and gold.<sup>13</sup>

It is at this point that, his mistake exposed, Evliya throws in the towel and, reluctantly, chooses to take part in the tall tale exchange on its own terms:

And I saw that it wasn't going to work, and for the sake of conversation—but still pulled in two directions like the waters of Uluabat or the ebb and flow of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Suez—I said, giving confirmation to the pasha and to Yahya Efendi: "Truly, my lord, in proving the fixed cloud by means of the pole star you have given a highly elegant reasoning to the marvelous tale told by your esteemed guest Yahya Efendi." And with that I began to tell a parallel tale, one of an occurrence that had befallen me myself.<sup>14</sup>

The "two directions" that Evliya feels himself being pulled in here represent not only his dilemma as to whether or not to take part in an exchange of tales whose fictional nature goes against his apparent detestation of lying, but also, more broadly, his being torn between the two basic duties of a courtier; *viz.* entertainment and edification. On the one hand, he has attempted to "edify" Murtaza Pasha—and perhaps, incidentally, the other guests—by providing examples and rational explanations meant to show the impossibility of what Yavaşça Mehmed Agha is purported to have done. However, owing to Murtaza Pasha's own approach to Yahya's story, Evliya fails to achieve this goal, a failure that is, in fact, inevitable considering that the performance he is privy to is a performance of tall tales, to which such rational objections as Evliya's cannot be made to apply. As a result, he has no real choice but to yield by telling Murtaza Pasha a tale of roughly the same nature as Yahya's,

thereby fulfilling his courtier's duty as an entertainer, which is what this particular context demands. He later goes on to state the moral that he learned from this incident: "It was then that I realized that, in the presence of all viziers and ministers and state officials of all kinds, one must say fawning and flattering things".<sup>15</sup>

As for Evliya's tale, he describes an incident that he claims occurred when he was travelling towards Moscow from the Crimea together with the Crimean khan Islam Giray, in a year that, significantly, is left blank. They traveled for seventeen days and seventeen nights in winter weather so severe that hundreds froze to death and a thousand more lost their hands and feet to the cold. At one point, after hours of walking, Evliya mounts his horse and witnesses the sun apparently rising in six directions at once, a phenomenon he explains as follows: "Because of the extreme severity of the winter, the rays of the eastern side of the actual sun froze and, striking the shores of some among the seven climes [with milder weather], became manifest [from there]".<sup>16</sup> Though the audience takes this story, or rather the phenomenon it describes, as an example of the power of God, they also make a point of saying that what happened in Erzurum was fundamentally similar. As for Evliya, he firmly maintains—in the narrative, though not during the course of the exchange itself—that his story is true, saying, "God knows, that is how it happened".<sup>17</sup>

Evliya's tale appears, at first sight, to be less a tall tale than an example of *ajā'ib wa gharā'ib*, the genre or subgenre of recounting various "wonders and marvels" during the course of a travel narrative. Indeed, as Robert Dankoff points out (171), in the eighth volume of

the *Book of Travels*, Evliya gives an account of roughly the same phenomenon occurring at roughly the same place (v. VIII:188b). There, the incident certainly qualifies as an example of the "wonders and marvels" type. Here, however, there is a difference in that, rather than narrating the incident directly to potential readers as something that occurred during his travels in the Crimea, he is telling his potential readers about a time when he narrated the incident to someone else. Context is everything, and what makes Evliya's story a tall tale here is that, in the context of this particular gathering, it would undoubtedly have been pure fiction.

In 1649/50, when Evliya was at Murtaza Pasha's gathering in Aleppo, he had not yet been as far north as he claims to have been and, moreover, he had not traveled with the Crimean khan Islam III Giray. In fact, it seems likely that Evliya never traveled with Islam III Giray, whose reign lasted from 1644 to 1654, because, looking at the scope of his travels as a whole, he appears not to have been in the Crimea at all between the years 1641 and 1657. Thus, in terms of the performance as recounted in the *Book of Travels*, Evliya's story has a problem similar to one he mentioned earlier regarding Murtaza Pasha's claim to have been a part of the relief force at Erzurum: "At the time of that hellish expedition to Yerevan [1635/36], Murtaza Pasha was just a black-browed, turban-wrapping eight-year-old apprentice, as ignorant of this world as he was of the next one, who, lacking the capacity to go on campaign, stayed in Aleppo".<sup>18</sup> While Evliya was by no means a young "apprentice" during Islam III Giray's reign, he was also no more in the Crimea at that time than Murtaza Pasha was in Erzurum when Yerevan fell to the Safavids.

It is at this point, in the light of the problems that Evliya's story brings

to the fore, that the question posed by Robert Dankoff about this entire tall tale exchange becomes especially pertinent: “We are left wondering who is being deceived in this episode: the courtiers in Aleppo? the readers of the *Seyahatname*? or Evliya himself?” (171) This is really a rhetorical question, and must necessarily remain so, because we can never know exactly what happened during the gathering of Murtaza Pasha’s courtiers. There seems to be little reason to doubt that there was an exchange along the general lines described by Evliya, and it appears equally likely that the story told by Yahya, as well as the responses it evoked from the others present if not necessarily Evliya’s own responses, was not simply invented out of whole cloth by Evliya. But when we get to the story that Evliya claims to have told himself, we run into a wall. The facts as we have them—though, admittedly, we only have them from Evliya himself—indicate that it would have been impossible for Evliya to tell of that particular incident at that particular place and time.

Moreover, when we consider the fact that the *Book of Travels* was not written down until much later, we can almost watch Evliya, the author, shaping his text here. For example, although Evliya most likely never traveled with Islam III Giray, he claims in his story to have been in the khan’s retinue at the time—and Islam III Giray happens to have been the khan of Crimea in 1649/50, at the very time that Evliya was serving as Murtaza Pasha’s courtier. Similarly, although Evliya does, *pace* Dankoff (171), appear to have passed, on his first visit to the Crimea in 1641, through the steppe where the multiple rising suns phenomenon occurred (*v.* II:262b), he was there in spring, probably April or May, and not in the depths of winter—though he does seem to have been there in winter on his later trip, in 1666–67, when he saw the sun rising in four places simultaneously

in a phenomenon rather conveniently applicable to the exchange of tall tales at Murtaza Pasha’s court.

With such facts in mind, we might do well to append to Dankoff’s question another question: Is what Evliya is doing in this episode really deception? Considering that Evliya was a lifelong courtier and thus that, as pointed out by Gottfried Hagen, his *Book of Travels* and its compositional methods were almost certainly shaped by the highly performative aspect of this “vocation”, it is reasonable to assume that there is no real deception on Evliya’s part in the Aleppan tall tales episode. Just as the story told by Yahya, when considered as a tall tale and not—as Evliya construed it—as a blatant lie, is no more than an amusing fiction told by a courtier to his master (even if it *was* flattery), so is Evliya’s story by no means a deception, but rather another amusing tale in a work that is absolutely full of them. The *Book of Travels* is a work where knowledge and amusement—that is, the courtier’s basic duties of edification and entertainment—come and go “like the waters of Uluabat”, because the work is one that, being written down in Evliya Çelebi’s final years, reflects all of the many aspects of its author through its highly multifaceted yet ultimately holistic structure. And so, when we look at the the *Book of Travels* from this angle, what matters is not whether any tall tales or analogous productions it contains are, technically, “lies” or “fictions”: what matters is that they are stories.

#### NOTES

- 1 *Behey paşa bizi kırır mısın? Revân kal’asın şâh alırsa bahâr eyyâmında yine h’âh-nâ-h’âh şâh-ı bî-penâh-ı gümrahdan alıruz. Hemân kalk Erzurûm’a gidelim.* (III:51b–52a) Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
- 2 [G]ökyüzüne nazar edüp bir gök bulut pâresin nişân edüp zemîni hançer ile kazup ol hafircik içre mezkûr kemeri iki bin altun ile zemîne defn edüp “İşte bu semâdaki bulut altındaki altunu- ma nişândır” deyüp ... (III:52a)
- 3 *Ammâ efendi, Yavaşça Mehemed Ağ’a’nun*

- Deveboynu'nda kar altına gömdüğü kemer ile iki bin altun niçe oldu? (III:52a)
- 4 Sultânım, Erzurüm'un on aydan sonra kartı kalmayıp Yavaşca Mehemed Ağa bir hayli hayâllî tevâbi'leriyle iki günde Deveboynu'nda ol kış ve kıyâmetde zemîne altunu defn etdüğü yeri teccüss ederek gökdeki buludu nişân koduğu ebr-i kebûdu görünce defn etdüğü yere varup görse on ay mukaddem duran bulut yine ber-karâr durup zemini kazup eliyle kemeri on ay mukaddem zemîne niçe koduysa bî-kusûr altunları kemeriyle ile bulup Erzurüm'a geldi. (III:52a)
- 5 Yavaşca Mehemed Ağa'yı biz biliriz. Bir Oğuz ve sâhib-i sülûk âdem idi. Ol altun anın helâl mâli olmağla buldu. (III:52a)
- 6 ... bedele-gü y u hezele-gü y dü rü ÷-gü ... (III:51b)
- 7 Yahyâ Efendi-yi Kezzâb; Yahyâ-yı Kizbî Efendi (III:52a)
- 8 [B]u güne bir yalan söyledi kim ÷aklım gütdi. (III:52a)
- 9 Beyâbânda kar içine niçe ÷akıl ile altununu gömer ... (III:52b)
- 10 Niçe ber-karâr bulut ola ... (III:52b)
- 11 Hemân nedîmin birisi "Ol sene eyle şiddet-i şitâ oldu kim bir kaç ay âfitâb-ı ÷âlem-tâbin ziyâsı münce mid olup rü y-ı zemîne pertev vermez olup ol şitâda bulutlar dahi ber-hevâ donup ber-karâr kaldığından Yavaşca Mehemed Ağa nişân koduğu buludu bulup nişânıyla zeminde altunu bulmasının sebebi oldur" deyü bu güne hüsn-i teveccüh etdiklerinde hemân Murtazâ Paşa-yı sâde-dil "Belî ol sene eyle kış olup gökde bulutlar birkaç ay yürüme yüp yerinde kaldı" deyü Molla Yahyâ Efendi'nin kelâm-ı dürü ğun tasdik etdi. (III:52b)
- 12 ... cem'i kevâkibler ve seb'a-i seyyâreler ve şems ve kemer ... (III:52b)
- 13 Ya bilmez misiz kim bu vech-i arz üzere demirkazık yıldızı niçe sâbitedir. Yıldız rûzgârı cânibleri gâyet şiddet-i şitâ olduğundan o demirkazık yıldızı ber-karârdır. Eyle olunca Erzurüm vilâyeti dahi gâyet sovuk yerdir. Anınçün ol asırda Erzurüm üzere bulutlar ber-karâr olup Yavaşca Mehemed Ağa âsumândaki ebr-i kebûdu nişân koyup kemeriyle altunu buldu. (III:52b)
- 14 Hemân hakîr gördüm, olmaz, musâhebe bir vesîle olsun için İlbât suyu gibi ve Basra ve Mısır Süveysi'nin medd [ü] cezri gibi iki cânibe akup paşayı ve Yahyâ Efendi'yi tasdik etmek için hakîr eyitdim, "Hakkâ ki efendim, Yahyâ Efendi hazretleri dâ'inizin hikâyet-i garîbesin 'aceb hüsn-i tevcih edüp necm-i hadid ile ebr-i sâbiteyi eyi isbât etdiniz" deyü ana nazîre hikâyet-i sergüzeşt [u] serencâmımızı bast-ı hikâye etdik. (III:52b)

- 15 Ol zamân bildim ki cem'i vüzerâ ve vükelâ ve erbâb-ı devlet huzûrunda müdâhane ve hoşâmed kelâm lâzım imiş. (III:53a)
- 16 Zîrâ asıl güneşin cânib-i şarkı gâyetü'l-gâye şiddet-i şitâ olmağla pertevi donup ba'zı sevâhil olan ekâlîm-i seb'alardan pertev urup nümâyân olurdu. (III:53a)
- 17 Hudâ 'âlimdir böyle olmuşdur. (III:53a)
- 18 Hâlâ ki Murtazâ Paşa ol asırda Revân seferine giderken ol sefer-i berzahda dünyâ ve âhireti bilmez bir karakaşlı sekiz yaşında sarıkcı şâkirdi idi. Sefere gütmeğe iktidârı olmayup anlar Haleb'de kalmışlar idi. (III:52a)

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, Carolyn S. *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987.
- Cuddon, J.A. "Tall story". *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1999. 900–901.
- Dankoff, Robert. *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004.
- Evliya Çelebi. *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 1. Kitap – Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 307 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu – Dizini*. Ed. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, and Yücel Dağlı. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006.
- . *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 2. Kitap – Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu – Dizini*. Ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı, and Zekeriya Kurşun. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999.
- . *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 3. Kitap – Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 307 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu – Dizini*. Ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman and Yücel Dağlı. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999.
- . *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi 8. Kitap – Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 308 Numaralı Yazmanın Transkripsiyonu – Dizini*. Ed. Robert Dankoff, Seyit Ali Kahraman, and Yücel Dağlı. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2003.
- Goldberg, Christine. "Folktale". *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*. Ed. Thomas A. Green. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 356–366.
- Hagen, Gottfried et al. "Evliya Çelebi's legacy lives on four centuries later". *Today's Zaman*, 20 March 2011. (29 November 2011). <[http://www.todayszaman.com/mobile\\_detailn.action?newsId=238669](http://www.todayszaman.com/mobile_detailn.action?newsId=238669)>.