

THE INSCRIPTION OF THE TRAVELER EVLIYA ÇELEBI FROM THE AHMED BEY MOSQUE IN KYUSTENDIL, BULGARIA

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Abstract: Numerous inscriptions from the Ottoman period originating from the territory of the city of Kyustendil and its surrounding region have been published in scholarly literature. One particularly interesting inscription has not received the scholarly attention it deserves – namely, the inscription in the Ahmed Bey Mosque in Kyustendil. The inscription is located to the right of the mosque's entrance, carved on the marble frame of the window. It is written in calligraphic style using black ink. It is written in Arabic script, in Middle Turkish. It is dated to September – October 1660. From the content of the text, it is evident that it was handwritten by the muezzin of Melek Ahmed Pasha – the renowned Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Kyustendil, Ahmed Bey Mosque, Evliya Çelebi.

The first researcher to study and publish the Ottoman epigraphic monuments from Kyustendil and the region was Yordan Ivanov (Иванов 1906: 156–166). One of the earliest epigraphic monuments from the Ottoman period in the Kyustendil area is the construction inscription of the Kadin Bridge near the village of Nevestino (Иванов 1906: 156–157). Inscriptions from Kyustendil were also published by K. Venedikova (Венедикова 2006: 82–99).

Of the Ottoman architectural monuments in Kyustendil, only a few buildings have survived – the Dervish Hamam (bath), the Ahmed Bey Mosque, and the Fatih Mosque. The Ahmed Bey Mosque, or Incili Ahmed Zau Mosque according to the inscriptions embedded in its walls, was built between 1575 and 1578. It belongs to the type of single-space domed mosques with a *son cemaat yeri* covered with small domes. According to an inscription above the entrance, the mosque was repaired in 1734–1735 (Венедикова 2006: 86).

On one of the windows of the *son cemaat yeri* of the Ahmed Bey Mosque, there is an inscription in Middle Turkish. The inscription is written in black ink and contains six lines of text in Arabic script.

Transcription of the inscription in Latin script:

- [1] Melek Ahmed paşa hazretleriniñ müezzini
- [2] Evliyâ-i Gülşeni rûhıçün Allah rızâsı için
- [3] fâtiha
- [4] sene
- [5] 1071
- [6] M(uharrem)

Translation:

- [1] The muezzin of His Excellency Melek Ahmed Pasha
- [2] For the soul of Evliya-i Gülşeni, for the sake of Allah's approval
- [3] (recite) the Fatiha (prayer)

[4] year

[5] 1071 (Hijri)

[6] Muharrem (month) [September – October 1660]

Similar inscriptions are known from other former territories of the Ottoman Empire – Edirne, Elbasan¹, Berat², Adana³, Foça⁴, Meca⁵, and others – and are associated with the figure of the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi. In many places in his travelogue, he notes that he left inscriptions on various buildings he visited (Tütüncü 2016: 235–252).

A similar inscription to the one in Kyustendil is found at the tekke of Osman Baba in Edirne (Tütüncü 2011: 16):

[1] Merhûm Melek Ahmed Paşalı seyyâh-ı âlem

[2] Evliyâ rûhiçün Allah rızâsına fâtiha

[3] Sene 1081

From the lexemes “*seyyâh-ı âlem Evliyâ*” (“Evliya, the traveler of the world”), it is clear that the inscription refers to the famous Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi.

Evliya Çelebi is one of the most famous Ottoman travelers, poets, and historians. Over a period of forty years, he traveled throughout the Ottoman Empire and left behind a ten-volume travelogue known as *Seyahatnâme* (“Book of Travels” or “Travelogue”). The original title of the work is *Târîh-i Seyyâh Evliyâ* (“The History of the Traveler Evliya”; Fahir 1979: 61–79).

The real name of Evliya Çelebi is unknown; he is widely known by his nickname. It is believed that he received this nickname from his teacher, Imam Evliya Mehmed Efendi. In his travelogue, Evliya provides detailed information about his origins. He was born on the 10th of Muharrem, 1020 AH (March 25, 1611 CE) in Unkapanı,

Istanbul. His father was Derviş Mehmed Zilli Efendi, the chief jeweler of the imperial court, who was of Abkhazian origin. He is mentioned many times in the *Seyahatnâme* under various names—Derviş Mehmed Ağa, Derviş Mehmed Ağa-i Zillî. His mother was also of Abkhazian origin, according to information contained in the travelogue. She had been a concubine in the harem of Sultan Ahmed I (1603–1617) and was later married to Evliya’s father (İlgürel 1995: 529).

Evliya Çelebi was related through his mother’s side to Defterzade Mehmed Pasha, Melek Ahmed Pasha, and İpşir Mustafa Pasha. He had a brother named Mahmud and a sister named İnal, who was married to Balıkesirli İlyas Pasha. Evliya received an excellent education in the best madrasas of Istanbul. He was received many times by the sultans at the palace and maintained good relations especially with Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640; İlgürel 1995: 529).

According to his own account, his passion for travel and exploration of the world was inspired by a dream he had in the month of Muharrem, 1040 AH (August 1630 CE). His first journey took place in 1640 to Bursa, without his father’s permission. Upon his return to Istanbul, his father allowed him to continue traveling and advised him to keep notes — his travelogue. He then visited Kütahya, Manisa, and İzmit. His first more distant journey took place the following year, to Trabzon, accompanying Ketençizade Ömer Pasha, the newly appointed governor of the province (İlgürel 1995: 529).

He participated in the campaign of Serdar Hüseyin Pasha against the fortress of Azov on the Sea of Azov. After the unsuccessful campaign, he traveled to Bahadır Khan, ruler of the Crimean Khanate, where he spent several months before returning to Istanbul. After a four-year stay in the capital, he joined Yusuf Pasha’s campaign against the island of Crete.

In 1646, he accompanied Defterzade Mehmed Pasha to Erzurum. In the following years, he visited Tabriz, Azerbaijan, Georgia — includ-

¹ A city in central Albania.

² A city in southern Albania.

³ A city in southern Turkey.

⁴ A city in İzmir Province, Turkey.

⁵ A city in Saudi Arabia.

ing Baku, Revan (Yerevan), Tortum, and others (Çelebi 1996: II, 448–452).

Between 1648 and 1649, he served under Murtaza Pasha, which gave him the opportunity to visit many cities in Syria and Palestine. In 1650, he returned to Istanbul. His uncle Melek Ahmed Pasha was appointed Grand Vizier in 1650, and Evliya accompanied him on his travels to Ruse, Silistra, Babadag, and other places (Deny 1933: 201–215). In 1653, he returned again to Istanbul and stayed there for some time. As a courier of İpşir Mustafa Pasha, he visited Konya. When Melek Ahmed Pasha was appointed beylerbey (governor-general) of Van, Evliya had the opportunity to visit various cities in Eastern Anatolia and later traveled to Baghdad (Çelebi 2003: 1–20).

In May 1657, he met the Crimean Khan Mehmed IV Giray and returned to Istanbul in December of the same year. In 1658, he visited Bursa, Çanakkale, and Gallipoli. In 1660, he took part in Köse Ali Pasha's campaign against the Prince of Transylvania (Kraus 1965: 1–10). Afterwards, he joined Melek Ahmed Pasha again, who was then beylerbey of Bosnia. When Melek Ahmed Pasha was appointed beylerbey of Rumelia, Evliya settled in Sofia, which allowed him to visit many Bulgarian and Macedonian towns (Dimitriadis 1973: 5–16). In 1661, he participated in a campaign against Transylvania under Köse Ali Pasha's command (Cernovodeanu 1993: 333–347).

In 1663, Evliya Çelebi accompanied Fazıl Ahmed Pasha on his campaign against Austria (Kreutel 1956; Köhbach 1978: 213–222). After the capture of the fortress of Uyvar, he visited Holland, Dalmatia, Bosnia (Turkova 1965), Hungary (Bayerle 1984: 21–24), and Denmark (Çelebi 1996: II, 81–120). Between 1664 and 1667, he traveled along the northern Black Sea coast – Crimea, Azov, Caffa, and the Caucasus. In May 1668, he visited Gümölcine (Komotini) and Thessaloniki, and by the end of 1670, he returned to Istanbul (Çelebi 1996: VIII, 558).

The following year, 1671, he embarked on a grand journey through Anatolia, the Middle East, and Africa — visiting Bursa, Kütahya, Afyon, İzmir, Aydın, Adana, Maraş, Kilis, Damascus, Egypt (Haarman 1976: 157–230) and Sudan (Çelebi 1996: IX, 255–260).

The tenth volume of his travelogue remains unfinished, suggesting that he may have died before completing it. There is no specific information about his death, but various hypotheses suggest that he passed away in Cairo, Istanbul or Vienna between 1682 and 1684 (İlgürel 1995: 532).

In the Kyustendil inscription, Evliya Çelebi is referred to as Evliyâ-i Gülşeni, which likely indicates his affiliation with the Gülşeniyye order, a branch of the Halvetiyye Sufi order. The Gülşeniyye order was founded by Ibrahim Gülşeni at the beginning of the 16th century.

In the inscription, Evliya Çelebi is mentioned as the muezzin of Melek Ahmed Pasha – “[1] Melek Ahmed paşa hazretlerinin müezzini.” He identifies his profession specifically as that of a muezzin. A muezzin is a religious functionary attached to a mosque, responsible for calling the Muslim faithful to prayer from the minaret by reciting the ezân. In the Ottoman Empire, muezzins were not only appointed in mosques but also served high-ranking officials, such as viziers, pashas, ayans and others. These muezzins belonged to the category of “Ehl-i hiref-i hâssa”, although they were not part of the guilds of merchants or palace artisans (Sözen 1986: 105; Ekici 2013: 14).

The Melek Ahmed Pasha mentioned in the inscription of the Kyustendil mosque was Evliya Çelebi's maternal uncle. He was born on 1 September 1662 in Istanbul. During the reign of Sultan Ahmed I, he was admitted to the Ottoman court, where he received an excellent education. Later, he held the position of *silyahtar* (sword-bearer) of the Sultan. In 1639, he was appointed governor of the province of Diyarbakır, and in March 1642, he became the governor of Baghdad. From 5 August 1650 to 21 August 1651, he served as Grand Vizier (Uzunçarşılı

1988: 67, 231, 408, 411). Evliya Çelebi accompanied Melek Ahmed Pasha on some of his journeys across the Balkans and Western Europe (Dankoff 1991: 3–14).

The inscription of Evliya Çelebi in Kyustendil is a unique historical source that provides

direct information about the renowned traveler's visit. The known copies of Evliya Çelebi's travelogue are later reproductions, while the originals are not known; for this reason, the inscription is particularly valuable, as it allows us to see the original manuscript of the traveler.

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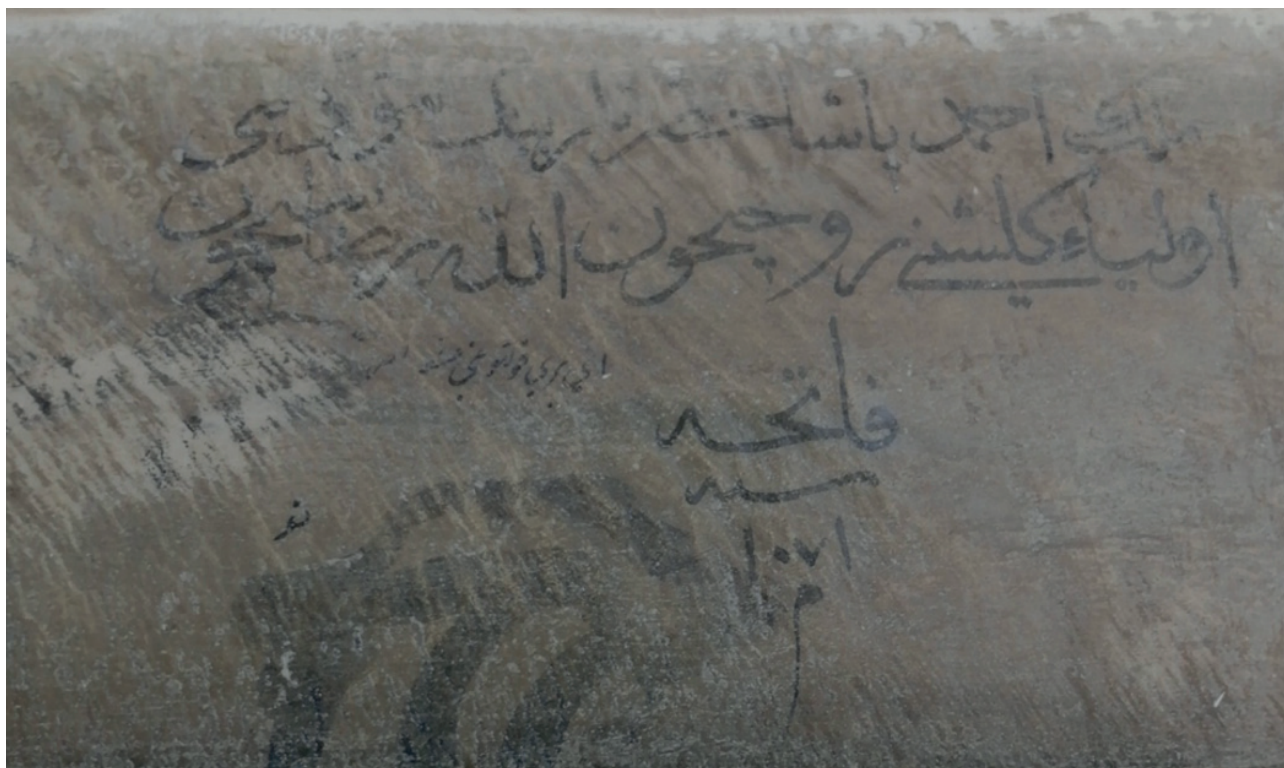


Fig. 1. The Inscription of Evliya Çelebi from Kyustendil

НАДПИСЪТ НА ПЪТЕШЕСТВЕНИКА ЕВЛИЯ ЧЕЛЕБИ ОТ АХМЕД БЕЙ ДЖАМИЯ В КЮСТЕНДИЛ

Румен Иванов

Резюме: Множество надписи от османския период, произхождащи от територията на град Кюстендил и околността му, са публикувани в научната литература. Един особено интересен надпис обаче не е получил заслуженото внимание от учените, а именно надписът в джамията на Ахмед бей в Кюстендил. Надписът се намира вдясно от входа на джамията, издялан върху мраморната рамка на прозореца. Той е написан в калиграфски стил с черно мастило. Изписан е на арабица, на среднотюркски език. Датирани са септември – октомври 1660 г. От съдържанието на текста става ясно, че е ръкописно написан от мюезина на Мелек Ахмед паша – известния османски пътешественик Евлия Челеби.

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