

# THE ALBANIAN LEXICON OF EVLIYA ÇELEBI, 1662 A.D., AND WHAT A TRAVELLING DERVISH SHOULD KNOW

by

ROBERT ELSIE

## Introduction

Evliya Çelebi (1611-1684), pen name of Dervish Mehmed Zilli, was born in Istanbul as the son of the chief goldsmith to the Ottoman court. His passion for travel stemmed, as he tells us, from a daydream he had as a youth. In this dream, the Prophet Mohammed appeared before him. Instead of requesting his intercession, Turkish *şefâ'at*, he requested in his excitement travel, Turkish *seyâhat*. From 1640 to 1676, Evliya Çelebi travelled widely throughout the Ottoman Empire and in neighbouring lands, sometimes in a private capacity and at other times on official business. Among the regions he visited and described are Istanbul, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Bulgaria, Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, Hungary, Vienna, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Albania, Greece, Russia, Mecca, Egypt and the Sudan.

Evliya Çelebi's extensive travels, exceptional for the period, were recorded in his ten volume *Seyahatname* (Book of travels), which the author wrote, or probably dictated, in later years when he settled in Cairo. Many sections of the *Seyahatname* seem to be incomplete, such that one can imagine Evliya Çelebi died before he finished ordering and correcting the text. A number of manuscripts of the work have survived, notably in Istanbul, Vienna, London, Munich, Basle and Manchester. Most of the *Seyahatname* has been published in Turkish, and some relevant sections have been published in translations (English, German, Serbo-Croatian, Russian, Hungarian, Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Albanian). Unfortunately no reliable scholarly edition of the whole work has appeared in any language, although several critical volumes of a 'corpus of partial editions' have been published over the last decade.

The *Seyahatname* contains a wealth of information on cultural history, folklore and geography from the countries Evliya Çelebi visited. For seventeenth-century Albania, and in particular for the interior of the country, it constitutes a virtual mine of information and is a work of inestimable value.

Evliya Çelebi visited Albanian-settled territories on three different occasions. The visit, from which we have the most complete information, was that he made in the summer of 1670 through southern Albania. Coming from Corfu, he journeyed through Delvina, Gjirokastër, Tepelena, Skrapar, Përmet, Berat, Kanina, Vlora, Bashtova, Durrës, Kavaja, Peqin, Elbasan, Struga, Ohrid and Pogradec before continuing on through Macedonia (Book VIII, p. 668-746 of the printed edition of 1928). His lengthy descriptions of Berat and Elbasan, in particular, give proof of a refined and highly developed Oriental culture in Albania, of which few traces have

remained<sup>1</sup>.

Evliya Çelebi's other two journeys through the southwestern Balkans are generally less well recorded, and on occasion a bit garbled, but provide nonetheless much intriguing information. In 1660 he passed through Kosovo on his way back to Istanbul, stopping at Mitrovica, Zvečan, Vushtrria (Serbo-Croatian: Vučitrn), Kosovo Polje, Prishtina and Kaçanik (Book V, p. 547-553 of the printed edition of 1897)<sup>2</sup>.

Two years later, in 1662, he had an opportunity to visit northern Albanian and Montenegro, stopping in Tirana (qaşaba-yı Tiran), Lezha (Leş), Shkodër (Arnavud Iskenderiyyesi), Bushat (Buşatlar), Podgorica (Podğoriç), Budva (Buduva), Bar (Bar) and Ulcinj (Ülgün), and then returning to Istanbul via the northern Albanian alps and Gjakova/Djakovica (Book VI, p. 106-117 of the printed edition of 1900).

The 1662 journey through northern Albania and Montenegro has never received much attention because of manuscript problems and the lack of translations. The 1900 printed edition of Book VI in Turkish is particularly unreliable and, for various reasons, certain parts of the manuscript were omitted. One of the most unfortunate omissions is a section which Evliya Çelebi recorded on the Albanian language, including a lexicon of thirty-nine entries in this language.

The Albanian lexicon of Evliya Çelebi is an unusual and valuable contribution to Albanian linguistic and cultural history. Exactly two centuries had passed since the first datable and intelligible text was recorded in Albanian, Christian baptismal formula: *Unte paghesont premenit Atit et birit et spertit senit* ("I bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost") by Paulus Angelus (1462), and in the course of these two centuries little had been produced, compared to other European national languages. Of the significant documents of early Albanian, mention can be made of the garbled Bellifortis text<sup>3</sup> of 1405, if it is indeed based on Albanian, and the Albanian lexicon of the German knight Arnold von Harff<sup>4</sup> of 1497, the latter not unsimilar to Evliya Çelebi's word list. The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries did see the publication of a small number of Albanian books<sup>5</sup>: the so-called 'Missal' of Gjon Buzuku (1555), the Christian Doctrine of the Sicilian-Arbëresh priest Luca Matranga (1592), the four works of Pietro or Pjetër Budi (1618, 1621), and the Latin-Albanian dictionary of Franciscus Blancus or Frang Bardhi (1635). Nonetheless, with the exception of the latter dictionary, works of lexicography and indeed records of the language in general were still rare in the mid-seventeenth century.

---

<sup>1</sup> A good annotated summary of this journey is given in German by Babinger 1930.

<sup>2</sup> For Serbo-Croatian and Albanian language translations and commentaries of this journey, all based however on the imperfect 1897 Turkish edition of this volume of the manuscript, cf. Čohadžić 1905, Sabanović 1954, Kaleshi 1955 and Krasniqi 1982.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Elsie 1986.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Elsie 1984.

<sup>5</sup> On Albanian literature of this period, cf. Elsie 1995, p. 41-83 & Elsie 1997, p. 29-62.

Evliya Çelebi's lexicon, recorded no doubt in Shkodër or Bushat during his visits there in 1662, is of significance in another sense, too. It offers us our first encounter in Albanian with some delightfully spicy expletives. Though the Albanians do not use swear words by any means as frequently as their southern Slavic neighbours (the Serbs, Montenegrins, Croats, Bosnians and Macedonians), they do of course dispose of a whole range of vulgar expressions, as assumingly every language does. The earliest curse to have been recorded in Albanian, *Dramburi te clofto gogle* ("May your mouth tremble"), derives from the year 1483 and was discovered in the Latin-language Renaissance play *Epirota* by Tommaso de Mezzo<sup>6</sup>. Recordings of other Albanian expletives are rare until well into the twentieth century.

Like Arnold von Harff before him, Evliya Çelebi was highly interested in the languages of the lands and peoples he visited. In the course of his travels, he gives us thirty-one specimens of non-Turkic languages and at least the same number of Turkic languages and dialects<sup>7</sup>. His imagination in coming up with derivations for words is no less subdued than that of Isidore of Seville one thousand years before him. Robert Dankoff has described him as an incorrigible etymologizer<sup>8</sup>. A good example of his creative fantasy is given here in his naive explanation of the origin of the Albanian people.

### Transcription of the Ottoman Turkish text<sup>9</sup>

"Cümleniñ lisānları Arnavudcadır kim bir lisāna beñzemez, zīrā bu Arnavud qavmıñ ibtidā aşl [u] fer'leri Mekke-yi mükerrime Qureyşīlerinden qavm-1 'Arabdır, anuñ için Arnavud lisānında ba'zı 'Arab eflāzları vardır kim hālā aralarında isti'māl olunur. Ve bu qavm-1 Arnavud bu İskender ve Avlonya dağlarından tulu' édüp lisān-1 Talyan-1 Fırengile ixtilāf ederek lisān-1 'Arab ile lisān-1 Fıreng arasına lisān-1 Arnavudı hażret-i 'Ömer xilāfetinde peydā etdiler. Bunuñ sebēbin ve qavm-1 Arnavuduñ aşl [u] fer'lerin inşā'allāh maḥalliyle taḥrīr olunur. Ammā şimdi der faşl-i lisān-1 Arnavud ve 'ār-nā-būd deyü qavm-1 'Acem laqab demişler, ve niçe müverrixler qavm-1 'ār-nā-būd yazmışlar, ammā lezīz lisāndır. Birbirlerine i'zāz [u] ikrām ile tevāzu'āne ve ḥilmāne kelimāt ederler. Gerçi kefereleri millet-i mesīhīden geçinürler, ammā ol daxi İspanya [ve] Venedik kefereleriniñ ibrāmlarıdır, yoxsa mecūsī gibi ne kitāb ve ne ḥaşr u neşirden bir şey bilmezler, bir alay kitāpsız kefereler vü fecerelerdir kim lisānları budur.

Evvelā **pörtuni zoti** *Allāh ḥaqqıyçün* demekdir. Bey' ü şīrā maḥallinde aqça ḥisābları böyle 'ad olunur: evvelā **ñe** 1, **dü** 2, **tiri** 3, **qotrā** 4, **pensı** 5, **gâşt** 6, **iştat** 7, **tetı** 8, **nandı** 9, **dit** 10. **falemi müre selām** 'aleyküüm adam, **aye şendoş enbahi** *ey xoş misin*, **mir niştıra nişe şabāḥıñ xayr ola**, **miliserde...**, **palá mizuni** ..., **buq ekmek**, **uy şu**, **miş et**, **dele qoyun**, **pulı tavuq**, **bayá müre gel adam**, **aha buq ekmek yer misin**, **qu qiye nerede idiñ**, **miyalt bal**, **aqi te**

---

<sup>6</sup> cf. Braun & Camaj 1972.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Dankoff 1989.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Dankoff 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Ms. Revan Köşkü 1457, VI, 34b.22-35a.2. I am indebted for the transcription of this text to Professor Robert Dankoff of the University of Chicago.

**ki arpa var m1, nuqu qám yoqdur, ruş üzüm, aqi mebe teşin qurd arpa getir yoqsa başñ yararım, pörtuni zoti nuqu qám aqi Allāh haqqıyçün yoqdur arpa, tǎmu ana, motrá qız qarındaş, şoke** ‘avret. Yava sözlerdir ammā seyyāhlara lāzımdır, belki sögerler yāxod dögerler. **hak mut boq ye, tıkişatı tǎmu anañı filan edeyim, tıkişatı şoke** ‘avrêdiñ filān edeyim, **tı pirişte bıhund burnuña yelleneyim ya’ nī darta çalayım, tıkişatı bütı** edebde götiñi filan edeyim, **iç qıvırdım puşt gidi** demekdir. Hāşıl-1 kelām, dervīşler ‘ālem-i seyāhatda böyle lisānları da bilüb kendüye şütüm etdikleri yere varmayup āsūde-ḥāl ola.”

## Translation

“As to language, they all speak Albanian, which is like no other tongue. In origin, the Albanians were one of the Arab tribes of Qureysh in Mecca. That is why there are some Arabic words still in use among them. When these Albanian tribesmen emerged from the mountains of Shkodër and Vlora, they mingled with the Italians and Franks, and so, during the caliphate of ‘Omar<sup>10</sup> produced a language between Arabic and Frankish. We will give an account of the reasons for this and of the origin of the Albanians in another place, but for now, let it be said on the language of the Albanians that the Persians dubbed them ‘*âr-nâ-bûd* (“may there be no shame”), and certain chroniclers write it this way. It is a delightful language which they speak humbly and gently when they are addressing one another with respect. To be sure, the infidels among them pass as Christians, although this, too, is simply at the insistence of the Spaniards and the Venetians. Otherwise, they are a company of bookless infidels and fornicators who, like the Zoroastrians, know nothing of the Book or of the final gathering. Their language is as follows:

To start with, **pörtuni zoti** means ‘for Allah’s sake’. When buying and selling, they count their money as follows: **ñe** ‘one’, **dü** ‘two’, **tiri** ‘three’, **qotrá** ‘four’, **pensı** ‘five’, **gâşt** ‘six’, **iştat** ‘seven’, **teti** ‘eight’, **nandı** ‘nine’, **dit** ‘ten’. **Falemi müre** ‘greetings, men’, **aye şendoş enbahi** ‘are you well?’, **mir niştıra nişe** ‘good morning’, **miliserde** [welcome], **palá mizuni** [thank you], **buq** ‘bread’, **uy** ‘water’, **miş** ‘meat’, **dele** ‘sheep’, **pulı** ‘hen’, **bayá müre** ‘come, man’, **aha buq** ‘do you eat bread?’, **qu qiye** ‘where have you been?’, **miyalt** ‘honey’, **aqi te ki** ‘have you got any barley?’, **nuku qám** ‘I haven’t’, **ruş** ‘grapes’, **aqi mebe teşin qurd** ‘bring barley or I’ll split your head open’, **pörtuni zoti nuqu qám aqi** ‘for Allah’s sake, there is no barley’, **tǎmu** ‘mother’, **motrá** ‘sister’, **şoke** ‘wife’. Here are some crude expressions, but travellers need to know them since they might be attacked or made fun of: **hak mut** ‘eat shit’, **tıkişatı tǎmu** ‘I’ll fuck your mother’, **tıkişatı şoke** ‘I’ll fuck your wife’, **tı pirişte bıhund** ‘I’ll fart in your nose’, **tıkişatı bütı** ‘I’ll fuck your ass’, **iç qıvırdım** ‘catamite pimp’. In short, when dervishes are travelling, they should know such expressions as well, so that they can avoid trouble by not going to places where they will be abused.”

---

<sup>10</sup> Caliphate of ‘Omar 634-644 A.D.

## Analysis of the Albanian lexicon

1. **pörtuni zoti**  
'Allāh ḥaqqıyçün 'for Allah's sake'  
Mod. Alb. *për tynëzot* 'for God's sake', literally 'for our lord'.
2. **ñe**  
1 'one'  
Mod. Alb. *një* 'one'.
3. **dü**  
2  
Mod. Alb. *dy* 'two'.
4. **tiri**  
3  
Mod. Alb. *tre* (m.), *tri* (f.) 'three'.
5. **qotrá**  
4  
Mod. Alb. *katër* 'four'.
6. **pensı**  
5  
Mod. Alb. *pesë* 'five'.
7. **gâşt**  
6  
Mod. Alb. *gjashtë* 'six'.
8. **iştat**  
7  
Mod. Alb. *shtatë* 'seven'.
9. **tetı**  
8  
Mod. Alb. *tetë* 'eight'.
10. **nandı**  
9  
Mod. Alb. *nëntë* 'nine'.
11. **dit**  
10  
Mod. Alb. *dhjetë* 'ten'.
12. **falemi müre**  
selām 'aleyküm adam 'greetings, men'  
Mod. Alb. *falemi, burra* 'greetings, men'. The greeting *të falem* is still used by elderly people in Albania.
13. **aye şendoş enbahi**  
ey xoş mısın 'are you well?'  
Mod. Alb. *a je shëndosh, a mbaheni?* 'Are you well, are you keeping up?' The second verb, in contrast to the first, is in the respectful plural *ju* form. One would normally expect either the familiar singular *a je shëndosh, a mbahesh?* or the respectful plural *a jeni shëndosh, a mbaheni?*
14. **mir niştıra nişe**  
şabāḥıñ xayr ola 'good morning'  
Mod. Alb. *mirë ndeshtrasha* 'greetings', i.e. *mirë ndesh (ty) të rasha* a greeting still used

- in Shkodër dialect. cf. *ndeshtrashë* n.f. ‘unexpected occurrence, event, meeting’.
15. **miliserde**  
[welcome]  
Mod. Alb. *mirë se erdhe* ‘welcome’.
  16. **palá mizuni**  
[thank you]  
Possibly Mod. Alb. *të falem shumë*.
  17. **buq**  
ekmek ‘bread’  
Mod. Alb. *bukë* ‘bread’.
  18. **uy**  
şu ‘water’  
Mod. Alb. *ujë* ‘water’.
  19. **miş**  
et ‘meat’  
Mod. Alb. *mish* ‘meat’.
  20. **dele**  
qoyun ‘sheep’  
Mod. Alb. *dele* ‘sheep’.
  21. **puli**  
tavuq ‘hen’  
Mod. Alb. *pulë, pula* ‘hen, chicken’.
  22. **bayá mure**  
gel adam ‘come, man’  
Mod. Alb. *pa eja, burra* ‘come on, men’. In Shkodër dialect, one often encounters the reduced form *p’eja*.
  23. **a ha buq**  
ekmek yer misin ‘do you eat bread?’  
Mod. Alb. *A ha bukë?* ‘Do you eat bread?’
  24. **qu qiye**  
nerede idiñ ‘where have you been?’  
Mod. Alb. *ku qe?* ‘Where have you been?’
  25. **miyalt**  
bal ‘honey’  
Mod. Alb. *mjaltë* ‘honey’.
  26. **aqi te ki**  
arpa var mı ‘is there barley?’  
Mod. Alb. *elb ti ke?* ‘Do you have barley?’ There does not seem to be any trace of an early *\*aki* for standard *elb* ‘barley’.
  27. **nuku qám**  
yoqdur ‘there isn’t’  
Mod. Alb. *nuk kam* ‘I haven’t’. The negative form *nuku*, for standard *nuk*, now occurs primarily in the southern dialect of Korça.
  28. **ruş**  
üzüm ‘grapes’  
Mod. Alb. *rrush* ‘grapes’.
  29. **aqi mebe teşin qurd**  
arpa getir yoqsa başıñ yararın ‘bring barley or I’ll split your head open’  
Unclear. Possibly Mod. Alb. *\*aki më bjerr, të ikën kryet*, i.e. ‘bring me *aki*, otherwise

- your head will be off’.
30. **pörtuni zoti nuqu qám aqi**  
Allāh ḥaqqıyçün yoqdur arpa ‘for Allah’s sake, there is no barley’  
Mod. Alb. *për tynëzot nuk kam \*aki* ‘for God’s sake, I have no \*aki’.
31. **ṭámu**  
ana ‘mother’  
Mod. Alb. *t’ëma*. Shkodër form: *e ama, t’ama* ‘mother’.
32. **motrá**  
qız qarındaş ‘sister’  
Mod. Alb. *motër, motra* ‘sister’.
33. **şoke**  
‘avret ‘wife’  
Mod. Alb. *shoqe, shoqja* ‘wife, companion, comrade (f.)’.
34. **hak mut**  
boq ye ‘eat shit’  
Mod. Alb. *ha mut* ‘eat shit’. Unlikely, in view of the Turkish translation, would be a Mod. Alb. *hak mut* ‘wages of shit’ in the sense of the expression *ja, e ke hak mutin!* ‘there’s your shitty recompense for you’.
35. **tıkifşatı ṭámu**  
anañı filan edeyim ‘I’ll fuck your mother’  
Mod. Alb. *të qifsha tët amë* ‘I’ll fuck your mother’. First person optative of the verb *qij* ‘to fuck’ plus accusative of *jot amë*. This expression, in the standard form *të qifsha nënën*, is one of the most commonly heard expletives in the Albanian language today.
36. **tıkifşatı şoke**  
‘avrëdiñ filān édeyim ‘I’ll fuck your wife’  
Mod. Alb. *të qifsha tët shoqe* ‘I’ll fuck your wife’.
37. **tı pirişte bıhund**  
burnuña yelleneyim ya ‘nī çarṭa çalayım ‘I’ll fart in your nose’  
Mod. Alb. *të pjerdhsha mbë hund* ‘I’ll fart in (your) nose’, an insult still known in Shkodër. First person optative of the intrans. verb *pjerdh* ‘to fart’ plus the Geg preposition *mbë* for standard *në*.
38. **tıkifşatı büti**  
edebde götiñi filan édeyim ‘I’ll fuck your ass’  
Mod. Alb. *të qifsha (në) bythë* ‘I’ll fuck (your) ass’.
39. **iç qıvırdım**  
puşt gidi ‘catamite pimp’.  
Mod. Alb. *i shkërdhyem*, ‘fucked’. Passive past participle of the verb *shkërdhej* ‘to fuck’ with the Geg ending *-yem*. A common insult in modern Albanian, cf. Tirana dialect form *shkërdhatë*.

## Conclusion

Evliya Çelebi was both an imaginative writer and a seminal source of information on daily life in seventeenth-century Albania. His unique Albanian lexicon, compiled during a visit to Shkodër in 1662 and offering what any dervish should know when travelling in the lands of the infidel, is for the most part accurately recorded and could be used by foreign travellers even

today with some success. We do, however, urge caution and restraint.

## Bibliography

BABINGER, Franz

Evlia Tschelebi's Reisewege in Albanien.

in: Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen, Berlin 33 (1930), II. Abteilung, p. 138-178.  
reprinted in: Rumelische Streifen (Berlin 1938) p. 1-40 and in: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Südosteuropas und der Levante 2 (Munich 1966), S. 51-89.

BRAUN, Ludwig & CAMAJ, Martin

Ein albanischer Satz aus dem Jahre 1483.

in: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung, Göttingen, 86 (1972) p. 1-6.

ČOHADZIĆ, Dim. S.

Putopis Evlije Čelebije o srpskim zemljama z XVII veku. Preveo s turskog.

in: Spomenik, Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, Belgrade, 42 (1905), drugi razred, 37, p. 1-34.

DANKOFF, Robert

The languages of the world, according to Evliya Çelebi.

in: Journal of Turkish Studies, Cambridge MA, 13 (1989), p. 23-32.

An Evliya Çelebi glossary. Unusual, dialectal and foreign words in the Seyahat-name.

in: Sources of Oriental languages and literatures 14. Edited by Şinani Tekin and Gönül Alpay Tekin. Turkish Sources XII. (Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilisations, Harvard University, Harvard 1991)

ELSIE, Robert

The Albanian lexicon of Arnold von Harff, 1497.

in: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung, Göttingen, 97, 1 (1984), p. 113-122.

The Bellifortis text and early Albanian.

in: Zeitschrift für Balkanologie, Berlin, 22, 2 (1986), p. 158-162.

History of Albanian literature. East European Monographs 379. ISBN 0-88033-276-X. 2 volumes.

(Social Science Monographs, Boulder. Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York 1995) xv + 1,054 pp.

Histori e letërsisë shqiptare.

(Dukagjini, Tirana & Peja/Peć 1997) 686 pp.

EVLIYA, Efendi

Evlijâ Çelebi seyahatnamesi. 10 vol.

(İqdâm Matbaası, İstanbul [1314 A.H.] 1896-1938 A.D.)

Evliyâ Çelebi Seyâhatnamesi. Türkçeleştiren Zuhuri Danişman. 15 vol.

(Zuhuri Danişman Yaninevi, İstanbul 1969-1971)

Seyahatnâme. Giriş. Hazırlayan İsmet Parmaksızoğlu.

(Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Ankara 1983) 350 pp.

Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi. Sadeleştiren: Tefik Temelkuran, Necati Aktaş. 6 vol.

(Üçdal Neşiyat, İstanbul 1984)

KALESHI, Hasan

Kosova e Metohija n'udhëpërshkrimin e Evlija Çelebis.  
in: Përparimi, Prishtina, 7-8 (1955), p. 422-434.

KRASNIQI, Mark

Shqiptarët në udhëpërshkrimin e Evlija Çelebiut.  
in: Gjurmë e gjurmime (Tirana 1982), p. 320-326.

ŠABANOVIĆ, Hazim

Evliya Čelebija. Putopis. Odlomci o jugoslovenskim zemljama. Preveo, uvod i komentar napisao Hazim Šabanović. 2. izd.  
(Svjetlost, Sarajevo 1954; repint Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo 1979) 704 pp.

[September 1997. Previously unpublished]