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Seyahatnâme'de Mezopotamya'nın İnanç Coğrafyası: Evliya Çelebi'nin Kaleminden Ziyaretgâhlar, Tekkeler ve Halk İnancı

The Religious Landscape of Mesopotamia in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatnâme, Shrines, Sufi Lodges, and Popular Beliefs *

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Özet

Bu çalışma, Evliyâ Çelebi'nin Seyahatnâme'sinde Mezopotamya coğrafyasına dair inanç mekânlarının tarihsel, kültürel ve sembolik işlevlerini incelemektedir. Araştırma, özellikle Mardin, Nusaybin, Cizre, Hasankeyf ve Musul şehirlerinde kutsal mekân inşasının halk inançlarıyla kurduğu ilişkileri çözümlemektedir. Evliyâ Çelebi'nin metinleri, klasik tarih yazımından farklı olarak gözlem, sözlü kültür ve mistik sezgiyi harmanlayan bir anlatı biçimi sunar. Bu anlatılar; ziyaretgâhlar, tekkeler, türbeler, kutsal sular ve menkıbeler etrafında şekillenen bir inanç atlası oluşturur. Çalışmada Evliyâ'nın gözlemleri, Mardin'de Şeyh Zûlî Sultan menzili, Hasankeyf'te Zülkifl Makamı ve Şeyh Emir Sultan türbesi, Nusaybin'de peygamberî ziyaretgâhlar, Cizre'de Nuhî hafıza ve Musul'da tılsımlar ile peygamber menkıbeleri üzerinden analiz edilmiştir. Her şehir, dinsel hafıza ile toplumsal kimliğin iç içe geçtiği bir "kutsal topografya" olarak konumlandırılmıştır. Seyahatnâme, bu yönüyle yalnızca bir seyahat anlatısı değil; inanç, bellek, coğrafya ve kimlik arasında kurulan çok katmanlı bir ilişkiler ağını görünür kılan kültürel bir metin olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Evliyâ Çelebi, Seyahatnâme, Mezopotamya, Halk İnancı, Kutsal Mekân.*

Abstract

This study examines the historical, cultural, and symbolic functions of sacred spaces in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname, with a particular focus on the religious geography of Mesopotamia. The research analyzes how the construction of sacred sites in the cities of Mardin, Nusaybin, Cizre, Hasankeyf, and Mosul interacts with local systems of popular belief. Evliya Çelebi's narrative departs from conventional historiography by blending empirical observation, oral tradition, and mystical intuition, thereby producing a distinctive form of storytelling. His accounts create a spiritual atlas structured around pilgrimage sites, dervish lodges, shrines, sacred springs, and miracle narratives.

The study explores Evliya's observations through specific examples: the Şeyh Zûlî Sultan sanctuary in Mardin, the Zülkifl and Şeyh Emir Sultan shrines in Hasankeyf, the prophetic loci in Nusaybin, the Noahic memory in Cizre, and the talismanic and prophetic traditions in Mosul. Each city is presented as a "sacred topography" in which religious memory and social identity are intertwined. The Seyahatname is thus interpreted not merely as a travel account but as a cultural text that reveals a multilayered network of relations among faith, memory, geography, and identity.

Keywords: *Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatname, Mesopotamia, Folk Belief, Sacred Space*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the Ottoman intellectual and cultural sphere, the relationship between folk beliefs and place stands among the most powerful carriers of historical continuity and collective memory. In this context, Evliya Çelebi's ten-volume *Seyahatnâme* is not merely a geography or an encyclopedia of cities written through the eyes of a traveler; it also constitutes a vivid portrayal of the popular mentality, religious practices, and faith-based cultural symbols of the Ottoman world.

Particularly in the fourth volume, the Mesopotamian cities—such as Mardin, Nusaybin, Cizre, and Mosul—embody a dense sense of sacredness in both geographical and metaphysical terms. In Evliya Çelebi's depictions of these regions, prominent elements include pilgrimage sites, saints' tombs, Sufi lodges and convents, sacred springs, and natural spaces shaped by legends and hagiographic narratives. The narrative style adopted by the traveler differs from conventional historiography in that it interweaves personal observation, oral culture, and mystical interpretation, thereby producing a multi-layered textual structure. Consequently, the *Seyahatnâme* lends itself to being read as an atlas of faith.

The aim of this study is to analyze, within a historical and cultural framework, the sacred spaces and belief-related sites described in the Mesopotamian cities of the *Seyahatnâme*'s fourth volume. The research is based on the edition *Seyahatnâme, Volume IV*, prepared by Seyit Ali Kahraman and Yücel Dağlı.

Throughout the study, the following questions are addressed: What kinds of insights do Evliya Çelebi's observations provide regarding popular religion? Through which indicators does the construction of sacred space emerge? And in what ways might contemporary faith tourism draw upon this historical legacy? The study evaluates these questions within the broader literature on folk religion and sacred geography.

2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was designed based on the method of qualitative textual analysis. Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme* was examined primarily through its fourth volume, focusing on the sacred sites located in the Mesopotamian cities. These sites were evaluated through thematic coding, narrative analysis, and symbolic spatial reading techniques. The analytical process not only concentrates on the level of content but also aims to interpret the relationship of the narrative with oral culture, its contribution to the construction of sacred space, and its functions in relation to collective memory.

During the analysis, in addition to the historical and social context, conceptual frameworks such as cultural memory, embodied practices, places of memory, and heterotopia served as guiding perspectives. Accordingly, the theoretical foundation of the study is grounded in approaches that examine the multilayered relationship between memory and space.

Pierre Nora's conceptualization of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) highlights that sacred spaces are not limited to religious functions but act as structures that encode collective memory and reinforce historical continuity (Nora, 1989, pp. 7–12). In this context, the shrines and tombs described in the *Seyahatnâme* are interpreted as sites of memory.

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia provides a functional tool for analyzing alternative spaces that exist outside the normative order and are defined by temporal and functional ruptures (Foucault, 1984). The tekkes, zawiyas, cemeteries, and shrines depicted by Evliya Çelebi are interpreted

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as heterotopic spaces which, although situated outside the established social order, operate in parallel with it.

Paul Connerton's theory of embodied practices demonstrates that memory is transmitted not only through written records but also through ritual repetitions and bodily performances specific to place (Connerton, 1989, p. 37). Practices such as prayer, shrine visitation, and votive offerings mentioned in the *Seyahatnâme* are examined as carriers of this embodied memory.

Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory emphasizes the constitutive role of space in the transformation of individual memories into collective ones (Assmann, 2015, p. 47). Evliya Çelebi's detailed depictions of sacred springs, mountains, caves, and saints' tombs are evaluated as examples revealing the historical continuity of this spatial memory.

Gaston Bachelard's approach to the poetics and sensory experience of space reveals the connection between remembrance and sensory elements such as silence, light, and scent (Bachelard, 1994, p. 38). The metaphorical and image-laden narrative style Evliya Çelebi employs in his descriptions of sacred places is interpreted as an indicator of this poetic construction of space.

Doreen Massey's conceptualization of space as a network of social relations demonstrates that sacred sites bearing traces of the past are also dynamic arenas where contemporary identities are reconstructed (Massey, 2005, p. 9). The places depicted in the *Seyahatnâme* are therefore considered as representations of both historical continuity and the social fabric of Evliya's own time.

This theoretical framework reveals that the narratives in the *Seyahatnâme* offer a multilayered field of interpretation that goes beyond mere reflections of popular belief, encompassing aspects of social memory, spatial construction, and cultural continuity. Evliya Çelebi's text thus unites the experiences of an observant traveler with the voice of an oral culture narrator, presenting itself as a holistic object of study that integrates primary source material with theoretical analysis.

3. SHEIKH ZULI SULTAN SHRINE IN MARDIN

Situated in the northern part of Mesopotamia, Mardin has historically formed an important crossroads along the east–west and north–south routes, due to its proximity to the lower tributaries of the Tigris River and the sources of the Khabur Stream (Le Strange, 1905, p. 96). Its strategic location and defensible topography made the city a political, cultural, and religious center throughout the Middle Ages. From the Seljuks to the Artuqids, Mardin developed a multilayered urban character. This accumulation is reflected not only in the city's stone architecture but also in its narrative world, transforming Mardin into a locus of both historical and spiritual memory.

Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme* stands as one of the most significant sources revealing the deep layers of this collective memory. In the fourth volume of his work, where he records his observations on the Mesopotamian region, Evliya devotes special attention to Mardin. In his depiction, the city emerges not only with its architectural richness but also with its spiritual depth, complex religious fabric, and enduring popular piety. Within this framework, he refers to the "residence of Hazrat Sheikh Zuli Sultan," describing it as "a great site of visitation in the land of Mardin." He notes that the figure known among the people as "Sheikh Zuli" was, in fact, "Sheikh Shehrezuli," whose name was simplified over time in popular speech. This observation clearly demonstrates Evliya Çelebi's attentiveness to folk culture, linguistic transformation, and the role of sacred sites within the fabric of social life.

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Evliya recounts that he visited this shrine during his journey in 1065 AH (1655 CE) and concludes his narrative with the following statement: "It has already been written above that Shehrezuli was a true saint and that all the people visited his shrine during our journey in the year 1065. May God sanctify his secret." This sentence reflects a recurrent stylistic feature of Evliya's prose: the union of historical observation and spiritual reverence within a single narrative framework. His language reveals that he viewed sacred sites not merely as objects of description but as settings of lived spiritual experience (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 743–744).

The mention of Sheikh Zuli Sultan's shrine in Evliya's records illuminates a sacred geography in which popular piety was strongly rooted in seventeenth-century Mardin. This tradition has survived for centuries and continues today in the Sultan Şeyhmus Tomb located in Sultan Village, within Mardin's Artuklu district. Known among the local population as "Sheikh Zuli" or "Sheikh Musa," this site represents a living extension of historical memory. It is known that Musa bin Mahin al-Mardini al-Zuli, who is buried in the tomb, died in 470 AH (1077–78 CE) (Göyünç, 1991, p. 72). In local narratives, Sheikh Musa appears as a Sufi master renowned for his miracles. According to tradition, he restored sight to a blind man, blessed the poor with abundance, extinguished fires by striking the ground with his staff, and even revived a dead ox through his prayer (Beşer, 2017, p. 1032). These hagiographic accounts elevate Sheikh Musa to a position of enduring spiritual authority in the collective imagination of the people.

The miracles attributed to Sheikh Musa transcend the bounds of individual piety, contributing to the formation of a broader regional field of sanctity. Legends linking him to Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani—such as Gilani's coming to greet him and recognizing his spiritual superiority—suggest that this sanctity extends beyond local boundaries into a wider Islamic geography of memory (Beşer, 2017, p. 1032). Each miracle narrative becomes a silent ring in the chain of remembrance woven into the meaning of the tomb. Over time, these rings accumulate, transforming the tomb into far more than a mere site of visitation: it becomes a center where remembrance, emotion, and contact with the sacred are embodied in space (Kaya & Tayanç, 2025, p. 60).

Evliya Çelebi's account of the Sheikh Zuli Sultan shrine in the *Seyahatnâme* is therefore crucial for understanding the historical foundations of the sanctity still maintained at the Sultan Şeyhmus Tomb today. His observations reveal that popular religious traditions have continued as a living cultural practice transmitted across centuries without interruption. This continuity demonstrates the decisive role of sacred spaces in Mardin's collective memory as loci of worship, belonging, and shared remembrance. In this sense, Mardin, as portrayed by Evliya Çelebi, stands as a living component of the sacred geography of Mesopotamia—a spiritual bridge linking the past and the present.

4. PROPHETIC MEMORY AND POPULAR SAINTHOOD IN HASANKEYF: THE SACRED AXIS FROM THE TOMB OF DHU AL-KIFL TO THE GARDEN OF IREM

There are various views regarding the etymology of Hasankeyf. The earliest records of the name appear in the annals of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (r. 884–859 BCE), where the settlement is referred to as "Kipani"; the text notes that the king crossed the Tigris and collected tribute from these lands (Lehmann-Haupt, 1910, p. 375; Taylor, 1865, p. 34). The fact that "Kipani" was located west of Nisibis suggests a geographical correspondence with present-day Hasankeyf (Mıynat, 2008, p. 9). The Roman historian Pliny, writing in the first century CE, mentions a region called "Cephenia," located on the border of Adiabene (Pliny, 1999, p. 369). Lehmann-Haupt argues that this region geographically coincides with Hasankeyf (Lehmann-Haupt, 1910, p. 375). In the sixth century, Procopius recorded the name as "Ciphas," demonstrating the continuity of the toponym across the sequence "Kipani–Cephenia–

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Ciphas" (Procopius, 2002, p. 319). The forms "Hesna Kepha" in Syriac texts, "Kentzy" in Armenian sources, and "Hısn al-Kayfa" in Islamic records further attest to the city's multilingual and multicultural historical identity (Oğuzoğlu, 1997, p. 364).

In Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme*, Hasankeyf emerges as a privileged station within the prophetic topography of Mesopotamia. In his narrative, the city functions as a sacred center where the chain of prophecy intersects with the tradition of local sainthood. The shrine of Prophet Dhu al-Kifl to the north of Hasankeyf and the maqam of Sheikh Emir Sultan along the banks of the Euphrates represent two primary axes that unite prophetic legacy with popular religiosity (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 745). After recounting different historical opinions concerning the tomb of Dhu al-Kifl ibn Ayyub, Evliya presents his own interpretation based on what he considers "authentic" knowledge. He reports that while some historians claimed that Dhu al-Kifl was buried at Hasankeyf, his true tomb was located "near the village of Rafiyya by the Hillah fortress, beside the tomb of Hazrat Ali, on the banks of the Euphrates" (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 745). This comparative approach reveals the epistemological balance in Evliya's narrative: oral tradition is transmitted, yet corrected through empirical observation.

Following his reference to the "gate overlooking the side of the Hasankeyf fortress," Evliya turns to the shrine of Sheikh Emir Sultan. This site occupies a central position in the devotional life of the Kurdish communities of the region: "All the Kurds believe in this sultan and visit him. May God sanctify his secret" (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 745). This expression makes visible a shared notion of sainthood that transcends the strict boundaries of Sunni orthodoxy. Sheikh Emir Sultan appears both as a representative of the local saintly cult and as the focal point of the people's prayers, vows, and intercessory practices.

In Evliya's account, Hasankeyf thus becomes a spiritual threshold where prophetic heritage, embodied in Dhu al-Kifl, meets the living sanctity represented by Sheikh Emir Sultan. This dual structure provides a compelling example of how the Ottoman-era popular faith intertwined with the prophetic tradition. As the traveler leaves Hasankeyf and proceeds southward through the ruins of Karadere toward the road to Baghdad, he writes that he "endured a hundred thousand hardships in the barren desert" (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 746). This statement implies more than physical travel; it evokes a mystical *seyr-i sülûk*—a spiritual journey of endurance and revelation. For Evliya, heat, thirst, and fatigue are bodily trials that mark the path toward the sacred.

At the end of this arduous journey, he reaches the Garden of Irem—an legendary site described both in the Qur'an and in popular mythology as "a paradise descended upon the earth." Evliya presents this garden as a station of contemplation along the road to Baghdad (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 746). In classical Islamic cosmology, Irem symbolizes the extravagance and arrogance of the people of ʿĀd; here it acquires meaning within a triad of nature, morality, and divine admonition. For Evliya, the Garden of Irem is both an "earthly paradise" and a "scene of divine wrath." This dual symbolism reflects his mode of transforming nature into a moral and spiritual landscape. The place reached "after a hundred thousand hardships" becomes a metaphor of pilgrimage—a journey that tests the traveler's patience while allowing him to witness the manifestation of divine order.

The route stretching from Hasankeyf to the Garden of Irem thus constitutes, in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme*, not merely a geographical passage but a sacred axis where prophetic memory, popular belief, and moral reflection converge (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 745–746). The narrative of Dhu al-Kifl embodies theological continuity; the legend of Sheikh Emir Sultan represents communal piety; and the Garden of Irem symbolizes human transience. In this sense, Hasankeyf emerges in Evliya Çelebi's Mesopotamian vision as a spiritual geography extending "from prophecy to sainthood, from admonition to truth"—a threshold between time and eternity, along the banks of the Euphrates.

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5. SHRINES, SUFI LODGES, AND POPULAR BELIEF IN NUSAYBIN

The name Nusaybin originates from an ancient toponym of Semitic roots. In classical sources, it appears as Nitibin, Nitibeni, or Nizzibi; in Armenian texts as Mebin; and in Arabic sources as Nasībīn, which eventually evolved into the modern Turkish form, Nusaybin (Honigmann, 1997, p. 99; Tuncel, 2007, p. 269). These linguistic variations, beyond simple phonetic shifts, reflect the traces of civilizational transitions and cultural continuity. Historical and mythological accounts offer diverse interpretations regarding the foundation of the city. Abū'l-Faraj records that the Babylonian King Nimrod encircled Nusaybin with walls, named it "the City of the Rivers," and that one of the three cities he founded was identified with Akhar (Akkad) (Abu'l-Farac, 1987, p. 75). In the Syriac tradition, Nusaybin is associated with the biblical city of Sobha, meaning "place of encounter," a designation that symbolically defines its historical position (Kütük, 2006, p. 32). Arab geographers describe Nusaybin as an important administrative center located on the upper course of the Hirmas River, within a wide and fertile plain in the fourth climatic zone (Kütük, 2006, pp. 26–27; Abdusselam Efendi, 2007, p. 4). Throughout the Roman, Sasanian, and Islamic periods, the city developed as one of the principal centers of Upper Mesopotamia, marked not only by political authority but also by cultural and intellectual vitality. As a historical crossroads, Nusaybin emerged as a border city of Mesopotamia, characterized by its multilingual, multi-religious, and multicultural structure, and as an arena of intellectual interaction where different belief systems were institutionalized (Azimli, 2006, p. 46; Şimşek, 2017, pp. 3–5).

Within this historical background, Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme* reconfigures Nusaybin as a mystical topography. In his narrative, the city appears as both a network of shrines woven around prophetic legends and a cosmic landscape intertwined with the imagination of "Sakalān" (the realm of humans and jinn) (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 751–752). The house of Prophet Yunus, located to the north of the ruins, is described as a "masonry hut of sorrow" and "a pleasant lodge frequented by all those in need," representing one of the most tangible expressions of popular piety (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 751). The maqam of Prophet Ezra, though its endowments had fallen into ruin, is still described as "a place where prayers are accepted," and the mention of Indian dervishes residing there underscores the cosmopolitan and spiritual character of the site (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 751). The shrine of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ibn Imam ʿAlī reflects the local manifestation of deep reverence toward the Ahl al-Bayt; the people's words—"May God be pleased with him"—illustrate the continuity of shrine veneration in shaping religious identity (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 751). The maqam of Prophet Job (Ayyūb) is portrayed as dilapidated but complemented by the narrative of his "true tomb" near Müzeyrib Castle in the province of Damascus. Evliya notes that ten dervishes resided in its white-domed structure, and that the dome's gate faced north (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 751). The phrase "its dome is in ruins" used for the shrine of Prophet Khidr conveys that, despite physical decay, spiritual continuity remained unbroken (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 751).

The ancient name of Nusaybin, "Sakalān" (the land of humans and jinn), is recounted through references to hadith and exegetical traditions. The belief that Nusaybin was made the abode of the jinn after the creation of heaven and earth in six days, and that "the jinn delight in ruins," deepens the city's mythological and theological significance (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 752). Within this cosmic framework, King Sarfayāʾīl is portrayed as a benevolent spirit (*rūḥ tayyiba*) who had faith since the time of Prophet Solomon. His rule over Nusaybin for forty years after the birth of the Prophet Muhammad strengthens the notion of spiritual continuity between the realms of the jinn and prophethood (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 752). In the "cosmic trial" that took place on the first day of prophethood, Sarfayāʾīl and Tahlīc, having been informed by Gabriel, came before the Prophet, signifying that the divine message extended to the jinn as well (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 752). The ensuing dispute over ownership unfolds between the claim that Nusaybin was "ancestral land" and Iblis's assertion that he was its "first inhabitant." The Prophet prohibits the entry of both benevolent and malevolent spirits (*arwāḥ tayyiba* / *arwāḥ khabītha*)

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into the city, dedicating it to the Muslim community. Thus, in popular memory, Nusaybin acquires sanctity as a city associated with immunity from jinn possession and with healing (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 755). On the same page, Evliya's observation about the malarial climate exemplifies his narrative's balance between rational observation and mystical intuition (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 755).

Iblis's defense, grounded in "pride born of love," reveals a Sufi interpretation that regards the command to prostrate before Adam as a denial of fidelity to divine love. The Prophet's call for repentance and his decree to make Iblis forget the *Ism al-Aʿẓam* (the Greatest Name of God) signify a moral order in which evil manifests as *waswasa* (whispering) within the human soul (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 756–757). The subsequent discussion on Iblis's origins and multiple names—Hāris, Abū Murra, Iblīs; Waswās, Khannās, Yuwaswis, Jinna—forms an onomastic demonology linked to the seven heavens and the recitation of the *Fātiha*. Correct pronunciation is portrayed as a metaphysical safeguard against error (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 757–758).

Through this narrative coherence, Nusaybin emerges as a topography of belief uniting historical layers with Evliya Çelebi's cosmic imagination. Interwoven with shrines, Sufi lodges, prophetic sites, and legends of the jinn, the city represents—both materially and spiritually—a frontier of Mesopotamia's sacred geography.

6. NOAHIC MEMORY, SHRINES, AND MULTIRELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN CIZRE

The settlement history of Cizre extends back to the Neolithic period. Archaeological evidence indicates that the region was influenced by the Hassuna, Samarra, and Halaf cultures from the seventh millennium BCE, and that traces of the Uruk culture became evident by the fourth millennium BCE (Yıldız et al., 2010, p. 226; Aydın, 2001, p. 22). Some scholars link the foundation of the city to the postdiluvian period and to the settlements located at the foothills of Mount Cudi. According to this view, the Mosque of Noah and the ark-shaped city walls are both material and symbolic reflections of faith following the Flood (Yaşin, 2011, pp. 15–16). Historical sources note that the ancient names of Cizre were *Kardu* and *Bazebda*, and that in 250 AH / 864 CE, Hasan b. ʿUmar al-Taghlibī rebuilt the city under the name *Ceziret ibn ʿUmar* upon the remains of a Roman fortress once called "Castle of the Tigris" (Karademir, 2019, p. 438).

Throughout antiquity, Cizre fell under the dominion of the Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Roman empires. Its strategic location on the banks of the Tigris River made it a center of both trade routes and cultural exchange (Beysanoğlu, 2014, p. 109). Conquered during the caliphate of ʿUmar by ʿIyād b. Ghanem, Cizre quickly established its Islamic identity with monuments such as the Great Mosque (*Ulu Cami*) (Belāzurī, 2002, p. 251). Under the Ayyubids, urban development, education, and agriculture flourished. Ibn Battuta later described the city as a vibrant, walled center with madrasas, baths, and bustling markets (Akbaş, 2012, p. 53; Bilgin, 2012, pp. 72–77).

Evliya Çelebi situates *Cezīre-i Ibn ʿUmar* (Cizre) within the sacred geography of Mesopotamia as a focal point where the postdiluvian narrative of Noah merges with institutionalized Islamic structures, Sufi networks, and multireligious local memory. His account weaves together the traces of the Noahic legacy, reinforced by Qur'anic exegesis, with a living fabric of popular religiosity sustained through mosques, madrasas, Sufi lodges (*tekkes*), and charitable complexes (*imarets*) (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 718–731). The end of the Flood, the mountain of Cûde (Cudi), and the adjacent city of Cûde are presented through the theme of "first settlement and first reconstruction": the ark is said to have come to rest on Cûde on Monday, the twelfth of Muharram, and the meal cooked in thanksgiving for deliverance from the Flood became known as *ʿĀshūrāʾ*. The "Sülupyān (The Saved) Mosque," built by Noah himself, is described as a revered site of visitation (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 718–719). Citing

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Qurʾān 11:43, Evliya recounts the belief that the ark landed on Cûde, emphasizing the mountain's Kurdish highland setting and the persistence of associated devotional practices (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 719).

A striking account regarding the circulation of the Noahic legacy relates that the wooden planks of the mosque at Cûde were dismantled during an invasion and later affixed to the doors of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Thus, the sanctity rooted in the Flood was symbolically incorporated into the Christian–Byzantine monumental architecture of the imperial capital (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 718–719). The sacred status of Cizre is further deepened by the story of *Ṭarḥ ibn Nūḥ*, described as "the first person buried on earth." According to legend, Ṭarḥ was born during the Flood when Noah's wife went into labor, and his burial in Cizre endowed the city with a blessing linked to Noahic fertility. Frequent twin births and longevity among the population were attributed to Noah's supplication; his forty-foot-long tomb, located in the Tur Abdin quarter, became a venerated shrine (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 720–721). This record portrays Cizre as a city bearing the "corporeal trace of prophecy."

Within the urban fabric, Islamic institutionalization is prominent. The *selatin* mosque where the Ottoman sermon was delivered, approximately 240 neighborhood mosques, and madrasas such as Mir ʿAbdālī, Süleyman Beyi, Meydan, and Kalealtı are described in detail, including their endowments and educational continuity (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 728). The Sufi landscape centers around the lodge of *Hazrat Muhammad al-Ghawth* from the Naqshbandi *Khājahgān* lineage; the presence of dervishes from India, Uzbekistan, Chagatai, and Kumuk origin highlights Cizre's role as a spiritual *barzakh*—a liminal space of mystical convergence (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 733). The Bey Bathhouse and the water balance system that supplied the inner citadel are described as "marvels that bewilder the mind," merging engineering ingenuity with the sanctity of water as a purifying element (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 729). The communal distribution of "honey sherbet" on Ramadan nights and the daily provision of two meals in charitable kitchens (*dār al-ziyāfa*) illustrate a social religiosity grounded in mercy and generosity (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 731).

In Evliya's depiction, Cizre also emerges as a multireligious landscape. He records two churches belonging to the Jacobite, Nestorian, and Armenian communities, one Jewish *kunnis* (synagogue), and the presence of Yazidi reaya within the city (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 731). Thus, the Muslim majority encircled by Noahic memory coexisted within the same spatial fabric as Christian and Jewish communities. The city's culture of leisure—gardens, vineyards, and some ten thousand "huts of sorrow"—formed the everyday geography of popular piety (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 731–732).

The map of sacred sites extends beyond the Noahic memory. Outside the city, a lofty shrine attributed to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the *Mashhad of Imam ʿAlī* near the Water Gate are noted as centers of prayer and votive offerings. The record that the Shafi 'i scholar Muḥammad b. al-Jazarī is buried in Cizre connects his 109-verse *Jazariyya* poem—central to Qur'anic recitation and tajwīd—to the city's intellectual and devotional networks (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 733–734). The presence of a family descending from Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī and the belief that the stoppage of a charitable watermill signaled a death within this lineage illustrate how omens and signs were institutionalized in local faith (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 732–733).

In conclusion, Evliya Çelebi portrays Cizre as a threshold city woven around the intertwined themes of Noahic origin, corporeal memory (*Ṭarḥ ibn Nūḥ*), institutional Islam (mosque–madrasa–imaret), Sufi circulation (Naqshbandi/Ghawthiyya), multireligious coexistence (churches–synagogue–Yazidi subjects), and the culture of visitation. This configuration unites the "blessing that survived the Flood" with the social compassion embodied in the networks of endowment, Sufi lodge, and charitable

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kitchen—placing Cizre at the very heart of popular religiosity and layered memory within the sacred geography of Mesopotamia (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 718–734).

7. TALISMANS, MIRACLES, AND PROPHETIC SITES IN MOSUL

Throughout history, various views have been advanced concerning the name and origin of Mosul. While the Arameans called the city "Hansa Ebraya," in the Islamic period this appellation was attributed to Rawand b. Beyurasaf al-Azdahhāk (Havan, 2004, p. 6). In his Muʿjam al-Buldān, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī records that "al-Mawṣila" ranked among the foremost centers of the Islamic world in terms of conquest and trade, counting as one of the major settlements of its time by virtue of its breadth and prosperity (Havan, 2004, p. 6). Guy Le Strange notes that during the Persian period the city was also called "Bavardašīr" or "Havardašīr," although he considers these names exceptional (Le Strange, 1905, p. 87).

Situated on the western bank of the Tigris, Mosul stood at the heart of Diyār Rabīʿa, the eastern part of al-Jazīra in the medieval period. The name Mawṣil, derived from the Arabic root waṣl (to connect, to join) and meaning "junction," directly reflects the city's geographical position (Sakkār, 2006, p. 361). At its founding, Mosul lay at the intersection of caravan routes and at the confluence of several branches of the Tigris—an advantageous location that illuminates both the etymology of its name and the regional role the city would play across the centuries.

Evliya Çelebi inserts Mosul into the same sacred chain as Nusaybin, portraying it as a center of "popular theology" where talismans and prophetic legends interpenetrate (p. 792). The first example is the "fountain of death," a curse formula embedded in the vernacular: it was believed that if a tyrannical ruler were made to drink from this water he would perish "within three days." Hence the malediction, "May the fountain of Mosul be the one you drink," reflects the linguistic imprint of this belief (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 792). A second example is the Ardashir fire temple near the ʿAlī Bath: according to Evliya, this fire, which went out on the night of the Prophet's birth, would at times ignite of its own accord "by the effect of talismans," illuminating caravan routes; he claims to have traveled "for eight hours" by its light during his return journey in 1059/1649. Although mineral explanations (sulfur/naphtha) are mentioned, the narrative ultimately anchors the phenomenon in the talismanic continuity of an ancient fire cult (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 792).

The most striking narrative in Mosul's prophetic memory concerns Ḥazrat Jirjis (Cercis/George). For calling the people of Rabī (Mosul) to faith, he is said to have been burned to ashes seven times and yet to have returned each time through a miracle of resurrection. A motif of geographical curse is forged through association with the dragon imprecation at Mayyāfāriqīn; at last he is denounced as a "sorcerer" and martyred by the sword (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 793). Evliya locates Jirjis's tomb "to the right of the minbar of the great mosque," noting that the presence of graves of Ottoman dignitaries in the same space suggests a convergence of prophetic remembrance and imperial memory within a single sacred topography (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 793). In this frame Mosul stands out not only by its individual shrines but also by the idea of "collective sanctity": a widely transmitted report holds that "seventy messenger-prophets" are buried beneath the paving of the courtyard of the Jāmiʿ al-Nūr (Great Mosque). While Evliya also relates disagreements regarding pre-diluvian graves, he contrasts these with references to consensus concerning the tombs of the Prophet and of Abraham, and with allusions to Ottoman judicial registers, underscoring official-religious oversight; at the same time, he presents the oral traditions of the ʿUrbān and Tatar groups as a local foundation of legitimacy (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 794).

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The story of Prophet Jonah (Yūnus) acquires a localized, "geographical miracle" dimension in Mosul. Having been cast into the sea by lot and swallowed by the fish, Jonah is said to have been carried across "seven seas," brought to the Shatt, and cast ashore at Mosul on the fortieth day. The shade of the gourd, linked to Qurʾān 37:146, is complemented by the report that "the gourd was created here for Jonah for the first time" (p. 795). The belief that the "Jonah fish" visits Mosul each year exemplifies a sacred etymology within popular zoology. The formation of communal identities named in relation to Jonah—"Humaydiyya" in areas such as Aqrah, ʿImādiyya, Hakkâri, Duhok, Cizre—shows how the narrative becomes a regional charter of belonging; Evliya's note placing Jonah's tomb east of Mosul at the bridgehead beyond the Shatt topographically anchors this localization (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 795). The architectural description of the Jonah shrine renders the embodiment of sacred space visible: descending "eleven stone steps" through a curtained door to the left of the mihrab into the crypt, the visitor encounters a "luminous tomb" that makes one's "limbs tremble," capturing both the phenomenology of popular devotion and Evliya's sensory testimony (p. 796). On the same page Evliya records the veneration, within Shāfiʿī circles, of Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Shaybānī al-Jazarī (author of the Risāla al-Jazariyya) as a "great sultan," noting his death in 628/1231; the emphasis that Mosul housed "thousands of scholars and awliyāʾ" situates the city within a continuum that unites prophet, scholar, and saint (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, p. 796).

Taken together, these materials configure Mosul along an axis of "water–fire–word": the "fountain of death" is a talisman of moral justice condensed into water; the Ardashir fire becomes a cosmic sign lighting the night; and the narratives of Jirjis and Jonah establish a sacred topography where legend converges with stone (the shrine), with speech (transmitted report), and with administration (the judicial record). Thus Mosul emerges, in Evliya Çelebi's Mesopotamian vision, as the "central stage" of both supernatural justice and the culture of visitation (Evliya Çelebi, 2013, pp. 792–796).

8. CONCLUSION

Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme* brings together historical continuity, the dynamism of popular religiosity, and the persistence of cultural memory in its depiction of the sacred geography of Mesopotamia. Extending from Mardin to Mosul, this broad landscape emerges as a multilayered cultural sphere where both faith and social identity take shape. Each city embodies the legends of the past, the prophetic heritage, and the Sufi traditions, thus becoming a concrete manifestation of collective memory.

Evliya's narrative style combines the precision of observation, the vitality of oral tradition, and the depth of intuitive perception. This synthesis renders sacred sites not merely as historical structures but as living spiritual centers. Shrines, lodges, tombs, and sacred waters constitute symbolic spaces that materialize the devotional practices of the people and reinforce their sense of belonging. Rituals of prayer, vow, healing, and visitation create an uninterrupted flow of spirituality between past and present.

The cities examined in this study are interpreted as complementary links in the chain of Mesopotamian religiosity. The lodge of Shaykh Zûlî Sultan in Mardin represents the continuity of popular sainthood; the shrine of Dhū al-Kifl in Hasankeyf bears the marks of prophetic heritage; the sanctuaries of Nusaybin embody the symbolic narratives of folk theology; Cizre preserves the universal memory inherited from the Flood; and Mosul, through its talismans and legends, becomes a focal point uniting faith and artistry. Thus, Mesopotamia transforms into a vibrant map of spirituality where multiple religious layers, cultural transmissions, and folk beliefs intertwine.

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Evliya Çelebi interprets space not merely as a travel route but as a vessel of memory, belonging, and spiritual experience. For him, the city is a living text: every street, every shrine, and every spring reveals a stratum of meaning that carries the continuity of collective consciousness. This approach articulates a multifaceted understanding of place that encompasses both its physical and symbolic dimensions.

The Mesopotamian sections of the *Seyahatnâme* simultaneously reflect the transformation of popular beliefs over time, the social role of sacred sites, and the cultural fabric of memory. Through his pen, Evliya unites the aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of popular religiosity, offering a distinctive perspective to the cultural history of Anatolia and Mesopotamia. This totality reinforces a vision of cultural continuity that carries the layers of the past into the spiritual sensibilities of the present.

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