VOLUME THREE

In the Retinue of Melek Ahmed Pasha
EVLIYA DEPARTS for Damascus with its governor Silihdar Murtaza Pasha in September 1648. On the way he stops briefly at Akşehir, home of Nasreddin Hoca, the legendary subject of so much Turkish humour. His peregrinations in the Holy Land include a stay in Safed (cf. Volume 9, selection 3) where he encounters a community of Sephardic Jews. He considers Ladino (or Judaeo-Spanish, which he had also heard in Istanbul and was later to hear in Salonica) to be the Jewish language par excellence. While in Damascus he has encounters with the colourful Sheikh Bekkar the Naked (cf. Volume 9, selection 5).

A year later Murtaza Pasha is appointed governor of Sivas, and Evliya accompanies him there. At the end of his long description of the city, we find the satirical story of the girl who gave birth to an elephant, and his description of the Armenian language. Stopping at Divriği, he sees the cats that he had found auctioned in Ardabil (Volume 2, selection 7). With the Pasha’s dismissal from office, Evliya returns to Istanbul in July 1650.

He now attaches himself to another kinsman, Melek Ahmed Pasha. For the next twelve years Evliya is in Melek Pasha’s service, and his travel itinerary follows the various posts to which the Pasha is assigned as governor (beylerbey). In this volume we hear about Evliya’s travels with Melek Pasha in Thrace and the Balkans. He reports on witchcraft in a Bulgarian village; on hot springs (cf. those of Bursa, Volume 2, selection 2) and prostitution in Sofia; and, in the countryside, on a fountain that tests for homosexual proclivities.

Evliya returns to Istanbul in 1653.
1. Nasreddin Hoca in Akşehir³³

Description of the saints’ tombs of Akşehir

First, in the cemetery outside the city to the south is buried the scholar of worldly and religious matters, Simurgh of Mt Qaf of certainty, the sheikh Hoca Nasreddin. He was born here in Akşehir during the reign of Gazi Hudavendigar (Sultan Murad I, reg. 1362–89) and grew up during the reign of Bayezid (I) the Thunderbolt (reg. 1389–1402). He was a great saint, with many virtues and a ready wit, and displayed miraculous graces.

He consorted with Timur³⁴ who enjoyed his company and, for his sake, exempted this city of Akşehir from pillage. The counsels and pleasantries of Nasreddin Hoca are on everybody’s lips and have become proverbial. For example:

One day Timur went with the Hoca to the public bath. As they were bathing themselves, each wrapped in a bath-cloth, Timur said, ‘Hoca, if it were necessary for a world-conquering emperor like my humble self to be sold, how much would you buy me for?’

‘40 akçe,’ he replied.

‘Hey Hoca,’ he said, ‘my bath-cloth is worth 40 akçe.’

‘Yes, and I would buy the bath-cloth for 40 akçe. Otherwise you’re a lame and wounded fellow from the band of Mongols, you’re not worth a Hille penny!’

Timur enjoyed this display of wit and showered him with gifts.

There are many such jokes and pleasantries. After the death of the Thunderbolt he lived until the reign of Çelebi Sultan Mehmed (I, reg. 1413–21). He is buried in a domed shrine outside this city of Akşehir, and a railing surrounds the tomb.

Adventure of this humble one. When the trumpet signal for departure was sounded at midnight and the heavy baggage had left, I too sent off my servants and left the city at midnight with one slaveboy. I recalled the belief that if one visits the tomb of Hoca Nasreddin and remembers some of his pleasantries, one is bound to laugh. Wondering if this was true, I veered left off the main road with
my horse and went straight toward his noble tomb.

‘Peace upon you, O people of the graves!’ said I. Thereupon a voice came from within Nasreddin’s shrine, ‘And upon you peace, O princely soul!’

My horse started with a grunt, rose up on its hind legs and tore through the cemetery. I had a hard time reining him in. One of his legs tripped on a grave, and I nearly suffered the torment of the grave.

‘Agha!’ cried the voice from the Hoca’s tomb. ‘Give alms and go laughing, but be sure to come back.’ It turned out to be the tomb’s keeper.

‘Hey, fellow, I greeted the people of the graves (ehl-i kubur), you are people of the backsides (ehl-i dübur), so why did you return the greeting?’ I gave him a few akçe.

‘Go, may God be your helper.’ He sent me off with this benediction, and I indeed went laughing at these events.

33 n.b. Evliya was probably never in Akşehir since, aside from some administrative details derived from a written source, and the passage above, the only information about it he mentions is that it is famous for its apples.

34 Tamerlane or Timur the Lame, who defeated the Ottomans at the Battle of Ankara in 1402
2. Safed

Description of Kafr Nahon, i.e. the notable city of Safed, country of the Jews, province of Canaan, town of the Yids

After the Deluge its founder was Shem, son of Noah – peace be on him. Until the time of Jacob this city prospered so much that even cities like Askalon, Hasan (Bilbays), Palestine, Tiberias, Jerusalem and Zagzaga were not so prosperous as this city of Safed. That is because all the Children of Israel originated from Safed and had their ancient Temple here. This city has become their Ka‘ba – saving the comparison! – and remains so even to this day.

When Sultan Selim (I) took this city from the Sultan al-Ghawri of the Egyptian Circassian (Mamluk) dynasty in the year 922 (1516) it had, according to the register of Tavași Sinan Pasha, a harac tax on 600,000 Jews. Today between seventy and eighty thousand Jews still live here, their houses layer on layer. According to their vain belief, a Jew cannot be considered anything but a Karaite Yid if he does not visit this city once in his life; or, if being unable to do so, he does not rub his face with its dust; or if he does not drink from its water; or does not fumigate himself with the (smoke of the) autumnal leaves of its trees.

I have recorded elsewhere the founder of this city and its being the capital of the Jews together with its public edifices and buildings, pious foundations, and chronograms. In volume (—) (9) of our Book of Travels dealing with the Hajj, I have written a detailed account of all the shrines of the sons and daughters of Jacob and the sons of Ishmael; Jacob’s House of Sorrows; and the houses of Ephraim son of Joseph, Isaac, Ishmael and Job, together with a thousand other notes.

For this year’s journey I will record here the language of the Jews according to the language of the Torah, since those who are world-travellers and boon-companions of mankind must have a smattering of every language.

35 n.b. Cuhud and its derivative Çufut are derogatory variants of Yahud meaning ‘Jews’.
Description of the Language of the Jews. The Yid Jews are an ancient and accursed people. Of the 124,000 prophets, 4,000 did not die in their beds but were martyred by this tribe of Jews. The fact that they martyred such prophets as John, Zachariah, George, etc. is recorded in thousands of commentaries and histories.

Two books were revealed to one religious community. One is the Book of Psalms which God revealed to the prophet David; as attested by the Koranic verse: To David We gave the Psalms (17:55). David was initially a preacher and counsellor who recited the Psalms in a loud Davidic voice. He made his living by fashioning iron into armour. Then God commanded David to wage war on King Goliath. King Saul believed in David. There was a great battle in the plain of Marj Dabiq near Aleppo where David crushed Goliath’s head with a sling shot and killed him instantly. God gave David Goliath’s kingdom, and thus he became both prophet and emperor, as attested by the verse in the Sura of al-Baqara: David slew Goliath, and God bestowed on him sovereignty (2:251).

The Book of Psalms, revealed to David, does not contain promise and threat, narrative, command and prohibition, permitted and forbidden; rather it consists entirely of prayers. All that the rabbis recite from their leather straps in the synagogues of the tribe of Judah are psalms, and what they swear by is the book of Psalms. As for the Torah, revealed to Moses, it is entirely promise and threat, command and prohibition, narrative, permitted and forbidden, paradise and hell and purgatory, resurrection and judgement. Everything in the Torah has to do with judgement, as in the Koranic verse: Nor anything green or sear, but is recorded in a glorious Book (6:59).

Aside from the Jews, among the Christians as well – the infidels of Sweden, Holland, Dunkerque, Denmark, Germany, etc. – they all read the Torah and the Psalms and they speak Jewish (Yahudice). But the Jews are a bunch of erring infidels whose sect is contrary to that of the Christians.

The Jewish language is this: un 1 dos 2 tire 3 kotra 4 çinko 5 si 6 sete 7 ota 8 nova 9 deç 10 kim anda What are you saying? venki Come! un dos Where were you? inkaza I was at home miyalom My dear ki kaziyan What were you doing? avra porta Open the door serele porta Shut the door miyaloma sinyor vamos sadaka My dear sir, go to alms miyaloma ono pa çuz dami My dear, give me a vagina miyaloma bono andam My dear, look at me nicely miyaloma andami sinyor si My dear, look, my dear sir.

Jewish names: Abraham Abraham Mordahay Nisim Mayliho Ishmael Yaho Jacob Duşenho Isra’il Musiko Moses (Musa çelebi) Kazeliko Harun Zehirya

[2 lines empty]
Names of Jewish women:
[2 lines empty]
pastaliko pastry kaşar pure turfα impure sinago synagogue
[5 lines empty]

The tribe of Jews has countless words and expressions other than these, but this much will suffice. Also there are many things to describe about the city of
2. Safed

Safed, but they are all recorded above (i.e., below in Volume 9).
3. Sheikh Bekkar the Naked on the road outside Damascus

Description of the Stages and Castles and Cities on our Journey from Damascus to Turkey in the year 1059 (1649)

On the first day of the month of Dhu’l-qa’dā in that year (6 November 1649) Emir Pasha, removed from office in Egypt, arrived in Damascus and set up camp in the Blue Square (Gökmeydanı). On the same day our lord Murtaza Pasha departed from Damascus. We went north, skirting the Damascus orchards, to the stages of Harasta … Kusayra … Katife … Karalar castle … Caravanserai of the Two Gates (İkikapulu hani).

This is a great han with two gates, like a castle, in one of the Damascus districts. Its governor and benefactor is (—) Pasha, as I recorded above. Departing from this place we were proceeding north through the desert with all the troops.
Saintly deeds of Sheikh Bekkar the Naked. A certain Sheikh Bekkar showed up from the east, with bare head and bare feet and bare chest, both hands on his shoulders, and his penis and testicles swaying back and forth.

‘I came Baghdad!’ he cried to the soldiers (in ungrammatical Arabic) as he passed us by. The chief muleteer Halil Agha, who was a very upright person, said, ‘O Sheikh Bekkar, where is your gift from Baghdad?’

Sheikh Bekkar had both hands on his shoulders. With a besmele he pulled out a bunch of dates with his right hand. They were hastavi dates that seemed freshly picked from Rum-nahiye in Baghdad, a bunch weighing 40 Ottoman batmans.

‘This grew Baghdad,’ he said and gave the dates to the chief muleteer. Then he approached Murtaza Pasha and said with a smile, ‘O Murtaza, go Turkey then went Istanbul and went Erzurum, went etc., went to Baghdad and went to the land of the Kurds, died from the love of God, martyred in the castle of Dühük.’

No one had any idea what these mysterious words meant. Sheikh Bekkar turned toward Damascus and in a moment vanished like a shadow. The chief muleteer gave the Pasha the bunch of dates he had received from Sheikh Bekkar.

‘Praise God!’ said the Pasha, ‘they are hastavi dates of Baghdad, freshly picked.’ He gave them to this humble one in a copper bucket. I ate three of them as a blessing and kept the rest. I plan to give one to anyone suffering from epilepsy or paralysis.

God knows, this saintly deed of Sheikh Bekkar happened exactly as I have recounted it. To be sure, dates do grow in Damascus, but not productively, and hastavi dates of Baghdad grow nowhere else but there. Sheikh Bekkar one day previously was walking about and exchanging banter with us among the tents in
Karalar castle, and the next day brought a bunch of hastavi dates to this place near İkikapulu. The strange thing is that none of the date palms – whether in Qurna, Jawazir, Samawat, Arja, Hilla, Baghdad or Damascus – was in flower. The miracles of the saints are true.

He was a great and naked saint, one suspected of miraculous graces – may his spiritual support be ever present. God be praised, I associated with such a great saint and received his benediction. Also this humble one had a tambourine in my house (i.e., while residing in Damascus?). Whenever he came to my house he would find the tambourine, put it in my hand and say ‘Play the tambourine,’ and as I played he would dance ecstatically.

He was originally from Baghdad where he was the muezzin at the (—) Friday mosque. One night while reciting temcid and seeing that the gate of God’s mercy was open, he flung himself from the minaret, disappeared from Baghdad, and appeared naked in Damascus.

He used to go about the marketplace naked. He would enter the women’s bath-houses, only a bath-towel around his loins, and rub the women down with soap and a bath-cloth. ‘The baby in your womb,’ he would say, ‘will be my daughter in this world and the next, or will be my son,’ and by God’s command the baby would be born precisely as he indicated.

One time he did this to the wife of a certain janissary colonel. After rubbing her down he placed his hand on her womb and said: ‘The baby boy in your womb will be my spiritual son and will go about like me.’ When the woman delivered, it was a boy like a gold piece, congealed light. Sheikh Bekkar showed up at the door and said ‘Give me my boy.’ Taking the baby in his arms he recited the call-to-prayer in its ear and puffed on its head, then returned it to its mother and left. By God’s wisdom, the newborn began to squirm and babble and refused any swaddling or any garment. Before he was three years old this son of the colonel began to go about naked alongside Sheikh Bekkar. Indeed, all his movements and gestures and attitudes are exactly those of Sheikh Bekkar. Only Sheikh Bekkar is not very talkative, but this spiritual son of his talks non-stop. He chats with anyone who catches his eye, and if there are no people he talks with animals and even with stones and trees. He is such a pure innocent child – may his spiritual support be ever present.
In the year 1059 (1649), while Silihdar Murtaza Pasha was governor of Sivas in the province of Rum, a delegation appeared before the Pasha from a village near Turhal. They had a box in which was the corpse of a white baby elephant. ‘My lord,’ they said, ‘this little elephant was born in our village of a girl who is a virgin maiden. Now our magistrate has imprisoned the girl along with her father and mother and other relatives. The baby elephant was born alive, but the prefect had the midwife smother it. We beg my lord to dispatch one of your agents, a fair-minded officer, to have the girl and her mother freed from prison and brought here so that you may determine the truth.’ The provincial councillors of Rum were amazed at the sight of this baby elephant.

‘Evliya Çelebi,’ said Murtaza Pasha, ‘this is a job for you. Let’s bring all of them before the provincial council. Let’s see how a virgin maid can give birth to an elephant. This is a divine mystery. Go quickly, punish those who have committed this deed, and bring them before the council.’

I was nonplussed. ‘You tell me to punish those who have committed this deed. But the one who has committed this deed is the Free-choosing Actor, the Lord of the Worlds. He has done this in order to manifest His creative wisdom. Whom should I punish? My lord, I beg you not to reveal this mystery. The whole world will start to say that women in the Ottoman Empire give birth to elephants. Just ignore this case.’

Some of the Pasha’s companions spoke up: ‘My lord, there is an issue here of income and expenditure. The matter requires a strong and brave individual, one who fears neither God nor man, who will investigate why they had the elephant killed and will haul the murderers and all the villagers in chains before the council. If they had not killed the elephant, you might have sent it to Sultan Mehmed, who recently assumed the throne, and it would have been a gift the likes of which no previous sultan has received since the world has stood.’

They pointed to the elephant corpse in the box, marvelling at its ears and lips, its trunk and eyes, its tail and legs. ‘God be praised, my lord,’ they said. ‘You should exact 10,000 gurus from the person who smothered this innocent baby elephant, and 40,000 or 50,000 from the girl who bore it and from her parents.’ At their insistence a decree was drawn up and the head of the military band was
ordered to go and summon all the villagers and the girl who had given birth to the elephant along with all of her relatives.

Three days later seventy individuals were brought before the provincial council in chains. The first to be questioned was the girl who had given birth to the elephant.

This was her story: ‘My lord. Three years ago a delegation from the sultan of India, bearing two elephants as a gift for Sultan Ibrahim, stopped in our plain of Turhal. All the townsfolk and the people from the surrounding villages went to see them. I was with a group of five or ten girls. We arrived at a pleasant spot and mounted some carts to get a better view. As they passed they cried, ‘You are too close, get down from the carts.’ Some of the women near me were whispering to each other, ‘Allah! what a big animal this is.’ I went forward, saying, ‘Mommy, where is the elephant?’ I saw a black house on five pillars. One of the pillars was swaying back and forth. I kept going forward, saying, ‘Mommy, where is the little elephant?’ Then I heard everyone shouting, ‘Hey, girl, stop!’ The next thing I saw was that big black house walking toward me. Something snatched me up in the air. I was in a dark warm place. I floundered about, crying for help, and my hands and feet kept sticking into warm flesh. Suddenly, after about an hour, something took hold of me and left me outside in the sunlight. I lay senseless for three hours, then they took me home. My belly began to swell. It got bigger day by day. Three years later I gave birth to this baby elephant. It was alive for one month. Then the midwife, urged on by the prefect, killed my elephant son. I demand justice.’

When she made this plea all the people of Turhal and Eynebazar and Kazova testified that it was so. Murtaza Pasha clapped the seventy individuals in chains and, keeping them confined for twenty days, got 20,000 guruş out of them. He also preserved the baby elephant in salt, planning to send it to the Felicitous Threshold (i.e. Istanbul).

These events occurred as I witnessed them, by divine mystery. God is capable of everything (2:20). The Free-choosing Actor wrought His eternal will in such a way that the elephant swallowed that virgin. She became pregnant by remaining in its belly for three hours, and a baby elephant was born. God does what He wills by His power and judges what He wishes by His might. This is clear proof of the wisdom of the Koranic verse: For His are the creation and the command; blessed be God, Lord of the Worlds (7:54).
5. Armenian

Language of the Armenians, called Soul of Yarmeni, an Ancient Community

This land of Sivas is an ancient city that has been in the hands of the Armenians ever since the time of its builder, Amalek. They trace their descent back to Esau, son of the prophet Isaac. They were a people of giants (or tyrants). According to their own claim, it was Amalek who created the Armenian language, which is spoken in its most elegant and refined form in the city of Sivas.

They belong to the Jacobite religious community. Since they believe in the Messiah, they are all Christians and followers of the Gospel. Furthermore, they are divided into seven sects and speak seven dialects. But being Christians, they all act according to the Gospel and recite the Gospel.

The Armenians of the Arab lands are called Jacobites, all of whom – in Damascus, Aleppo and Iraq – speak the Jacobite dialect and their false and unorthodox rituals are of a different sort; the Jacobite dialect is recorded in its place. The dialect of the Mighdisi people is a different dialect, of which some words and phrases are close to Persian; it is the most elegant of their dialects. The dialect of (—) is close to the language of the Kurds. The dialect of (—) is close to Arabic. The dialect of (—) is close to Georgian; these are Anushirvanis. The dialect of (—) does not resemble any other language; they are the Gypsies of the Armenians.

But they all follow the Gospel and belong to the Christian religious community. Only their false doctrines are not like those of the Greeks. The Armenians eat oily foods on the eve of the Christian Festival of the Egg (Easter), while the Greeks eat oily foods on the following morning, according to their false fast.

The world traveller and boon-companion of mankind greatly requires to know some of this Armenian language. Therefore this small amount has been recorded here so that he will know enough to get sustenance in the stages of his journey and in the villages and towns, and so that he will be on good terms with everyone he meets.
First are the numbers for counting in Armenian, which differ in the seven dialects: meg 1 erguk 2 erek 3 çors 4 hink 5 veç 6 yot 7 ut 8 inı 9 das 10 meg das 11 erguk das 12; asvas God haç bread çur water mis meat gavoh grapes çamic raisins eku Come! kina Go! mste Sit! el Get up! kini Sleep! hncor apple zu kina per kari Hey, go bring barley çika There isn’t any kina pındırı Go look for some yur kadınam Where shall I find some? lina kadını zu gnikad kunem Go get some or I’ll fuck your wife zu kina Hey, come kurtank bostanı kini hmenk Come let’s go to the garden and drink wine ah imhokiz diga O my dear boy ahbar eku inç kuzes imhokiz Brother, come, what do you want my dear? bahadur hist kezi kəsirem My hero, I love you very much yes iz kezi kəsirem I love you too eku ertank mer duni Come let’s go to our house together bak mı dur inc bake ah diga Give me a kiss O my dear boy vəgi kıkum tun kini … I’ll come tomorrow, you get wine right now ez nistenk hmenk Let’s sit and drink bahadur inc kığına ez kîşer kığına eku kınik My hero, whatever happens will happen tonight, come let’s go to bed.
6. The cats of Divriği

Among the Turks and Arabs and Persians there is no cat more coy and cuddly or more trained to the hunt than this Divriği cat. True, the cats of Al Wahat (the oases in the Western Desert) in Egypt and those of Trabzon and Sinop are also famous. But this Divriği cat is fat and sturdy, with a shiny coat like sable fur, and comes in a thousand colours.

Indeed these cats are brought as gifts from Turkey to Persia, in particular to the city of Ardabil where they are sold at auction by cat-brokers who put them in cages on their heads and parade them around the royal market and the bedestan crying ‘One tuman, two tumans of akçe!’ The Divriği cat goes for a great price, especially if it is spayed. Because cats in Ardabil have short lives, and so the mice of that city are notorious. The Persians, to be sure, have round trim beards, but their moustaches are all mouse-eaten, and that is why Divriği cats are so expensive.

Cry of the Ardabil cat-brokers:

You who seek a feline,
A cat to hunt your mice:
To rats it makes a beeline,
But otherwise it’s nice;
An enemy to rodents,
And yet it’s not a thief;
A pet to share your grief.

This is their patter, sung in the beyati mode, as they peddle the Divriği cats in cages perched on their heads. Because in Ardabil the mice chew up the people’s clothing – their woolen cloaks, for example – and so this city has an auction for hirre, i.e. gürbe, i.e. kuta, i.e. sennure, i.e. merrabe, i.e. maçi and pistan and mis-tan – i.e. cats.

That is how famous Divriği cats are. But some of the kadis of Divriği have gone bankrupt because of these cats and so bear a grudge against them. Every year forty or fifty cats are secretly killed and their skins tanned and made into furs to be worn in the winter. They are very like the squirrel furs of Muscovy, and the
cats with red coats are no different from the cikava furs of Azov.
7. Witchcraft in a Bulgarian village

Adventures of Evliya the humble. In that mountainous Balkan region my servants and I were guests in the house of a certain infidel, and I was comfortably settled in a corner near the fire. Suddenly an old woman entered. She was very ugly, with her hair going in all directions, and was in a rage. She sat herself next to the fire and let out a stream of expletives in her peculiar dialect. From what I could understand, the servants outside had somewhat mistreated her. When I went out to scold them, they denied it. Then seven young children came in, male and female, and gathered about her, jabbering away in Bulgarian. They did not leave any place for me near the fire, so I observed the strange scene from a little distance (before falling asleep).

Around midnight I was awakened by some footsteps. What should I see? The old woman came inside, took a handful of ashes from the fireplace, and rubbed them onto her vagina. Then she recited a spell over the ashes left in her hand and scattered them over the seven little boys and girls who were lying naked next to the fireplace. At once all seven turned into plump chickens and started to go ‘cheep cheep’. She scattered the rest of the ashes over her own head and in an instant was transformed into a big broody hen going ‘gurk gurk’. She marched out the door with the seven chicks right behind.

‘Hey, boy!’ I shouted out, in a fright. My slaveboys awoke and came over, only to see that my nose was bleeding profusely. ‘What’s going on?’ I cried. ‘Go outside and see what that racket is.’ They rushed outside and saw that witch-hen and her brood of chickens marching about among our horses, which had got loose and were tearing at each other. This seemed unusual, since horses normally like chickens, and they also like pigs, and they are never affected by scrofula or red mite (when those animals are present), and that is why you never see farriers’ shops without chickens, or horse-driven mills without pigs, or wealthy people’s houses without Jews. But this time the horses were just tearing at each other, so some peasant infidels from the village had to come and tie them down. The bewitched hen and chickens went off. One of my slaveboys, who followed them, reported what happened next, ‘One infidel took out his penis and showered the chickens with a rain of piss. At once all eight of them turned back into their human form. The one who had urinated over them gave the old hag and the chil-
dren a good beating and took them away. We followed them into a house, which turned out to be their church. He gave the woman over to a priest, and the priest anathematised her.’

My slaveboys swore that this account was true; and Antabi Müezzin Mehmed Efendi’s servants and my chief canteen-man’s servants also bore witness that they had seen human beings turn into chickens.

Whether out of fright, or because my blood was so excited, my nosebleed kept up all that night and only stopped toward dawn. In the morning I questioned my muezzin’s servants and also Mataracı Mehmed Agha’s servants. They swore that when the infidel pissed over the chickens they turned human, and they offered to bring the very man who did it. When the infidel was brought and I questioned him, he laughed and said: ‘My lord, that woman is a different breed. She used to turn into a witch once a year on a winter’s night, but this year she turned into a hen. She doesn’t harm anyone.’ He went away.

Such was the adventure that this humble one, full of fault, experienced in the above-mentioned village of Çalık-kavak. It really unnerved me.
Description of the pure hot springs in the city of Sofia. In this country hot springs are called *bana*, in Persia *germab*, in Arabia *humma*, in Türkistan (i.e. Turkey) *ılica*, in Yörükistan (i.e., among the Yörüks or Balkan nomads) *kaplıca*, among the Tatar *ilşi*, in Kürdistan *çermik*, in Serbian *köstence*, among the Türkman *ilğın*.

Here in Sofia there are five such hot springs. The first is the women’s bath – beneficial to women but not to men. If a man enters this bath he loses his hair and beard and is turned into a shiny-pated boy or a *cevellaki* dervish (i.e., one who shaves off all facial hair). But if a woman enters she loses all her body hair, including pubic hair, and the flesh around her vagina becomes as soft and smooth as her earlobes.

The second is reserved for Jewish and Christian women.

The third is reserved for Greeks, Latins, Bulgars and Armenians; other Christians are not permitted.

The fourth is only for Rabbinic Jews; all other religious communities are loath to enter it.

Each of these four baths has its own beneficial properties. But they are not imposing stone buildings. Also, the overflow from their pools forms streams that flow through the tanners’ quarters and are used for tanning.

The fifth one, the great hot spring, is in the middle of the city. It has a large domed dressing room – spacious enough for 1,000 men – and, in the middle, a pool and jetting fountain. Then one enters another domed space, so large you can hardly recognise someone on the other side. It has six vaults around the periphery, each with a Hanafi basin and water flowing from a spout in a stream as thick as your arm.

And there are two private chambers. One – called the White Chamber because it is paved with shining white marble – has a basin with the picture of a frog, as if to say, ‘You are human beings, don’t stay in the water too much like a frog.’ The other is called the Black Chamber, and indeed it is dark.

There is also a basin on the left side of the great pool called the Stopping Basin (*Diner Kurna*). If you stick your finger in a hole that is in the opposite wall, or just blow on the hole, the water stops flowing from the spout. Remove your fin-
ger, or stop blowing, and the water starts to flow again. It is a strange spectacle.

In the middle of this domed space is a large pool, ten-by-ten (cubits) in dimension and as deep as a man’s height, full to the brim with hot water. Six marble steps lead down to it on all sides, and fresh water flows into it from marble heads of dragons and lions. But the water is very hot. Lovers dally freely with their sweethearts in this pool. The bathers swim about like herons, leap and tumble, join hands and dance like dervishes or turn and croak like a flock of cranes. Or they huddle in a circle with some standing on others’ shoulders and turn in a circle with a great hue and cry.

I call this pool Lovers’ Lair because everyone here embraces his darling boy uninhibitedly and they can go off in a corner to dally undisturbed. It is such a spacious pool. Also there are numerous small basins in the changing-room where individuals may wash their garments. Others, meanwhile, are getting rubdowns with bath-gloves and soap. This gets them very clean, though some who don’t know the rules of ritual purity soil themselves (by ejaculating). It is altogether a marvellous scene, verging on mayhem.

In this bath there is no distinction between rich and poor. As long as you have a bath-cloth you can get out without giving the bath-keeper a single akçe. If you want him to guard your clothes, it costs a penny. This is worth it, since there is a mixed multitude of unsavoury individuals who come and go. If you don’t have a bath-cloth you can rent one from the bath-keeper and also get rubbed down with bath-gloves and soap for two akçe.

During the long winter nights seventy or eighty of the town notables rent this bana for a private party. The space is illuminated with hundreds of lamps and candles. They party until dawn while the city sleeps, having intimate conversations, enjoying delicious foods and musk-flavoured fruit drinks and the scents of rose-water and aloes-wood and ambergris.

The more sophisticated residents of Sofia make it a practice to fill clean jars with water from this bath and drink it when it cools, as it betokens the Water of Life. Generally the water of hot baths smells of sulfur and arsenic and tarnishes silver. This water, on the contrary, has no smell at all, nor does it tarnish metal but rather gives a shine to both silver and gold.

Bathing in this water is beneficial for leprosy, syphilis, scabies, jaundice, palpitations and baldness. Drinking it is good for diarrhoea, pleurisy and haemorrhoids. Entering it several times is a cure for fever. But there are certain rules. Sofia gets very cold in winter, so you must not stay too long in the hot bath, nor stay too long in the changing-room when you get out, for that could prove fatal. The first rule is to put on a shirt and trousers as soon as you exit the bath.

One delightful custom in Sofia is that when anyone dies, male or female, the water-carriers of his or her neighbourhood attach honey-barrels called çılır to poles and fill them up with hot water from the bana which is used to wash the body, and then it is buried, all at the expense of a pious foundation. On this occasion the soap combined with the hot water from the natural spring causes so much foam that it is like the water of Lake Van.
Another, less savoury, innovation has to do with the womenfolk of Sofia. They are covered and modest ladies who never go out into the marketplace unless there is a dire necessity. There are, however, several thousand loose women who do go out every night to ‘wash themselves’ or ‘do their laundry’. They put their clothes in a bundle, get permission from their so-called husbands, take lanterns and go to the bana or to some other house and ‘wash their soiled clothes’. It is a disgraceful practice, peculiar to this city. Our lord Melek Ahmed Pasha wanted to put an end to the practice but the notables of the province would not let him. So every night women of this sort gad about in groups until morning.

Another class of females are the very pretty Bulgar Voynuk girls employed here as household servants. Every house of the notables has five or ten, or at least one or two of these girls, who are called orfana. Elsewhere this term refers to prostitutes, but in Sofia it just means servant girl. You see these girls, with their faces uncovered, in the houses and in the markets, performing services very capably.

In short, these are the customs of old in this city. But going to the bana at night is most improper.

It was the martyr at Kosovo, Gazi Hudavendigar, who founded these hot springs. Due to his benevolence everyone here goes to the bana for free, which accounts for there being only two public baths in Sofia. The notables of the province do assert, however, that there are seventy private baths in the palatial residences of the city.

[...

Description of the picnic grounds and great summer pasture of Mt Vitosh.
The brethren of purity should know that of all the summer pastures and lofty mountains in the Anatolian region, the greatest is Mt Alburz around the countries of Dagestan and Persia and Georgia and Circassia and towering over the Caspian Sea. Next is the great summer pasture of Bingöl overlooking the Erzurum region, as we recounted above in Volume 2 when discussing the summer pastures of Anatolia that number (—) in toto.

But now in Rumelia we observed this lofty mountain pasture of Vitosh, one day’s journey from Sofia, where I came to spend the month of July with seventy companions. Having climbed to the most flourishing site we set up our tents and busied ourselves with picnics, parties and pleasure excursions.

The peak of this mountain is the summer-pasture for Salonica, Kavala, Serrez, Zihne – in short, all the cities of Rumelia. Flocks of sheep numbering in the hundreds of thousands spend seven months of the year here. From these sheep we got over 100 lambs to make into kebabs.

And every day we feasted on trout that we caught in the lakes and cooked in

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36 The reference to ‘Volume 2’ (cild-i sanimiz) must be to an earlier redaction of the Book of Travels. As we have the text now, the listing of Anatolian summer pastures is found in Vol. 3, fol. 89a, that of Rumelian summer pastures in Vol. 3, fol. 18b. Cf. Dankoff 2004, 55.
butter. There are fish here weighing six or seven okkas the likes of which are not found in the summer pastures of Bin Göl, Göksün or Ramazanoğlu. There are ruby-coloured gold-sprinkled musk-scented trout, as well as carp and fish known as şibe and dilçe that are found here and nowhere else.

Another speciality of the region are the sour cherries growing on a kind of squat shrub. There are also strawberries and, in the lower valleys, chestnuts, wild pears, sour plums, medlars and rowanberries. Day and night we drank sour-cherry juice cooled with pieces of ice like crystal.

According to the local authorities there are on this mountain 3,000 sheepfolds called eşrek or saya. The shepherds – Serbian and Bulgarian and Voynuk infidels – live in long huts that resemble caravel galleons and their daughters are Bulgarian mountain beauties. There are lovely boys as well, but the plump and ruddy girls of the Yörüks and Çıtkaks and the other country bumpkins win the beauty-prize of the Franks.

We stayed for five days in the Yörük tents savouring their milk and cream and yoghurt, curds and whey and buttermilk and beestings and cheeses, and their butter-baked breads and pastries, and other such light-fare specialities of these summer pastures, and fattening ourselves on roasted lamb.

In sum, we spent a total of forty days among the Yörüks and Çıtkaks, going from tent to tent and savouring the regional delights. Eventually we got a Yörük guide to take us back to Sofia. He told us about a fountain nearby, springing from the rocks, called the Fountain of Luck (Tali‘ Çeşmesi). ‘Go try your luck there,’ he said, and took us through that valley. As we were making our way on that difficult road, Refi‘izade Şefi‘i Çelebi, who was from Sofia, spoke up, ‘Do you know what the Fountain of Luck is that this old Yörük is taking us to?’

‘No,’ we replied, ‘we’ve never heard of it.’

**Description of the Fountain of Luck, the Spring of Plato the Divine**

‘Listen, O brethren of loyalty,’ said Şefi‘i Çelebi. ‘It is a fountain of pure water that refuses to flow for any man who has ever committed murder, or any man who was sodomised in his youth. But any man who is clean-skirted can drink freely from that Water of Life. If you can’t get water from it you will be shamed and blamed among your peers. Is it a good idea to go to such a fountain?’

Some of our companions started teasing him, ‘Şefi‘i Çelebi has been a homeless vagrant for the past forty days. He’s anxious to get home and make up the Friday night prayers he missed and dally with the beauties of Sofia.’

‘Let the mare that mothered you feel shame,’ said Şefi‘i Çelebi, stung by their taunts. ‘Whoever doesn’t go is an old woman. Onward, father Yörük, show us the way!’

So we proceeded toward the Fountain of Luck. But most of our companions began to complain that the road was hard or the road was long. Finally, having arrived at that Water of Life, we dismounted in a shady grove and set up camp.
Adventure of the brethren of purity. Before us was a sheer cliff rising to the sky and a pure stream flowing out of the rocks. The group urged one another on, and withdrew to this corner and that to consult, but no one would dare approach to drink. Finally Şefi‘i Çelebi said: ‘God be praised, I know that I have been innocent and pure in all respects, from the time I was a child until now.’ So he came forward, uttering a besmele, fearlessly drew some pure water from the spring, and drank it.

Next to dare was Müezzinzade Ali Çelebi. Taking up his wooden begging-bowl, he reached out for the water, but suddenly the spring stopped flowing. Everyone made fun of him, crying, ‘You’re a catamite.’ The poor fellow turned pale and couldn’t say a word.

Now the party started quarrelling, some claiming that they had drunk but the others could not, some saying ‘Let’s drink,’ others saying ‘Let’s go.’ Eventually they all swore not to reveal what happened, and began to draw water one by one.

When Şefi‘i Çelebi’s brother approached, as soon as he stretched out his hand the water stopped flowing, and again the others started to make fun.

Then there was Hımhım Mehmed Çelebi, who was Şeyhzade Çelebi’s boy: the spring stopped while he was still ten paces from it. They all burst out laughing: ‘This one must have been sodomised quite a lot!’

Resmi Çelebi uttered a besmele and drank without hesitation.

When Muhzirzade approached, the water stopped but then began flowing again and he drank – a sequence that the others in the party did not know how to interpret.

Now one of my slaveboys came forward and fearlessly took a drink. Immediately all the party fixed their attention on me and insisted that I too should drink.

‘O friends and lovers,’ said I, ‘you know that I am a world-traveller, free and easy and friends with all. Please don’t force me to do this.’ The more I objected, the more they laughed and kept pressing me, ‘You have seen how it stands with us, now let’s see about you!’

Of course, I was aware of my own situation; still, I couldn’t shake off a nagging fear. Seeking spiritual succour from my great ancestor, Turk of the Turks, the saintly Hoca Ahmed Yesevi, I took up the begging-bowl with a besmele, drew some pure water from the spring, and drank it. My friends all rejoiced.

Now Sarrac Mehmed Çelebi drew water and drank, thanking God.

Then it was the turn of the old Yörük who had brought us to the spring. He expressed misgivings, saying, ‘Children, my luck is bad, the water might stop’ – and indeed, he was unable to draw from the spring.

‘Hey old man,’ they joked, ‘you’re a catamite too!’

The upshot was that seventy individuals tried to drink from the spring at this bare rock, and only five were able to do so. It is a strange and wondrous spring, under a talismanic spell. No one could fathom the mystery of this fountain.

The next day we entered Sofia, having been absent forty-one days. […]
A marvellous and noteworthy spectacle. Upon the lead-tiled roof of the ancient Friday mosque named the Çelebi Mosque, which is in front of the Pasha’s palace in the city of Sofia, a pair of storks made their nest and deposited their eggs.

One day a notorious rogue named De bağoğlu (‘son of the tanner’) climbed up to the roof of this mosque, removed the stork eggs, and put crow eggs in their place. Eventually these hatched and two crow chicks emerged, according to the verse:

If you put crow eggs beneath a blessed peacock
What hatches are crows, despite a thousand schemes.

When the father stork returned from his foraging, what should he see but two black crow chicks squirming in the nest. He gave the mother stork a sound drubbing with his beak, then flew up and began to cry and wail as he soared about over the entire city of Sofia. Thousands of storks assembled and flew straight to Çelebi Mosque, landing on the domes and covering the roof so that you could not see a single lead tile.

All these birds came forward one by one to peer into the nest and take a look at the grafted crow chicks. They raised such a hue and cry on the mosque dome that it frightened the wits of the passers-by. None of the birds ate or drank that day; they just kept up their crowing and cawing. So there was no peace of mind in Sofia on that day. All the people stopped what they were doing to watch the storks.

Finally the crowd of storks killed the crow chicks. Then they rushed upon the mother stork, accusing her of adultery, and cut her to pieces with their beaks. After some further stork talk they gave the father stork another mother stork as his mate, and all flew back to their own nests.

The townsfolk marvelled at this incident, and our lord Melek Ahmed Pasha too was quite astounded. ‘Have that scoundrel who exchanged the eggs brought here immediately,’ he said, ‘we’ll punish him.’ But then he decided to bide his time saying, ‘Be patient, God almighty will punish that rogue as he deserves.’

A few days later – by God’s wisdom – that notorious outlaw who had exchanged the stork eggs – he was a Segban servant named Uşkurta De bağoğlu – was tipsy and went to visit his lady friend. Just as he was shuttling on her loom like a master weaver, the lady’s husband suddenly entered and saw that the workshop was in full swing. This householder bared his sword in a fit of zealous rage, rushed upon his wife and on Uşkurta De bağoğlu, and led them outside wounded and manacled, crying, ‘See, O people of Muhammad!’

When they reached Bana-başı, the gathering place of Sofia’s mystics and lovers, some Zadra janissaries were squabbling over a woman, and it turned out that this woman was the original whore of that very De bağoğlu who had exchanged the stork eggs. So now De bağoğlu freed himself from his captor and began trying to rescue his whore. In the midst of the struggle the janissaries bared
their swords and cut up both Debbağoğlu and his whore, and left them in Bana-başı.

A band of youthful tanners from the town brought Debbağoğlu’s corpse to the Pasha’s palace, crying, ‘The janissaries killed our Çelebi, here is his corpse!’ Since the Pasha was rather displeased at this plea for justice, the tanner youths put Debbağoğlu’s corpse under the eaves of the mosque in front of the Pasha’s palace.

So you see the divine plan! Because this Debbağolu took the stork eggs and put crow eggs in their place, when the crows hatched, all the birds cut the female stork to pieces and dropped them from the eaves of the mosque. A few days later – according to the verse,

Avenger is one name of the Eternal One

– God had him cut to pieces, as well as his whore in place of the female stork, and had them leave Debbağolu’s corpse in the very place where the storks had left the stork. For God is just.

When the Pasha heard of this he said, ‘I ought to have punished him, but I cast him to God, and a few days later God punished him. He got what he deserved. Have that damned fellow’s corpse removed from the courtyard of the mosque, shrouded in a mat, and buried.’ So the tanner brigands took away the hide of the tanner’s son and brought it to Bana-başı to be tanned. It was quite a spectacle. Many moral lessons can be drawn from this event.

After the Debbağolu affair our lord the Pasha banished all the prostitutes of Sofia from the town. A few of them, by leave of the Sharia and for the reform of the world, were strung up like chandeliers to adorn the town at the street corners in the silk market. The notables of the province were grateful that their town was now tranquil and free of prostitutes. But the rogues and the brigands, for the sake of their carnal pleasures, bruited it about that the town’s resources had grown scarce, and there would now be famine and dearth, even plague.

And indeed – by God’s wisdom – the plague did begin to spread in the city from day to day. By the end of a month, 500 people, men and women, were dying from it daily. It reached the point that thousands of people fled from Sofia to other regions. Seventy-seven of our fortunate lord’s renowned aghas, among his highest officers, died. The Pasha too had to take to his bed from illness. His head swelled up like an Adana squash, his tongue was scorched and turned black, his ears oozed with pus. More than once he was on the verge of death.

(Melek Pasha recovers from his illness, but is dismissed from office.)