

The Evliya Çelebi Way Project

In the steps of Historical Long Rider Evliya Çelebi

Several scholars and plantsmen are following in Evliya's tracks with the purpose of recording and raising awareness of the unique landscape and disappearing horse culture of this richly diverse region of Turkey.

Evliya Çelebi is an Historical Long Rider who rode in Europe, Asia and Africa in the mid-1600s.

The Evliya Çelebi Way is an international project of **historical re-enactment** and **cultural re-connection**

that will establish a Cultural Route through Western Anatolia.

The Evliya Çelebi Way is primarily an equestrian route designed to generate interest in Turkey's vanishing horse culture, thereby reconnecting Turkish people today with their heritage. Combining the romance of horseback travel in remote but stunning landscapes with rediscovery of Turkey's historical past, it must appeal to all who are concerned to preserve Turkey's heritage through sustainable tourism.

The Evliya Çelebi Way (EÇW) will be realised in 2 phases:

- Phase I: the Evliya Çelebi Ride (EÇR) a long-distance horseback ride along the route for the purpose of navigating it and gaining familiarity with local conditions
- Phase II: the establishment of the EÇW on the basis of the experience gained on the EÇR

For more information please visit [this page](#) on the University of Kent website.

The Evliya Çelebi Way: the Concept

The EÇW will be a marked route winding its way through open countryside amidst the burgeoning population centres of western Turkey. It will be an invitation both to local people to escape the town and gain a wider appreciation of the region in which they live, and also to visitors from further afield. It passes through countryside that seems familiar, yet is visited only by the few who choose to venture away from the main thoroughfares. The EÇW offers access to magnificent landscapes of towering mountains, rich agricultural valleys and hillsides, forests, marshes and little-known villages. These are ideal conditions for short or long treks, on horseback or on foot.

The establishment of the EÇW will:

- encourage preservation of the region's natural and historical landscapes and unique cultural environment
- promote economic prosperity through sustainable tourism
- act as a catalyst for local development projects in the impoverished countryside
- provide an educational and recreational resource for local young people
- promote knowledge about vanishing indigenous horse breeds and equestrian traditions, and raise awareness about the value of their preservation
- foster a sense of history by means of projects to record the stories of the villagers and townsfolk whose lives have depended on horses, and who continue to keep them

About Evliya Çelebi (1611-c.1683)

The EÇW retraces the initial stages of the journey of the singular Ottoman gentleman Evliya Çelebi as he travelled to perform the pilgrimage to the Islamic Holy Places in the Hejaz in 1671.

Son of the imperial goldsmith and a slave-girl of Abkhazian origin, Evliya Çelebi received early

training in the essentials of the Muslim faith, and was educated at the Palace School of Sultan Murad IV from where he graduated as a cavalryman. This environment clearly nurtured his talents as an entertainer, most notably in music and story-telling, and fostered the restless curiosity that prompted his desire to travel throughout the empire and beyond—and to compile an account of the knowledge he gained. Evliya Çelebi states that he had a wide circle of friends. His capacity for camaraderie shines through his Seyahatname, or Book of Travels, and he was able to undertake his journeys thanks to the wide circle of well-placed individuals—many of them his kinsmen—with whom he often travelled as they progressed across the sultan's realms. He was present at a number of military engagements, and although not a state official, he fulfilled a variety of semi-official functions including membership of an Ottoman embassy to Vienna in 1665, and negotiator with the Safavid governor of Tabriz in 1647 and 1655.

About Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname, or Book of Travels

Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels is a first-person, ten-volume narrative of his journeyings over some forty years, from the Aegean to the Sea of Azov, from the northern Black Sea steppe to the upper Nile. The author passed through Anatolia on each occasion that his impulse took him eastwards, and his Anatolian travels are recorded in five of the ten volumes of his great work. The Book of Travels is a unique geographical, social, cultural and linguistic record of the places and peoples the author encountered, and an invaluable source for many aspects of life in his time.

The manuscripts of Evliya Çelebi's travelogue have recently been made available in the modern Turkish alphabet, in a scholarly transcription of the original Ottoman. This brings them to the attention of a wider audience than hitherto. Some excerpts from the Book of Travels are available in English, French or German in modern studies, and the earliest section, about Istanbul, was famously published in English by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall in two volumes in 1834-50.

Why Evliya Çelebi?

Anatolia is abundantly criss-crossed by routes followed over the centuries by merchants, soldiers, sultans, shepherds and a host of others journeying from motives of curiosity, livelihood, conquest or gain. Many of the men and women who travelled the byways of Anatolia in times past wrote of their experiences, and thereby contributed to a rich literature on ways of life that we can today barely imagine.

The EÇW is a cultural route that offers a means of re-connecting today's Turks and others with their past, by revisiting the places visited and described by the only 'local' among the hundreds of outsiders whose travel accounts have come down to us.

An Ottoman and an Istanbulu, Evliya Çelebi viewed Anatolia both as familiar terrain, by virtue of its being part of the sultan's domains, and also as an alien milieu, where the tenor of life and cultural expression were very different from those of the citizens of the capital. To journey with Evliya Çelebi must have been constantly stimulating, for his interests were wide-ranging and his curiosity boundless, and he was possessed of a range of acquaintances whose hospitality he did not hesitate to avail himself of.

Interest in Evliya Çelebi is growing throughout Turkey today. A regular international symposium devoted to the author and his work is organised by Prof. Dr Nuran Tezcan of Bilkent University (Ankara). The most recent of these symposiums was held at Bilkent in April 2008. Every Turkish school pupil knows of Evliya Çelebi and his travels. He is also known abroad, where he is recognised as an exemplary character from a world that is little understood.

We can hope for no better guide than Evliya Çelebi in Western Anatolia today, in our quest to re-discover his world and thus re-connect with our own past.

The Evliya Çelebi Way: the Route

Evliya Çelebi travelled on horseback. The EÇW is envisaged first and foremost as an opportunity to experience the varied Turkish landscape and its cultural heritage as he and his companions would have done. His route between Istanbul and Izmir crossed a variety of terrains: he set off along the edge of the Marmara Sea and the northern coast of the Izmit Gulf, crossing to its southern shore at Dil İskelesi, from where he traversed the Samanlı Dağları to Iznik, then continued to Bursa via Yenişehir. From Bursa he turned southeast to Inegöl, and then southwards to Kütahya. And thus he continued.

His route between any two towns is not predictable on the basis of the modern road network, and takes the rider by paths and tracks that are frequented only by villagers. He names and

describes the villages and pastures through which he rode, and his route takes us away from today's major arteries.

Evliya Çelebi was very aware of the realities of being on the road for days on end, and supplied information about time and direction of travel between the places he visited, as well as simple descriptions of the terrain he crossed. When leaving one place for the next he indicated the direction in which he set out, and the number of hours to the next place he came to.

Existing compilations of historical travellers' journeyings in Anatolia indicate that most segments of the route followed by Evliya Çelebi on this journey between Istanbul and Izmir were distinct from the well-worn routes followed by other, western travellers. It seems that he had a curiosity about life away from the towns that they did not share—and this too makes him a compelling and distinctive Ottoman figure.

This first instalment of the EÇW begins in Istanbul and ends in Izmir, and is some 1,200 km long, passing through the iller of Istanbul-Kocaeli-Yalova-Bursa-Kütahya-Afyon-Uşak-Manisa-Izmir. From Istanbul the riders will head towards Bursa, followed by Inegöl-Tavşanlı-Kütahya-Afyon-Sandıklı-Banaz-Uşak-Gediz-Simav-Demirci-Kula-Gördes-Akhisar-Turgutlu-Manisa-Bergama(?)-Foça-Menemen, and thence to Izmir. Most significantly, this route criss-crosses the rarely-visited countryside between these towns: modern routes take the easy way, through the valleys where possible, while Evliya Çelebi roamed at whim, through what is, for the most part, still open country today. Suitable for riders or walkers, it is not a route intended for mass tourism, and will therefore have only positive impact on the countryside and people along the way. By the same token, it will require only a minimum of administration and maintenance once established.

The Evliya Çelebi Ride 2009

The Evliya Çelebi Ride (EÇR), the first phase of the project, is an essential preliminary towards successful realisation of the EÇW.

In May 1671 Evliya Çelebi set out from Istanbul with 8 servants, 3 companions, and 15 horses, to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in middle age. On this occasion, he was not in the company of

any dignitaries, as he so often was. His usual brief of seyahat, ticaret, ziyaret—travel, trade and pilgrimage—remained his watchwords. He and his party took more than two months to cover the distance between Istanbul and Izmir by a meandering route that guaranteed he saw everything there was to see in this region.

The EÇR is an international venture whose core participants include a Turkish horseman and broadcaster, a Scottish Ottoman historian, an English botanist, and two UK-based cultural and literary historians. Our interests are at once equestrian, archaeological, historical, cultural and botanical. We will make the first modern ride of reenactment in the hoofprints of Evliya Çelebi in Western Anatolia, with the aim of demonstrating the value of such a route ‘on the ground’, rather than in abstract.

We intend to undertake the first EÇR in late summer 2009.

Practical Issues on the Evliya Çelebi Ride

Numerous practical issues must be addressed as the EÇW takes shape, and this is the purpose of the EÇR. Among these are:

- establishing Evliya Çelebi’s route from place to place, and assessing if it is feasible today, or whether alternative routes must be followed for short stages
- assessing whether modern riders can realistically hope to enter the cities that have grown up along Evliya Çelebi’s path since his time, and finding the best paths to follow in their vicinity
- taking GPS readings along the route in order that it can be accurately mapped
- identifying segments of the EÇW suitable for short rides and walks
- ascertaining conditions concerning horse and human welfare, such as the availability of shelter and of food, fodder and water
- investigating the availability of veterinary and medical services along the route
- identifying locations where a support vehicle might most conveniently rendezvous with riders and walkers
- identifying individuals willing to participate in an oral history project concerning the disappearing horse culture of the region
- investigating remaining traces of local horse breeds pre-dating the equine improvement programmes of the late Ottoman Empire and Republican eras

There have been many long-distance riders in all corners of the world. Few, however, have aimed to re-enact the journeyings of historical figures, and fewer still have ridden across Anatolia. By undertaking the EÇR we aim to enrich the cultural background to the EÇW, finding out what can only be learned by travelling on horseback along the byways of this ancient region, and ensuring that there are no practical obstacles to realising the EÇW.

Core Participants in the Evliya Çelebi Ride (and their most recent works)

Emir Mahir Başdoğan, broadcaster of Adeta Dörtnala [Walk and Gallop], Açık Radyo, Istanbul; contributor to Zeck magazine

Andrew Byfield, co-author of Türkiye'nin 122 Önemli Bitki Alanı (2005) [122 Important Plant Areas of Turkey]

Dr Caroline Finkel, author of Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923 (2005); published in Turkish as Rüya'dan İmparatorluğa Osmanlı: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Öyküsü (2007)

Professor Donna Landry, author of Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture (forthcoming 2008); to be published in Turkish by E-Yayınları

Professor Gerald MacLean, author of The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580-1720 (2004); published in Turkish as Doğu'ya Yolculuğun Yükselişi: Osmanlı İmparatorluğun İngiliz Konukları (1580-1720) (2006)

Anticipated Outcomes of the Evliya Çelebi Ride

In addition to resolving the practical issues without which the EÇW cannot become a reality, the EÇR will produce the following outcomes which will provide publicity about the EÇW:

- a record of our adventures on Evliya Çelebi's path on video, in photographs, and in written journals culminating in a book. The book will include studies of the flora, fauna, landscape, monuments, local horse types, equestrian traditions, and villagers' stories along the route, and interweave Evliya Çelebi's experiences with those of other travellers who passed the same way

- *the EÇR will make for compelling television, and we have expressions of interest from Turkish and other media concerns*

- a translation into English of Evliya Çelebi's travels between Istanbul and Izmir
- planning for EÇR phases 2 and 3, rides in southeast Anatolia (Birecek to Urfa and back towards Karaman Maraş) and northeast Anatolia (Erzurum to Kars).

The Evliya Çelebi Ride: Progress to Date

In summer 2007 Donna Landry and Caroline Finkel visited segments of the EÇW by car to make a preliminary survey of current conditions along the route. We discovered that Evliya's itinerary still takes us to many places that are best approached on horseback. Following in his tracks reveals how open the Turkish countryside remains, and how rideable. Even in Western Anatolia, Turkey's most developed region, just off the major highways and the tourists' familiar routes, there is ideal riding country still, as the villagers know. In Anatolia it is still possible to engage in long distance cross-country riding, a rare privilege unknown in most of western Europe.

People we met as we travelled were well aware that Evliya Çelebi had passed through their village, and were delighted at the prospect of the EÇR and EÇW which they saw as a means of reminding the outside world of their existence and of the rich natural heritage and cultural traditions they possess.

Turkey's renowned equestrian heritage is fast disappearing, yet there are more horses in rural areas than most people realise. We learnt about local horse practices along the EÇW, such as the rahvan (pacing) and cirit competitions that are a flourishing aspect of rural and urban life in many areas. We made contact with and talked to at cambazları (horse traders) about the business of buying and selling that once sustained horse ownership in the countryside: they will be among the interviewees for our planned oral history of horse culture in the Western Anatolian countryside.

The other face of the coin of Turkish horseways is the studs at Karacabey—both the Thoroughbreds of the TJK stud and the Arabians at the government stud. The origins of the Thoroughbred lie in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, and we visited the studs to hear about Turkey's Arabian and Thoroughbred breeding programmes.

Evliya Çelebi remarked on the particularities of each place he passed through—such as the bridge at Gördes which was wider and more splendidly decorated than that built over the river Drina by Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, or the striped kilims of Demirci, or the cherries of Kayacık which were so famous in Anatolia that the colour red might be praised as 'red like the morocco leather and cherries of Kayacık'.

We investigated the following sections of the route in greater detail: Afyon-Şuhut-Sandıklı-Banaz-Gediz-Şaphane-Simav-Demirci and Gördes-Kayacık-Akhisar. Rahvan and cirit enthusiasts were ubiquitous, and many of the monuments Evliya Çelebi describes still extant—though others such as the Gördes bridge have now vanished. We climbed up to the fortress at Afyon—the kara hisar for which the town is famed—with our skirts hitched up (etek dermiyan edüp) as Evliya Çelebi did, as wary of the snakes and centipedes (yılan ve çiyenlar) as he. At Sorkhun near Sandıklı we found a yayla and nature reserve where three generations of feral horses (yılık atlar)—descendants of domesticated stock released into the forest as the tractor became king—run free. We filmed them in their dramatic mountain habitat. Evliya Çelebi's Gediz, with its külliye (mosque complex) built by the chief white eunuch (kızlar ağası) Gazanfer Ağa in the 1590s, was ruined in the earthquake of 1970, while Şaphane was famous as the centre of the Ottoman alum trade. We saw the extraordinary rock of Şahinkayası, near Kayacık, of which he remarks that he never saw another so high in all his 32 years of travelling and the 18 kingdoms he had visited.

The Evliya Çelebi Ride: Sponsorship

We are working on raising funds for the EÇR—both in-cash contributions to the amount of €57,500 and in-kind contributions to the amount of €24,000. This will provide sponsors with opportunities for charitable donations and advertising. We have received a contribution of €20,000 to date.

We have expressions of interest from the general secretary of TURSAB, Günnur Özalp, who offered to help with publicising the EÇR once the time is ripe.

We expect to gain UNESCO approval for the project as a European Cultural Route, at the suggestion of Turkey's UNESCO executive board member Prof. Dr Mehmet Kalpaklı of Bilkent University

The Evliya Çelebi Way: Funding

We envisage producing a budget for the EÇW once we have completed the EÇR and reassessed how best to proceed towards its realisation.

A Companion Project

With funds from the Turkish Cultural Foundation (Washington DC), we are working with In Focus Productions (London) on a three-part series provisionally entitled 'Ottomania' that explores Ottoman influences on British culture. These are the coffee-houses of the 17th century which soon became a familiar feature of British urban life; the horses imported into Britain from the Ottoman Empire in the 18th

century that had a decisive impact on social and cultural life; and the hamams that were all the rage in Victorian England in the 19th

century. We are in negotiation with potential Turkish partners regarding further funding for this project.

Relevant Reading

Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb, eds., Extreme and Sentimental History, a special issue of Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts 46:3 (Summer 2004). [Contains articles on historical re-enactment by Landry and MacLean. Available on Project Muse: www.muse.jhu.edu
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Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi, 9.cilt; haz. Yücel Dağlı, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: YKY 2005) 5-54

Robert Dankoff (with an afterword by Gottfried Hagen), *An Ottoman Mentality. The World of Evliya Çelebi* (Leiden: Brill 2004); Turkish translation forthcoming from YKY

Evliya Çelebi entry in www.ottomanhistorians.com

Kudret Emirođlu ve Ahmet Yüksel, Yoldaşımız At (Istanbul: YKY 2002); an expanded edition of this book is due out in late 2008

Donna Landry, 'The Beauty of the Beast', *Cornucopia* issue 38, vol.6 (2007) 86-97

Caroline Finkel, 'Evliya Çelebi'nin toynak izinde: yazıdan yola, parşömeden patikaya'; forthcoming in *Uluslararası Evliya Çelebi Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (Bilkent Üniversitesi, 3-5 Nisan 2008)