

SOHBETGÂH-I İBÂDETGÂH: NAMAZGÂHS IN THE BALKANS IN VIEW OF EVLİYA ÇELEBİ

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“El-hâsıl bu abd-i kemter elli bir yıl seyâhatde
böyle bir ma‘bedgâh-ı musallâgâh görmedim.
İllâ Sirem sancağı hâkinde Öziçe nâm şehrin içindeki
namazgâhı gördüm. Ol dahi ibret-nümâdır
ammâ bu Karafer[y]e musallâsı
vâcibü’s-seyr küşâde bir medrese-i azîmdir...”¹

Introduction

Evliya Çelebi was born in İstanbul in the year 1611 to a family of Kütahya origin. His father Mehmet Zilli Efendi was the head of goldsmiths in the palace, and thus Çelebi was grown up around the palace, educated at Enderun, which was then a really significant educational centre. He was accepted to the presence of the Sultan Murat IV., and then assigned at the Kılar-ı Has. He was a well educated and intellectual Ottoman man. From the early ages of his life, he has got a passion for traveling and searched opportunities to do it. He succeeded it by traveling together with the chamberlain Mehmed and İpşir Mustafa Paşa. They were high class imperial officers and were from the Melek Ahmed Paşa family. Then he continued his travels by undertaking various official responsibilities.²

Having a broad imaginary world thanks to his well education, he traveled throughout the Ottoman empire and the neighboring countries from the year 1640 on, for some 40 years. Therefore he took the official title “Seyyah-ı alem, Nedim-i

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¹ Evliyâ Çelebi b. Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliyâ Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, VIII. Kitap (=VIII), ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman-Yücel Dağlı-Robert Dankoff, İstanbul 2003, p.82.

² See for the childhood, the circumstances in which he grew up, and basic features as an itinerant of Evliya Çelebi: Mücteba İlgürel, “Evliya Çelebi”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (=DİA), 11, İstanbul 1995, pp.529-530; M. Cavid Baysun, “Evliya Çelebi”, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 4, İstanbul 1977, p.400-412. Robert Dankoff, *Seyyah-ı Âlem Evliyâ çelebi'nin Dünyaya Bakışı*, tr. Müfit Günay, İstanbul 2010; Halil İnalçık, “Açış Konuşması”, *Çağın Sıra dışı Yazarı Evliyâ Çelebi*, ed. Nuran Tezcan, İstanbul 2009, pp.14-15.

alem". When he died in 1685,¹ he left the masterpiece Seyahatname in ten volumes.² After it was reinvented in the middle of the 19th century, it has been used as an historical source for monographic and specific researches. It has lots of original titles and themes in it, still waiting for analyzing. The namazgahs that usually don't include architectural figures other than except mihrap and minber, but that had great importance in the Islamic world and the Ottoman society with sacral, social and cultural functions, belong to that category.

In this study, the namazgahs that were founded in the Ottoman period in the Balkans and that were narrated by Evliya Çelebi will be evaluated. By the help of Evliyâ's descriptions about the namazgahs founded both in urban areas and countryside in the Balkans, we will focus on especially religious and cultural functions of the namazgahs and their role in social life. But, for understanding better, we will give patterns of Evliyâ's masterpiece, and the main features about grouping and designing of the namazgahs built in that period.

The Patterns Applied in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname and the Namazgahs

One of the important elements that Evliya Çelebi collected from verbal and written sources, and that used and carefully observed during the travels was situation of cities and towns. Considering the panorama that Evliya Çelebi tries to draw about cities, we witness that they are evaluated in a specific pattern. Apart from the cities that he described thoroughly or nearly thoroughly, there are some others especially like Sofya³ and Manastır,⁴ which are included in the scope of this paper, for which he reserved some titles or blank places in the text, but could not enter the necessary info. This shows that Evliya had a framework for studying and writing on settlements. According to his method, he starts with geographical descriptions and locations of the settlements, and finishes by mentioning the significant visiting places there, which he regarded in a sense as his main reason for traveling to that city.

The namazgahs constituting main theme of this paper, are generally evaluated in the book in two different occasions related to the pattern. These are defined and mentioned after mosques and masjids under some titles like "*Der-aded-i cevâmi'hâ-*

¹ He spent his last years in Egypt and died in his return to Istanbul. On the date of his death see. M. İlgürel, *ibid*, p.531; M. Cavid Baysun, "Evliya Çelebi'ye Dâir Notlar", *Türkiyat Mecmuası* XII (İstanbul 1955), pp.258-261.

² The first publication of the Seyahatname is at the end of the 19th century. This paper, however, refers to the ten volume edition of the Yapıkredi Yayınları.

³ Evliyâ Çelebi bin Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliyaa Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 3. Book (=III), ed. Seyit Ali Kahraman-Yücel Dağlı, İstanbul 1999, pp.220-234.

⁴ Evliyâ Çelebi bin Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliyaa Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 5. Kitap (=V), ed. Yücel Dağlı-Seyit Ali Kahraman-İbrahim Sezgin, İstanbul 2001, pp.307-309.

yı selâtin-i Âl-i Osmân ve gayri ibâdetgâh-ı mü'minân"¹ or "*Der-ibâdetgâh-ı mesâcid-i mü'minân ü ehl-i îmân*".²

However, the namazgahs recorded in Evliya's Seyahatname are not restricted with those cities, towns and around them. There were the same structures on routes, bazaar places or even in resorts. The Namazgahs around urban areas or on the ways connecting them were one of the important elements described by Evliya Çelebi, in accordance with an order from centers to peripheries. Especially the promenade namazgahs or those constituting a part of the promenades are particularly described with detailed information under some titles like "*Der-vasf-ı mesîregâh-ı müfferihât-ı ârâm-gâh-ı erbâb-ı merâm*"³ or "*Der-takrîr-i mesîregâh-ı müfferihât*".⁴

These structures, which has great importance in religious, social and cultural life in the Balkans in those days, and which survived to this day only with few examples, have not been thoroughly evaluated by researchers, and therefore the information in the Seyahatname has remained so, almost untouched.

The Namazgahs in the Islamic World and the Ottoman Realm

The word namazgah is composed of the Persian words "namaz" and "gâh", meaning the place to perform the namaz prayer. In Arabic, its equivalent is the word "musallâ". Besides these terms used in this paper, the same structure is called in the Islamic world under other names, too, in different places. The most widespread terms among others are "sajdagâh" meaning the prostration place and "iydgâh" meaning the place for the namaz performed during the religious days.⁵ However, some local studies show that these terms have been localized in many places, and got various names other than these.⁶ Within this cognitive richness, the word namazgah that the most widespread one in Turkish defines the places for the

¹ *Ibid*, VIII, pp.272.

² Evliyâ Çelebi bin Derviş Mehmed Zillî, *Evliyaa Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, 6. Kitap (=VI), Haz. Seyit Ali Kahraman- Yücel Dağlı, İstanbul 2001, pp.260.

³ *Ibid*, VIII, p.83.

⁴ *Ibid*, VIII, p.330.

⁵ For detail on the namazgâhs and the equivalent terms see Nebi Bozkurt, "Namazgâh", *DİA*, 32, İstanbul 2006, pp.357-358; Ernst Diez, "Musalla", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 8, İstanbul 1997, pp.674-675; Yavuz Tiryaki, *İstanbul'un 100 Namazgâhı*, İstanbul 2010, pp.10-11; J. Burton-Page, "Namâzgâh", *Encyclopaedia of Islam (=EI)*², VII, p.947; A.J. Wensinck, "Musallâ", *Eİ²*, VII, p.658-659; Andrew Petersen, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture*, London 1996, p.208; Ayla Ödekan, "Namazgâh", *Eczacıbaşı Sanat Ansiklopedisi*, 2. Cilt, p.1334.

⁶ For instance see Mükerrerem Kürüm, "Aydın'daki Osmanlı Dönemi Namazgâhları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Güzel Sanatlar enstitüsü Dergisi*, 18 (Erzurum 2007), pp.104-105; Mustafa Özdamar, "Namazgâhlar", *Vakıflar Dergisi*, XX (Ankara 1988), p.221.

passengers and the armies' Friday namaz or religious festival namaz. Those places were also used by the local inhabitants for common prayers.

Origins of the term “musalla”, used in the same meaning, go back to the time of the prophet His Majesties Muhammed. Not considering the open masjids that were built on the ways connecting settlements, the structure built in the Buthân valley, some 500 meters distant to the Masjid-i Nebevi, the essential praying place of the Prophet, is accepted as the oldest namazgah in the Islamic world. The musalla, designed for crowded common praying such as rain praying and funeral ceremonies, to where the Prophet used to walk after the morning namaz at Masjid-i Nebevi, became source of the namazgah tradition in the Islamic world for such kinds of ceremonies. Not the early examples but the latter ones include shrine and minbar as substantial elements, and thus the namazgahs got the most characteristic feature and spread all over the Islamic world in that combination.¹ However, half closed namazgahs that are covered with a shrine wall can be seen as a different style especially in Iran.² Except a few examples from the Saljukid State, this kind of namazgah does not exist in the Ottoman geography. Today lots of recorded examples show that the namazgahs with shrine and minbar were preferred in the Balkans and Anatolia.³

Many samples, whose main components and features survived today, points that the namazgahs in the Ottoman world were not built according to a standard measure and the same style of architecture. The samples with shrines and pulpits, built around cities and towns, compose the most common namazgah style of the Ottoman lands. However, there are many samples, from tombs and graveyards' entrance or “musalla namazgahs” seen on the way of mosque and lodge's to “çeşme namazgahs” built around fountains on which people can perform namaz.⁴

Studies on the namazgahs, which hosted social and cultural activities, and which also had religious functions, show that they can be grouped among themselves, even though they have much diversity. The namazgahs⁵ classified usually in such four groups as the meydan, musalla, mesire and menzil ones could be separated to different categories in terms of their functional and architectural aspects.

¹ See N. Bozkurt, *ibid*, p.358.

² Yavuz Tiryaki, “Namazgâh, Mimari”, *DİA*, 32, İstanbul 2006, p.359.

³ Y. Tiryaki, *ibid*, p.359.

⁴ Y. Tiryaki, *ibid*, p.359. Besides, for the varieties only in İstanbul see Yavuz Tiryaki, *İstanbul'un 100 Namazgâhı*, İstanbul 2010.

⁵ Y. Tiryaki, *İstanbul'un 100 Namazgâhı*, p.11.

Ottoman namazgahs, including the ones in the Balkans and mentioned by Evliya Çelebi in the 17th century are divided generally into three groups architecturally. Namazgah with mihrap and minber is one of them. Such kinds of namazgahs, built around cities and towns or out of cities, are generally hedged with low walls. These namazgahs are buildings, having a muezzin mahfel such as Gelibolu Azeps and Okmeydanı samples. Such kinds of namazgahs, built in the army style, are locations which have multiple functions and which are open to the public.¹ These functions may have different qualities according to locations, and show a lot of diversity such as Friday and festival namazs, army voyages and Hajj/pilgrimage. This category includes the namazgahs spread all over the Balkans, especially the ones in Karaferye and Öziçe examined in this paper.

Namazgahs with fountain compose the second group architecturally in addition to the namazgahs having generally fountains and places of ablution. Such kinds of namazgahs, mostly built on the routes, have a shrine and are built on water sources. In those places very restricted number of people can perform namaz.² Such kinds of namazgahs,³ seen mostly in vicinity of İstanbul, are distributed in various parts of the Ottoman lands and especially in the Balkans.

Namazgahs with musallâ stone are the other common type namazgahs seen in the Ottoman geography. These kinds of namazgahs, generally built near shrines having a musalla stone,⁴ are built around the locations in which people pray for the funeral namaz. At the same time, there are some samples with shrines and minbars such as the one in Sivrihisar.⁵

The namazgahs in the Balkans mentioned by Evliya Çelebi and studied in this paper belong to this category.

In architectural terms the namazgahs are evaluated in three groups. However, in terms of their locations which determines their functions they are classified in a different way. Concerning studies offer different classifications with some slight differences, but focus on five different namazgah groups. These are defined as the *menzil* (route), *meydan* (quarter), *teferriç* and *mesire* (picnic), *bayram-Cumateravîh* (holiday) and *musalla* (funeral) *namazgahs*.⁶ Also, the evaluated definitions of Evliya Çelebi in the 17th century draw a parallel dispersion for functional structures with this classification.

¹ Hüdavendigâr Akmaydalı, “Mihrablı ve Minberli Namazgâhlarımız”, *Vakıflar Dergisi*, XXIII (Ankara 1994), pp.123-143; Y. Tiryaki, “Namazgâh, Mimari”, p.359; *İstanbul’un 100 Namazgâhı*, pp.12-13.

² Y. Tiryaki, “Namazgâh, Mimari”, pp.359-360.

³ Y. Tiryaki, *İstanbul’un 100 Namazgâhı*, pp.18ff.

⁴ Y. Tiryaki, “Namazgâh, Mimari”, p.360.

⁵ See Yüksel Sayan, *Sivrihisar Evleri*, İzmir 2009, p.45.

⁶ See Mustafa Özdamar, “Namazgâhlar”, p.245.

The Balkan Namazgahs in the Seyahatname of Evliya Çelebi

As mentioned above, Seyahatname defines places with the method “from centre to the rural area” and one of the most important points that Evliya Çelebi emphasizes is the praying places, which were founded in rural areas or on the ways connecting settlement areas. The namazgahs given above with their main characteristics were the places which were by the famous traveler during his long trips. Sometimes he prayed there and sometimes listened to conversations of the local eminent people. He collected all of them, and then pictured religious and social places with their architectural and natural features.

Evliya Çelebi recorded his Balkan visits between the years 1640 and 1685 in the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th volumes of the Seyahatname. He wrote down on these places in accordance with the method and pattern mentioned above; while evaluating praying places, he added namazgahs around the settlements to them. Except those in the settlements, Evliya recorded the namazgahs in promenades and the namazgahs on the rural ways. In this context, he recorded lots of namazgahs from Gelibolu and Edirne to the Adriatic coasts and to the Central Europe. Most of them were built for the sake of expeditions of the army.

Among the namazgahs that he recorded during his travels and described, these cities and towns are worth of mentioning: Siroz, Yenişehir, Karaferye, Atina, Yanya, Silistre, Varna, Valiva (Valyeva/Valjevo), Hilevne, Gölikesri, Vidin, Belgrad, Mitroviçe, Öziçe, Pirepol (Pirepoy), Çayniçe, Foça, Mostar, Ustołça (Tulça), İzvornik, Varat, Fethü'l-İslâm, Mazistre (Mizistre), Misehor (Misehori), İnebahtı, Narda, Avlonya, Ergirikasrı, Elbasan. In the Seyahatname, Evliya prefers to give some examples and detailed descriptions, instead of giving detailed information. The namazgahs in Öziçe and Karaferye evaluated in detail below are typical examples.

Seyahatname uses the term “İbadetgah” for praying place unities. For special cases like the Friday namaz, festival namaz and private days when people are to perform namaz in crowded groups, Evliya changes the term to “namazgah”. Today the word “musalla” is used as a term signifying the place to perform the funeral namaz in graveyards or mosque yards, though it is used in Seyahatname as an alternative for namazgah. The term “idgâh” points to the same structure but heavily means the festival place. Besides, it is observed in the Seyahatname that Çelebi often refers to the terms “secdegâh”, “niyazgâh” (which he used for the one in Öziçe, from which

he had impressed at the most, before seeing the one in Karaferye), “mebedgâh” and “ta’atgâh” as synonyms of namazgah.¹

Evliya, being a well educated and cultured man, defines namazgahs in the Balkan cities and towns with these and similar concepts. At the same time, he used cumulative adjectives in order to explain impressions awaken in his mind. In this discourse, the most common expression for defining namazgahs in Seyahatname is “vâsi” (very great), “azîm” (tremendous) and “ibretnümâ” (exemplary). Evliya, who is very able to express himself and who has a rich vocabulary, uses also the adjectives “mesîregâh”, “iremgâh”, “çemenzâr”, “lâlezâr”, “şükûfezâr”, “hıyâbân”, “drahtistân”, “ferahfezâ”, “ârâmgâh”, “merâmgâh”, “koyah”, “mürtefi”, “müferrih”, “ferahfezâ”, “havâdâr”, “hoşhavâ” and “temâşâgâh” for the namazgahs, which he ultimately describes as “vâcibü’s-seyr” (necessary to watch). The namazgahs, whose physical features are emphasized with such kinds of concepts, are described basically as “mâbedgâh-ı hüdayî” (temple of God). Other words that can be seen in terms of the namazgahs are “teferrüçgâh”, “ârâmgâh” and “sohbetgâh”. As for their social functions, Çelebi qualifies them by the phrases “ârâmgâh-ı erbâb-ı merâm”, “ârâmgâh-ı kân-ı şu’arâ”, “mesken-i şuara”, “kân-ı sulehâ”, “mecma’ü’l-irfân”, “mecma’ü’l-ulemâ” and “menba’-ı fuzelâ”, which basically refers them as the source and gathering place of intellectuals, authors and poets.

Evliya Çelebi, who is not only an eminent representative of the Ottoman culture and civilization with his knowledge and experience, but also a world-wide traveler, did not satisfy with describing the namazgahs that he saw in the Balkans, and tried to compare them with other throughout the Ottoman realm in order to add more value. In this sense, the sentences on the namazgah in the Valiva (Valyeva) town,² includes a comparison which that in Meram (in Konya) in terms of natural environments, are typical samples of this:

“...han kurbunda bir hıyâbân ve drahtistân içre bir müferrih namazgâh-ı çemenzârı var kim sayf u şitâda bu musallanın zemînine aslâ güneş te’sir etmez. Gûyâ Konya şehrinin Merâm’ıdır kim bu mâbedgâh-ı küşâde bir şehr-i mu’azzamda yokdur.”

The namazgah in Mitroviçe, classified as “şehir kenârında bir namazgâh-ı mesîregâh-ı çemenzâr”, reminds Evliya the namazgah in Birgi (Western Anatolia), and he expressed his sentiments with the sentence “misli meger Anadolu’da Birgi şehri namazgâhı ola.”³

¹ VI, p.246.

² V, p.221.

³ VI, p.102.

When Evliya Çelebi, who wrote the Seyahatname thanks to his voyages continuing about fifty years, met new things which necessitated him to revise his previous texts making definition with his then limited knowledge, he did not hesitate to change his sentences bravely. The ten volumes of Seyahatname are full of examples of Evliya's opinions that changed in the course of time. The two important namazgahs in Öziçe and Karaferye, evaluated in this paper, can be taken as typical examples for this.

Evliya Çelebi defines the namazgah, built by the governor of the Semendire Sandjak, which was administratively under the Budin province, founded in Öziçe near the Diçina river, which belonged him as a fief, as the most magnificent namazgah and explains his opinion with the sentence: “*kırk iki yıldan berü seyr etdiğimiz İslâm diyârlarının biri böyle hıyâbân u koyah ve İremzâtü'l-imâd misilli bir ta'atgâha mâlik olduğun bu hakîr görmemişimdir ve olmak ihtimâli yokdur*”.¹ When Evliya Çelebi saw the Pirepol namazgah,² he depicts it as “*Namazgâh-ı ibret-nümâ*”, and the Çayniçe namazgah³ is depicted as “*Mesîregâh-ı Namâzgâh*”, on the same route and voyage, but he didn't change his mind.

But, after long years, when he traveled to the Karaferye namazgah in 1668, the famous traveler revised and changed his opinion.

When Evliya Çelebi compares the Karaferye namazgah with the others, he describes it as a peerless one in “*Rûm ve Arab u Acem*”, and calls with the very ornamented phrase “*sohbetgâh-ı ibâdetgâh-ı namâzgâh*”, which is not popular in his texts, and which takes attention of Lowry,⁴ who recently traveled in the region. Just under the head of the section, he writes these sentences:

“*Bir vâsi' fezâda vâki' olmuş bir musallâdır kim Rûm ve Arab u Acem'de misli yokdur... El-hâsıl bu abd-i kemter elli bir yıl seyâhatde böyle bir ma'bedgâh-ı musallâgâh görmedim. İllâ Sirem sancağı hâkinde Öziçe nâm şehrin içindeki namazgâhı gördüm. Ol dahi ibret-nümâdır ammâ bu Karafer[y]e musallâsı vâcibü's-seyr küşâde bir medrese-i azîmdir...*”⁵

Evliya, who is accustomed of increasing value of certain things by comparing with some others, as a world-wide traveler, on the other hand, preferred to evaluate some namazgahs within local scales. The namazgah, which is located on the riverside in

¹ VI, p.246.

² VI, p.249.

³ VI, p.254.

⁴ H. W. Lowry, *Osmanlıların Ayak İzlerinde Kuzey Yunanistan'da Mukaddes Mekânlar ve Mimari Eserleri Arayış Yolculukları*, İstanbul 2009, p.46.

⁵ VIII, pp.82-83.

Varna, and which is of a promenade place kind, is the typical example for this situation:

“... bir çemenzâr ve mesîregâh müfferih bir namâzgâhı var kim bu eyâlet şehirlerinde eyle bir hıyâbân ibâdetgâh-ı musallâ yokdur”.¹

Physical Features of the Namazgahs

The namazgahs, which are defined with different concepts and sometimes evaluated as “unidentified architectural structures”, for the varieties of their functions, were not built in a standard architectural style in the Islamic world and Ottoman geography.² In order to give a general idea, even though the namazgahs have different architectural styles throughout the Islamic world, the army type namazgahs, which are widespread in the Ottoman geography, have low walls, as well as a shrine and a mihrab in the south frontage. Great namazgahs which are situated near musalla stone in city squares or in wide areas out of city walls show big differences with the namazgahs in which restricted number people can perform namaz. But, whichever style or scale theirs are, common component of all of them is the shrine and qibla stone. In addition, ablution place and water are seen as indispensable components.

On the other, typical characteristic feature of the military camp and promenades type namazgahs is a wide place surrounding with low walls built with a depended shrine and mihrab. There are a few samples of them. The Safranbolu namazgah in Anatolia and the Karaferye and Prizren namazgahs in the Balkans are the typical samples of army and mesiregah type namazgahs, some of whom have been converted into other structures. “Shrine” and “minbar” are symbols of namazgahs’ main features; they are seen on some examples especially on “musalla” patterned structures as seen in the examples in Konya and Sivrihisar.

Evliya Çelebi’s Seyahatname gives much information about architectural peculiarities and environmental features of squares in settlements, promenades in vicinities of cities and towns, and namazgahs on the routes in rural areas. One of the common feature of namazgahs mentioned in Seyahatname is that they are all stated as being in high places and are defined as “mürtefi”, “müfferih”, “ferahfezâ” or “havâdâr”. As mentioned above, the namazgahs near fountains also have the same characteristics about the highness. The second common feature of the namazgahs in Seyahatname is that they are situated in naturally beautiful places, with dominancy

¹ V, p.52.

² Uğur Tanyeli, “Musalla, İdgâh, Namazgâh: Tanımsız Bir Mimarî Olgu”, *Üçüncü Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Kongresi (25-29 Eylül 1993 Ankara) Bildirileri*, Volume I, Ankara 1999, pp.231-238.

of green, so they are described as defined as “mesîregâh”, “iremgâh”, “çemenzâr”, “lâlezâr”, “şükûfezâr”, “hıyâbân”, “drahtistân”, “merâmgâh” , “koyah”, in cypress forests or gardens with much water, rightly defined as “semâya ser çekmiş”.

Today, there is a namazgah in Moldovia, near the Bender castle, and it was described by Evliya Çelebi in such sentences (it is important for understanding the simplicity of the namazgahs’ structure of that time):

“*Ve bu kal’anın büyük kapusunun taşra sol tarafında handak kenârında bir mürtefi‘ havâdâr yerde mecma‘ül-irfân bir teferrüçgâh ve mesîregâh namâzgâh-ı ferah-fezâsı var. Cümle guzât anda tâ‘at u ibâdet edüp varda beklerler. Ve handak kenârınca cümle kalın direkler ile şaranpav ta‘bîr etdikleri parmaklık çevirmişlerdir kim andan içeri at ve katur ve sâ‘ir hayvânât giremeyüp kimesne handaka bir hâr u hâşâk atamazlar. Gâyet amîk ve pâk handaktır.*”¹

The description of Valiva (Valyeva) town namazgah (today in Serbia) explains us how the environmental features of the namazgahs were at that time founded in the Balkans:

“*...hân kurbunda bir hıyâbân ve drahtistân içre bir müferrih Namâzgâh-ı çemenzârı var kim sayf u şitâda bu musallânın zemînine aslâ güneş te’sîr etmez. Gûyâ Konya şehrinin Merâm’ıdır kim bu ma‘bedgâh-ı küşâde bir şehir-i mu‘azzamda yokdur.*”²

Beside this, “Şehir kenarında bir namazgâh-ı mesîregâh-ı çemenzâr” Mitroviçse,³ “gûnâ-gûn eşcâr-ı azîmeler ile ârâste ve niçe draht-ı hoş-bûlar ile pîrâste olmuş bir koyah gölgeli musallâ-yı idgâh” Pirepol,⁴ “bir garîb temâşâgâh-ı çemenzâr, şükûfezâr, lâlezâr şecere-i tayyibeler ile ârâste ve nahlistân, gül [ü] gülistân ile pîrâste bir kân-ı sulahâ ve bir mesken-i tarz-ı hoş-havâ-yı ferah-fezâ ma‘bedgâh-ı Hudâyî” Çayniçe, Gazi Murad Baba Tekkesi,⁵ “hamâm kurbunda bir vâsi‘ namazgâh” Foça,⁶ “şehir tarafındaki namazgâh vâsi‘dir” Mostar,⁷ “gâyet mesîregâh ve ârâmgâh ve namazgâh maksûrecik” Varat castle,⁸ Aydonat,⁹ “musallâ-yı ibâdetgâh-ı erbâb-ı hâcât” başlığı altında “bir müferrih namâzgâhdır kim duhâvî yeşil katîfe gibi çemenzârda elli yedi ad[ed] servi-i serâmedler ile

¹ V, p.65.

² V, p.221.

³ VI, p.102.

⁴ VI, p.249.

⁵ VI, p.253-254.

⁶ VI, p.254.

⁷ VI, p.289.

⁸ VII, p.153.

⁹ VIII, p.294.

müzeyyen ibâdetgâh” Elbasan,¹ “*namazgâh-ı ibretnümâ-yı azîm*” Yenişehir,² “*sokak aşırı bir namâzgâhı var, aslâ ağaçlar dikili değildir, hemân bir çemenzâr u lâlezâr musallâ-yı ferahfezâ*” Narda,³ “*kal’a ile varoş kasabası mâbeyninde bir çemenzâr yerde vâki’ bir vâsi’ namâzgâh*” Avlonya,⁴ “*tâ şehir üzre havâle bir cihannümâ yer*” and “*kırk beş aded servi ağaçlarıyla müzeyyen olup gâyet çemenzâr u lâlezâr mesîregâh yer*” Yanya⁵ and the other high open praying places are important examples for the descriptions above in the Balkans at that time.

On the other hand, among the concerning descriptions in *Seyahatname*, with the exception of above said general features, some examples are striking with some different features. In this discourse, one of the interesting groups of namazgahs is the “square namazgahs”, which had some urban functions, too. The namazgah at the Fethü’l-Islam castle consisted of “funeral musalla stone” described as “a square of namazgah in front of the castle gate”.⁶ In this context, the Ergirikasrı namazgah (modern Gjirokaster, Albania) was called *Namazgah Meydanı*. It means namazgah area, and this proves that such kind of namazgahs had different features from the other structures. The term “meydan namazgahı”⁷ is seen in another example in Albania again, in the Pekin/Beklin castle, which consisted of a namazgah “*solunda dîvâra muttasıl bir çemenzâr yerde*”⁸ (meaning it is placed in a green area). It shows that this type of structures was common in the Balkans at that time.

The description of the namazgah in front of the public bath in Ustolça (Tulça), in Romania,⁹ reflects a typical example of the namazgahs, in which water used to be transmitted from the well to the ablution taps via a developed mechanism:

“Hammâm-ı kesîfi önünde bir namâzgâh soffası üzre üç aded kavak ağaçları namâzgâha sâye-i himâye salup namâzgâh yanında bir âb-ı hayât kuyusundan ipler ile suyu çekilüp âbdest musluklarına gidiüp tecdîd-i vudû’ olunur, ammâ havâsi ve âdemîsi sakîldir.”

He depicts the Öziçe namazgah, from which he was influenced at the most among similar structures that he saw in the Europe part of the Ottoman domain, and for which he adjudges with the sentence “*kırk iki yıldan berü seyr etdiğimiz İslâm diyârlarının biri böyle huyâbân u koyah ve iremezâtü’l-imâd misilli bir tâ’atgâha*

¹ VIII, p.322.

² VIII, p.87.

³ VIII, p.285.

⁴ VIII, p.313.

⁵ VIII, p.289.

⁶ VII, p.175-176.

⁷ VIII, p.299.

⁸ VIII, p.316.

⁹ VI, p.262.

mâlik olduğun bu hakîr görmemişimdir ve olmak ihtimâli yokdur”, under the title “*Der-sitâyîş-i musallâ-yı ibret-nümâ-yı âbidân-ı zâhidân*”, with this paragrahp:¹

“Salât-ı îdeyn ve salât-ı du‘â-i istiskâ için bu şehrin tâ aynü’l-fi‘linde nehr-i Diçina kenârında bir namâzghâh [u] niyâzghâh [u] ma‘bedghâhdır.

“Bu cây-ı müferrih gül [ü] gülistân ve ma‘bedghâh-ı mü‘minân ola” deyü du‘â etdiklerinde anların nutk-ı dürer-bârlarıyla hâlâ bir müstecâbü’ d-da ‘ve du‘a hırmeni bir musallâdır kim kırk gün bu mahalde ibâdet eden elbette dünyevî ve uhrevî hayr murâdâtları hâsıl olup sa‘âdet-i dâreyne nâil olur.

Hattâ bu namâzghâhun tûlu çâr-ender-çârî dâ‘iren-mâdâr kâmil iki bin adımdır. Etrâfî bir âdem kaddi kadar kârgîr ve metîn dîvârdır. Ve cümle dörd aded kapuları vardır.

Bu musallânın içi cümle evc-i âsmâna ser çekmiş çınar ve kavak ve uhlamur ve bîd-i ser-nîgûn ve ar‘ar ve servî ve sanavber ü tefne dirahtlarının şükûfeleri râyiha-i tayyibelerinden bunda tâ‘at-ı Sübhânî eden cemâ‘atin demâğları mu‘attar olur ve zemîn-i sebiz-gûnu eyle yeşil çemenzârdır kim gûyâ ahzar-gûn duhâvî katîfedir.

Ve dîvârının cânib-i erba‘ası gül [ü] gülistân ve murgzâristândır kim niçe bin andelîb-i beyâbânîlerin asvât-ı hazînleri âdeme cân bağışlar. Ve bu musallâya sayf u şitâda aslâ ve kat‘â şems-i âteş-tâbin te‘sîri olmayup cemî‘i eşcârların zıll-ı himâyelerinde cümle mü‘minân muvahhidân tâ‘at-ı Yezdân edüp şehrin cemî‘i a‘yân-ı kibârî ve erbâb-ı me‘ârif ve âşıkân-ı sâdikânları bu menzilghâhda cem‘ olup mubâhase-i ilm edüp gûy gûy sohbet-i hâs ederler, bir aceb mesîregâh u teferrücgâh ve pâk ibâdetghâhdır, ammâ cânib-i vakfından dörd aded bevvâbları vardır.

El-hâsıl bir mecma‘-i ulemâ ve bir menba‘-ı fuzelâ ve bir ârâmgâh-ı kân-ı şu‘arâ yeridir.”

The namazgah, which is portrayed with these sentences which ends with a begging for its permanence until the end of the World, is pictured by Evliya Çelebi in such a way: It is a place with the length of two thousands steps, surrounded with a long wall, with four gates,

¹ VI, p.246.

under shade of plane trees, poplars, lindens, cypress trees; surrounded by myriad types of flora; located by the river; the sun is invisible.

But, Evliya's image about the Karaferye namazgah which he compares with the Öziçe namazgah, which he previously observed as peerless in the Islamic world, is more interesting. Really, the city Karaferye, situated in the north of Greece, which is said once to have 26 promenades, including to Çağlayık teferrücgah and the Eynepınar namazgah, is outstanding in the book also with its historical namazgah.

Evliya Çelebi, as emphasized before, tells about it under the treacly title “sohbetgâh-ı ibâdetgâh-ı namâzgâh”, with these sentences:¹

“Bir vâsi ‘ fezâda vâki ‘ olmuş bir musallâdır kim Rûm ve Arab u Acem’de misli yokdur. Elli bin âdem alur bir çemenzâr u lâle ‘ızâr vâdîde etrâfı dîvârlı ve çârbâğ-ı Acem-misâl çâr kapulu bir fezânın içi ilm-i hendese üzre çırpı ile sâhibü’l-hayrât-ı selef niçe bin aded draht-ı müntehâları diküb her bir şecer-i müntehâlar evc-i âsımâna ser çekmiş duru[r]. Her draht-ı bâlâların nihâl-i şâhdârlarının berk-i nâbının(?) zıllında zemîne âfitâb-ı âlemtâbınsâyesi zemîne düşmeyüp edîm-i arz gûyâ ahzar gûn duhâvî katîfe gibi nakş-ı bûkalemûn-ı ibretnümûn bir vâdîdir. Bunda olan sun’-ı Hudâ kad-keşân olmuş sebiz-gûn servlerin râyihâ-i tayyibelerinden âdemin demağları mu’attar olup her biri zümürürüd gibi yeşil hil’atlı cüvân gibi ayağ üzre Hallâk-ı âlemin kulluğuna el kavşurup durur kim biri birinden müntehâ serâmed servlerde ve gayr-ı draht-ı azîmler üzre niçe kere yüz bin murğân-ı hoş-elhân-ı hezâr hezârân bülbül-i gûyâ-yı nağme-sâzın ve gayrı murğân-ı nevâ-sâzın âğâze-i dâstânları esvâtı âdeme rûh-efzâ hayat verir.”

After these sentences, in which Evliya Çelebi mentions about the namazgah with such kinds of expressions as “no sunshine could enter in”, “there was no similar of it in the lands of the Arabs, Persians or Rums”, he gives the capacity of the namazgah as “fifty thousands people can pray”, and after that he adds one more description for revisiting his ideas once upon a time about Öziçe, with which he compares the one in Karaferye:

“El-hâsıl bu abd-i kemter elli bir yıl seyâhatde böyle bir ma’bedgâh-ı musallâgâh görmedim. İllâ Sirem sancağı hâkinde Öziçe nâm şehrin içindeki namazgâhı gördüm. Ol dahi ibret-

¹ VIII, pp.82-83.

nümâdır ammâ bu Karafer[y]e musallâsı vâcibü's-seyr küşâde bir medrese-i azîmdir, zîrâ şehrin cemî'i ulemâ vü sülehâ ve meşâyihân tâlibân-ı ulûmları ba'de'l-asr bu hıyâbân içre cem' olup köşe be-köşe küme küme mübâhese-i ulûm-ı şer'îyye ve gayrı ulûm-ı Arabiyye görüp can sohbetleri edüp mecma'-ı ulemâ ve menba'-ı fuzalâ ve mesken-i şu'arâ-yı musannifin müverrihîn kânıdır. İktizâ etdikde niçe yüz bin âdem bu dergâhda cem' olup du'a-yı istiskâ edüp tazarru' [u] nâlişler etdiklerinde elbette du'âları hayyiz-i kabûlde vâki' olup bir müstecâbü'd-da've du'â hırmeni namazgâh-ı bî-misildir kim gören âdemler engüşt ber-dehen edüp aklı perişân olmak martabasena varır. Tâ bu mertebe acîb ü garîb sun'-ı Hudâ eşcâr-ı azîmler vardır. İnkırâzü'd-devrân mü'ebbed ola."



Figure 1: The mihrab and minber of the namazgâh in olden days¹

After the Muslim Turkish population withdrawn from the Balkans, the namazgah, which was once used for funeral, Friday, and religious festival namaz, and besides, for rain prays and other gathering, in which crowded people from the surroundings used to participate, and also for conversation of educated and respected men with their fellows, and which preserved their multi-functional values for long centuries, were turned to be a place that Orthodox Christians used. The shrine and seven stair minbar that was made of stone blocks and that have wooden columns, which survived today only in the given photograph above, are outstanding. The shrine and

¹ After *Makedonia, Through the Lens of Aristotelis Zachos 1915-1931* (Neohellenic Architecture Archives-Benaki Museum, Panayotis & Effie Michelis Foundation, 2007, p.271, Neval Konuk, *Yunanistan'da Osmanlı Mimarisi*, I, Ankara 2010, p.47, 103.

minbar were devastated, and the first three stairs of the minbar have been used for an imagination which claims that the Christian apostle Paul addressed to people standing on them, when he visited Karaferye two thousands years ago. Thus, there remained from the Karaferya namazgah, which had a history of five centuries, and which was converted to an Orthodox visiting place with a falsification, only cypress trees witnessing all those happenings.¹



Figure 2: Modern sight of the minber of the namazgâh²

Evliya is accustomed of giving information backed by numbers. In our examples, he did not satisfy with giving sizes of the namazgahs, which he calculated by his steps, but also gave numbers of people which the namazgahs can take inside. He did so, for example, for the İzmir namazgah having a capacity of 100.000 people and the Tire one having 50.000 people inside it, and therefore we can find some numbers for the Balkan namazgahs, too. These are three other examples of Evliya for giving numbers of the capacities: Karaferye with fifty thousands people,³ the Yenişehir namazgah described as “*Namazgâh-ı ibretnüma-yı azîm kim elli bin âdem alur müstecâbü'd-da've yer*”,⁴ and the Avlonya namazgah described as “*iki bin âdem alur*”.⁵

¹ For the mournful conversion of the namazgâh, see also Lowry, *Osmanlı Döneminde Balkanların Şekillenmesi*, pp.49-53; Nevval Konuk, “Karaferye Camileri, Mescitleri ve Namazgâhı”, *Uluslararası Balkanlarda Türk Varlığı Sempozyumu II (13-15 Mayıs 2010) Bildiriler*, ed. Ünal Şenel, Manisa 2010, pp.127-129; Nevval Konuk, *Yunanistan'da Osmanlı Mimarisi I*, Ankara 2010, p.103-106.

² Nevval Konuk, *ibid*, s.104.

³ VIII, p.82.

⁴ VIII, p.87.

⁵ VIII, p.313.

The Functions of Namazhags

Evliya Çelebi reveals openly the basic functions of the namazgahs, which are described like “*namazgâh*”, “*secdegâh*”, “*mâbetgâh*”, “*ibâdetgâh*”, “*musallâ*”, “*musallâgâh*”. He has got information about them by traveling himself and spending time there, and sometimes he applied to verbal and written sources. In general, in spite of these name versions, namazgah signifies an open place where crowded people can perform namaz altogether. They were founded mostly on the routes or boundaries at rural areas for army, so that troops would use them on the expedition ways. The namazgahs, whose versions for cities and towns are *meydan*, *musallâ* or *mesîregâh*, were used in order to perform funeral namaz, Friday namaz, and religious festival namaz and pray together by crowded people. The namazgahs founded in cities and towns were also used as festival places, the term “*iydgah*” was reserved for them. Some of these areas became part of the urban areas in the next centuries, and they would be called as “festival place” as a refererence to the historical usage. The namazgahs in urban areas, as Evliya Çelebi described, were not only used for the crowded funeral or festival namaz in special days, but also functioned as gathering places for poets, authors and respected religious fellows, as reflected in the title of this study, so those people shared their arts and sciences with their audiences, as expressed by the terms “*sohbetgâh*” and “*tefferriüçgâh*”. As a matter fact, the definition “*medres-i âzim*” used for the Karaferye namazgah is very important in this sense, since it reflects the educational dimension of them.

Evliya explained in related descriptions openly the multi-functional structures of the namazgahs in his many examples, which he saw during his travels in the Balkans for more than fifty years. In this context, it would be more suitable to refer some important individual examples, instead of referring all of them one by one.

The explanations of Evliya about the Silistre namazgah, which was once founded on the expedition road, and was then left and ruined, are important in terms of mentioning previous functions of the namazgahs, and of introducing some dimensions of activities held there, for instance, recitation of Mevlûd-i Şerif there on the command of Melek Ahmed Paşa, protector of Evliya, who had the namazgah repaired within seven days:¹

“*Evvelâ Bismillah ile şehir-i Silisre'den alay-ı azîm ile çıkup mezkûr namâzgâhda meks olundu. Sâhil-i Tuna'da çâr-kûşe divâr ile mebnî bir musallâ-yı harâbe idi. Efendimiz yedi günde ta'mîr u termîm edüp mâh-ı Rebîülevvelin on ikinci isneyn günü bu hakîr Evliyâ-yı bî-riyâ*

¹ III, p.196.

Mevlûd-i şerîfi tilâvet edüp bir cem'iyet-i azîm olmuştur kim cemî'i a'yân-ı şehir mesrûr olup et'ime-i nefîse ve sükkerî ve aselî eşribeler ile muğtenim olup ilâ hâze'l-ân ehl-i Silisre ol mevlâdu ve ol ziyâfeti yâd edüp Melek Ahmed Paşa'ya hayr du'â ederler. Hakkâ ki namâzgâh-ı Müslimîn ma'mûr oldu."

Furthermore, Evliya visited again the same namazgah, which was on his travel route, and recorded once again some sentences concerning the same place. Those are important in explaining the fact that the namazgahs were not only for performing namaz by the army, but also they had some other basic functions in them:¹

"... Ol gün hemân Paşa Silisre'de Namâzgâh mahalline otağ bârhânesin çıkarup bir sâ'atden alay-ı azîm ile serâperdesinde meks edüp ertesi gün bir müşâveresi azîm edüp,

Şehr-i Silisre'den sene 1067 Şa'bân'ının on ikinci günü Leh memleketine Rakofçi kral üzre sefere gitdiğimiz konakları ve kılâ'vü kasabâtları bildirir

Evvelâ Namâzgâh'da sa'âdetlü pâdişâhdan hatt-ı şerîf ile tuğrâ-yı garrâyı serdârlık sorgucu getiren kapucubaşıya on kîse ve on at ve bir semmûr kürk ihsân edüp mu'tâd-ı kadîmesi üzre ağayı der-i devlete mektûb-ı mahabbet uslûblar ile Köprülü vezîre yolladı..."

Evliya once more recorded something in 1068 (1657-1658) about the Silistre namazgah, while he was traveling with Melek Ahmet Paşa. His definitions are important for they show the procedures during the expeditions:²

"Bin altmış sekiz mâh-ı Rebî'ulevvel'in dördüncü günü Silisre'den İslâmbol'a revâne olduğumuz beyân eder

Evvelâ Silisre'den yine alay-ı azîm ile çıkarken cümle ehl-i beled bükâ-âlûd olup cümle sığâr u kibârın du'â-yı hayrlarıyla ibtidâ,

¹ V, p.58.

² V, p.118.

Menzil-i Namâzgâh: Üç gün meks edüp ol ân Fazlî Paşa'nın Ahmed Ağa nâm bir umûr-dâde müsellimi geliüp dîvân-ı pâdişâhîde hil'at-i fâhire geyüp eyâlet-i Özü'ye Fazlî Paşa mutasarrıf olup ol gün Melek Ahmed Paşa mu'tâd-ı kadîmesi üzre Namâzgâh'dan kalkup cânib-i kibleye..."

During the expedition, in which Evliya participated in company of Melek Ahmed Paşa, they had a brake in the Seydi Ahmet Paşa namazgah in the Hilevne plain. Evliya recorded what happened there, by ornamenting his text with a new figure of dream, to which he attributed much. His expressions are important for displaying the varieties that namazgahs contributed to the headquarter notion:¹

"Bu hakîr-i pür-taksîr bu Hilevne kal'asın dahi kemâl mertebe seyr [ü] temâşâ edüp, andan yine refîklerimizle Hilevne sahrâsında Seydî Ahmed Paşa namâzgâhı dibinde ordu-yı İslâm'da Melek Ahmed Paşa efendimize istikbâlimize çıkan ağavâtlarıyla varup dest-i şerîfin bûs edince..."

Ba'dehû Hilevne gâzîleriyle her bâr atlanup sayd [u] şikârlara gidüp seyr [u] temâşâlar ederdik ve niçe yüz aded mesîregâhlara giderdik

Ve min-bedâyi'i'l-garâ'ibi'r-rü'yâyı's-sâliha-i Gâzî Melek Ahmed Paşa

Bir sabâh salât-ı fecri Hilevne sahrâsında Hilevne Yeniçeri Ağası Halil Ağa ve Tekeli Paşa Kethüdâsı Hüseyin Ağa ve hakîr hâzır olup,

Melek Ahmed Paşa eydir: "Hayrola, bu gece bir vâkı'a gördüm. Bu yanıımızdaki Seydî Ahmed Paşa inşâ ettiği namâzgâhın minberine hakîr çıkup cümle askere hutbe tilâvet ederdim. Meğer cum'a günü imiş. Hutbeyi okurken anı gördüm. Seydî Ahmed Paşa zırh [u] zereh-kiülâh ve ser-penâhın başına geymiş minber nerdübânından yukaru çıkup eydir: 'Âh Birâderim, benim minberime çıkmak hüner değildir. Beni Köpürlü Mehemed Paşa vezîre arz edüp beni öldürmeden halâs eyle. Yohsa beni böyle bir cum'a günü şehîd ederler' deyü ağladı. Biz dahi hutbeyi birağup, 'Elem çekme birâder, seni anlardan Allâh kurtarır. İnşâ'allâh sene-i âtîde seninle Tımışvâr ovasında

¹ V, p.236.

mülâkat olup seni bir hâl ederiz. Elem çekme. Var Budin'e girüp kal'ayı bir hoşca amâr edüp hıfz [u] hırâset üzre ol' dedim. Ol dahi 'Kabûl etdik. Hemân bizi hayır du'âdan unutma' deyü minberden gerü gerü ineyim derken başı aşağı düşüp teker meker olup merhûm oldu. Hemân ben de,

'Bire meded, şu hutbeyi tamâm edüp şu gâzî vezîri defn edelim' deyü ale'l-acele hutbeyi,

(İsyankar, günühkar ve kendime zulmeden nefsim Allah'tan korkmasını ve O'na itaat etmesini salık veririm.) deyüp 'Eyyühe'l-hâzırûn' demeyüp 'Eyyühe'l-gâfilûn' dedim.

Andan gördüm ki şu karşıki Porolok dağından berü boğazları zincirli yedi sekiz yüz mikdârı kara hınzîrlar ol dağlardan berü bu sahrâya inüp cum'a namâzı kılan cemâ'atleri bölük bölük bölerek cemâ'at içine girüp minber dibinde yatan Seydî Ahmed Paşa'nın meyyitine ol hınzîrlar birkaç dış urdular, ammâ cemâ'at aslâ safların bozmadılar ve bu hınzîrların içinde bir semiz sarı ayu seğirde seğirde boynunda zincirin sürüyüp hemân minbere çıkmâğa başladı. Hemân Evliyâm, sen ayunun zincirinden yapışup minberden aşağı çeküp düşürdüğünde, "Bire Evliyâ'm öldür" deyü minberden feryâd ederim. Sen dahi dal kılıç olup ayıyı katl eyleyüp leşini Seydî Ahmed Paşa'nın meyyiti yanına kodun. Ben dahi hutbeyi tamâm edüp salât-ı cum'ayı edâ etdikden sonra cemâ'at içine gelen kara hınzîrları kırın deyü fermân etdiğimde cümlesin kılıç ile kırdılar. Meğer sabâh namâzı karîb imiş. Silihdâr Süleymân beni uyarup şimdi salât-ı fecri kılup sizler geldiniz. Ben dahi bism-i İlâh ile bu vâkı'ayı sizlere takrîr eyledim" buyurdıklarında, yeniçeri ağası ve Tekeli Mustafâ Paşa kethüdâsı, "Hayr ola sultânım" dediklerinde,

Hakîr eyitdim: "Hayr ola sultânım, Allâhu a'lem ve Resûluhü".

The records of Çelebi about the namazgah on the left side of the Bender castle by the Turla (Dniester) river are significant for they are reflecting the substantive functions of namazgahs, which were located on strategic locations and for pre-security they were important: "*mecma'ü'l-irfân bir teferrücgâh ve mesîregâh*

namâzgâh-ı ferah-fezâsı var. Cümle guzât anda tâ'at u ibâdet edüp varda bekleler.”¹

As for the popular religious, social and cultural functions of the namazgahs, Evliya Çelebi, after giving architectural and natural features, emphasizes educational, social and cultural functions of the Öziçe namazgah, which is the second most impressive one for him, beyond being a praying centre:²

“...cemî’i eşcârların zıll-ı himâyelerinde cümle mü’minân muvahhidân tâ’at-ı Yezdân edüp şehrin cemî’i a’yân-ı kibârı ve erbâb-ı me’ârif ve âşıkân-ı sâdikânları bu menzilgâhda cem’ olup mubâhase-i ilm edüp gûy gûy sohbet-i hâs ederler, bir aceb mesîregâh u teferrücgâh ve pâk ibâdetgâhdır, ammâ cânib-i vakfından dörd aded bevâbları vardır.

El-hâsıl bir mecma’-i ulemâ ve bir menba’-ı fuzelâ ve bir ârâmgâh-ı kân-ı şu’arâ yeridir.”

The text of Evliya about the Karaferya namazgah,³ which became the symbol of the namazgahas in the Balkans in Evliya’s world, explains its function and role in the city’s educational and cultural life in a more literary style:

“...bu Karafer[y]e musallâsı vâcibü’s-seyr küşâde bir medrese-i azîmdir, zîrâ şehrin cemî’i ulemâ vü sülehâ ve meşâyihân tâlibân-ı ulûmları ba’de’l-asr bu hıyâbân içre cem’ olup köşe be-köşe küme küme mübâhese-i ulûm-ı şer’iyye ve gayrı ulûm-ı Arabiyye görüp can sohbetleri edüp mecma’-ı ulemâ ve menba’-ı fuzalâ ve mesken-i şu’arâ-yı musannifîn müverrihîn kânıdır. İktizâ etdikde niçe yüz bin âdem bu dergâhda cem’ olup du’a-yı istiskâ edüp tazarru’ [u] nâlişler etdiklerinde elbette du’âları hayyiz-i kabûlde vâki’ olup bir müstecâbü’-d-da’ve du’â hırmeni namazgâh-ı bî-misildir kim gören âdemler engüş ber-dehen edüp akli perîşân olmak martabasına varır.”

At the same time; the square, musalla, promenade and army namazgahs described by Evliya were accepted as holy places where people believed that their praying

¹ V, p.65.

² VI, p.246.

³ VIII, pp.82-83.

would be accepted. In the related lines “*salât-ı îydeyn ve salât-ı du‘â-i istiskâ için*” about the Öziçe namazgah,¹ besides its festival place function, he emphasizes the function and role of a common praying place. This fact, related with Karaferye, is explained clearly in the next passage:

“... İktizâ etdikde niçe yüz bin âdem bu dergâhda cem‘ olup du‘a-yı istiskâ edüp tazarru‘ [u] nâlişler etdiklerinde elbette du‘âları hayyiz-i kabûlde vâki‘ olup...”

This function of namazgahs was briefly and clearly recorded in the sentences under the title “*Der-terkîm-i musallâ-yı erbâb-ı hâcât*”, which is reserved for the namazgah in Tekirdağ:²

“*Bu şehirde ve taşra kurâlarda bârân-ı rahmet yağmasa yâhûd vebâ-yı azîm ve yâhûd bir âfât-ı semavî veyâ bir âfât-ı arazî olsa cümle ahâlî-i vilâyet bu musallâya istiskâ du‘âsına çıkup ba‘de salâti‘l-fecr du‘â vü senâ ederler.*”

The descriptions on the namazgah to the east of Athens, in the place called “*Taht-ı Belkîs*”, which Evliya classifies as “*teferrücgâh namazgâh*”, one of the important structures of this kind recorded by Evliya Çelebi, are important in taking attention to another function not given for the other namazgahs:³

“*Bu şehir-i Atina’nın gün doğusu tarafında taht-ı Belkîs derler, Hazret-i Süleymân Nebî dîvlere fermân edüp yapmışlardır. Eğer bunun dahi evsâfını kemâ-kân olan eser-i binâ-yı amûd-ı gûnâ-gûnları ve tâk-i Kisrâları ve kubâb-ı âlîleriyle ta‘rîf ü tavsîf etsek bir kürrâs-ı kitâbet olur. Lâkin şimdiki hâlde Atina şehrinin namâzgâhıdır kim istiskâ du‘âsına ve salât-ı iydeyne cümle müslimîn pürsilâh olup çıkarlar, zîrâ bu şehirde müselmân kalmayup cümle kefereler kalır. Bu dahi bir vâcibü’s-seyr üstü açık amûd-ı müntehâları âlî bir namâzgâh-ı sarây-ı azîmdir kim midhatinde lisânlar kâsırdır.*”

¹ VI, p.246.

² VIII, p.349.

³ VIII, p.118.

General Assessment and Conclusion

Evliya Çelebi, who was rightly awarded with the title “*seyyâh-ı âlem*” (world traveler), since he spent about fifty years of his life by traveling, introduces in his ten volumes Seyahatname, a unique travel-book in the world, a general portrait of the 17th century the Ottoman world in its own literary characteristics. He combines his observations with other verbal and written sources, and then produces his own texts in a specific pattern. He gives details of some cases and samples in an amazing degree. Within this context, he referred to the namazgahs also, which were evaluated as open praying places (open masques) for their functions on religious, social and cultural life of cities and towns, with great emphasize, besides closed praying places of settlements like mosques and masjids.

Relying on the observations of Evliya Çelebi, who traveled in the region for many times, we may conclude that the namazgahs, main theme of this paper, became famous with their samples of the headquarter kind ones, which were built on the points used as gathering places for troops during the process of conquest of the Balkans, and where all members of the army could pray. These structures, which were evaluated physically and socially by Evliya Çelebi, after some time passed, turned to be resting places on the ways, which common people also used for their needs. At the same time the fountain type namazgahs, in which restricted numbers of people could pray, increased.

The namazgahs, called also as *îydgâh*, *meydan*, *musalla*, *ibâdetgâh* and *secdegâh* in our context, were founded as multi-functional structures for the aim of providing circumstances for funeral, Friday and holiday namaz, as well as for common praying. Besides the namazgahs founded in cities or near castles, there were other widespread big namazgahs that were founded in promenade places away from settlements. In Evliya Çelebi’s Seyahatname, there are lots of physical and social descriptions of the “*çemenzâr*” and “*mesiregâh-teferrücgâh*” namazgahs spread all over the Balkans, the one in Karaferye being the most eminent one. They were founded on high and broad meadows among and under long trees. When namazgahs were founded, the main aim was to provide a place for crowded namaz, but they turned out to be some kind of medreses (religious education places), in the course of time, which are described in the book as “*menba‘-ı fuzalâ*”, “*mesken-i şu‘arâ*”, “*mecma-i ulemâ*” “*mübâhese-i ulum-ı şer‘iyye*”, and also they became conversations places (where Evliya also attended once as a speech man, with the title “*nedîm-i âdem*”), so being called as “*sohbetgâh*”. Regarding this fact, it would not be a mistake to say that the namazgahs in cities, towns or around them were the centres for the science, culture and arts; they manipulated social and religious life there.

In residence places or around them, historical namazgahs played important role in physical organization of cities, being attractive places as “*teferrücgâh*”. Actually, the effects of the namazgahs on physical organization of cities are clear in such examples: The city squares are named “namazgah meydanı” (means namazgah square) in some cities as in Ergirikasrı. One of the castle gates is called “namazgah kapısı” (means namazgah porte) in Silistre, Ergirikasrı and Mazistre. Yanya, Silistre and Belgrad had quarters called “Namazgah Mahallesi”. One of the important issues that we have to say in this context is that some of the namazgahs used as holiday places in urban areas turned out in the course of time to be open praying or performing namaz places, as a result of growth of settlements. As happened in İzvornik and Belgrad, the cities grew up and the namazgah areas were opened for habitation, the original namazghas becoming mosques. Some mosques called “namazgah” points to such a development there. In this context, as happened in İzmir (where the author of this paper lives), quarters around namazgahs were called “namazgah mahallesi”. These names survived even though namazgahs disappeared in later centuries.

When common samples are taken into consideration, a few of the namazgahs, which generally were built on the qibla direction with a fixed mihrab and shrine, and which were surrounded with low doors or high muezzin mahfils, survived today. In the Balkans, the most known structure is the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Namazgah¹ in Prizren, Kosova, which was recently restored. Most of the hundreds of namazgahs recorded in the Seyahatname of Evliya Çelebi or those never recorded have been lost cross the succeeding centuries. Foundation (waqf) records reveal their existence in many other places; a great part of them also does not exist today. Therefore, being an important element of Turkish Islamic culture and architecture, humble in material sense but great in varieties and functions, namazgahs has been lost to a great degree. A more significant question is that they were converted to Christian temples, as the historical cypresses witness in silence, and were deprived of their original historical identities, as in the case of the Karaferye namazgah, symbol of the Balkan namazgahs in the view of Evliya Çelebi.

Restoration of some namazgahs in a right way on their original places and original structures, as happened in Prizren, would compensate this loss partially in each Balkans country. In this way, Evliya’s soul, which didn’t forget praying in such a

¹ Hakkı Acun - Mehmet İbrahimgil, *Kosova-Prizren Fatih Sultan Mehmed Namazgâhı (Kırık cami) Kazı ve Restorasyon çalışmaları ile Şehit Başçavuş Hüseyin Kutlu Parkı*, Ankara 2002.

way as “*İnkırâzu’ d-devrân mü’ebbed ola, âmîn ve yâ Mu‘în*” after each namazgâh description, would feel relaxed to some degree.

Supplement

The namazgâhs portrayed in the Balkan cities and towns in Evliya Çelebi’s Seyahatname

The settlement (Digs)	Namazgâh	Its place in the book
Silistre (Bulgaria)	Mesire-i Namazgâh	III, 188
	Melek Ahmed Paşa Musallâsı	III, 192
Bender (Moldavya)	Mesire-i Namazgâh	V, 165
Varna (Bulgaria)	Mesiregâh Namazgâh	V, 52
Belgrad (Serbia)	Namazgâh	V, 193-196
Valiva /Valyeva/Valjevo (Serbia)	Namazgâh-ı Çemenzâr	V, 221
Hilevne (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Ordugâh-Namazgâh	V, 236
Gölikesri	Namazgâh	V, 310
Vidin (Bulgaria)	Mesîregâh-Namazgâh	VI, 98
Mitroviçe/Mitroviçe (Kosovo)	Mesiregâh-Namazgâh	VI, 102
Öziçe/Öziçe (Serbia)	Mesîregâh-Namazgâh	VI, 246
Pirepol/Pirboy/Pirepo y (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Mesiregâh-Namazgâh	VI, 249
Çayniçe/Çayniçe (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Mesiregâh-Namazgâh	VI, 252-253
Foça (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Namazgâh	VI, 254

Ustolça/Tulça (Rumania)	Namazgâh	VI, 262
Mostar (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Namazgâh	VI, 289
İzvornik (Bosnia Herzegovina)	Namazgâh	VI, 295
Varat (Rumania)	Namazgâh	VII, 153
Fethü'l-İslâm (Bulgaria)	Namazgâh/Musallâ	VII, 176
Siroz (Greece)	Namazgâh/Musallâ	VIII, 58
Yenişehir (Greece)	Namazgâh	VIII, 87
Karaferye (Greece)	Sohbetgâh/İbadetgâ h/Namazgâh	VIII, 82-83
Atina (Greece)	Belkîs Teferrücgâh- Namazgâhı	VIII, 118
Petratina/Karitina (Greece)	Namazgâh/Musallâ	VIII, 153
Mazistre/Mizistre (Greece)	Namazgâh	VIII, 155
Misehor/Misehori (Greece)	Musallâ-yı Namazgâh	VIII, 155
	Musallâ-yı Namazgâh	VIII, 155
İnebahtı (Greece)	Musallâ	VIII, 274
Narda (Greece)	Namazgâh	VIII, 285
Yanya (Greece)	Namazgâh	VIII, 289-290
Aydonat (Greece)	Namazgâh- Mezaristan	VIII, 294
Ergirikasrı/Gjirokaster (Albania)	Namazgâh	VIII, 300
Avlonya/Vlora (Albania)	Namazgâh	VIII, 313
Elbasan (Albania)	Musallâ/ Namazgâh	VIII, 322