

KURDISH LIFE AND ROLE IN THE OTTOMAN  
ADMINISTRATION IN EVLIYA ÇELEBI'S  
*SEYAHATNAME*

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Kurdistan was an important economic, political, and cultural territory of the Ottoman Empire. Many Ottoman-era scholars researched the region, mainly based on formal documents like Tahrir notebooks. Among the most important resources are travellers' narrations about the region, including those associated with Western missionaries and espionage activities. Ottoman officials and citizens travelled to Kurdistan for official duties and ethnographic travel itself, including Evliya Çelebi (the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman traveller). He described the culture, civilization, and administration of Kurdistan in great detail for the fourth volume of his book of travel (*Seyahatname*). Çelebi visited almost all regions in Kurdistan between 1655 and 1656. In his visit to these places, Çelebi paid attention to history, science, administration and religious life. He narrated important information about mosques, palaces, hammams (public bath), madrasahs, and the antiquities of the region. He paid special attention to the history of administration and structure by giving specific details of information about ruling families in Kurdistan. He met with the rulers of that period and explained the structure of their administration. Also, he provided information about relations between the Ottoman Empire and local rulers. He examined and noted daily lives, religions, languages, foods, special days, social and cultural lives. The purpose of this work is to draw a critical analysis of Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, based on extensive archival resources and secondary sources to present a pioneering insight into the Ottoman engagement with Kurdistan during this period. In doing this, the researcher tries to present a more transparent overview of an important region that was to some extent neglected in Islamic historical studies. In this study, a Qualitative historical and textual analysis method was used. The most notable findings of this study are; Firstly, Çelebi visited Erzurum province (in south eastern Turkey) many years earlier than his travels to Kurdistan and provided invaluable data on Kurds living there at the time which has not been mentioned by other travellers. Secondly, he made an interesting remark about peace and harmony among various religious communities in Kurdistan. Thirdly, Çelebi made a unique contribution to the study of Islamic education and sciences by uncovering in great detail numerous madrasahs and other institutions of learning.

## خلاصة البحث

كان كردستان منطقة اقتصادية وسياسية وثقافية مهمة في الإمبراطورية العثمانية، وقام العديد من علماء العصر العثماني بإجراء أبحاث في المنطقة، وذلك استناداً بشكل أساسي على الوثائق الرسمية مثل دفاتر التحرير. من أهم الموارد الأساسية لهذه الدراسات هي روايات المسافرين حول المنطقة، بما في ذلك تلك المرتبطة بأنشطة التبشير والتجسس الغربية. وكما كان المسؤولون والمواطنون العثمانيون يسافرون إلى كردستان للقيام بالواجبات الرسمية؛ فإن أحد أهم هؤلاء هو الرحالة اوليا جلبي Evliya Çelebi. الذي قام بشرح وبيان النواحي الثقافية والحضارية والإدارية في كردستان بالتفصيل وذلك في المجلد الرابع من كتابه المسمى بـ"سياحتنامه". فزار الجلبي جميع مناطق كردستان تقريباً بين عامي 1655 و 1656 وفي زيارته لهذه الأماكن اهتم كثيراً بالتاريخ والعلوم والإدارة والحياة الدينية. وروى معلومات مهمة عن المساجد والأماكن والحمامات والمدارس والآثار التاريخية لهذه المدن. كما أولى اهتماماً خاصاً بتاريخ الإدارة والهيكل الإداري المتبع حينذاك. كما قام بذكر تفاصيل كثيرة حول الحكام وعائلاتهم. وقد التقى مع حكام تلك الفترة وشرح هيكل إدارتها. كما قدم معلومات حول العلاقات بين الإمبراطورية العثمانية والحكام المحليين. أيضاً، درس الحياة اليومية والأديان واللغات والأطعمة وأيام الاحتفالات والحياة الاجتماعية والثقافية للناس. الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تحليل نقدي لما ورد عن كورد وكوردستان في كتاب الجلبي الموسوم بـ"سياحتنامه" مستخدماً موارد أرشيفية واسعة النطاق، ومصادر ثانوية لتقديم رؤية رائدة في التعامل العثماني مع كردستان خلال تلك الفترة، مما يعطي نظرة أكثر شفافية لمنطقة مهمة تم تجاهلها في الدراسات التاريخية الإسلامية. في هذه الدراسة تم استخدام أسلوب التحليل النوعي التاريخي للنصوص. ومن أهم نتائج هذه الدراسة هي: أن أوليا جلبي جاء إلى إقليم أرضروم قبل سنوات عديدة، وحتى قبل سفره إلى كوردستان، حيث عاش ومكث مع العديد من الأقليات والطوائف الدينية الإسلامية وغير الإسلامية المنسجمة فيما بينها في كوردستان. وأخيراً تم توفير السكن والطعام للطلاب في كوردستان.

## APPROVAL PAGE

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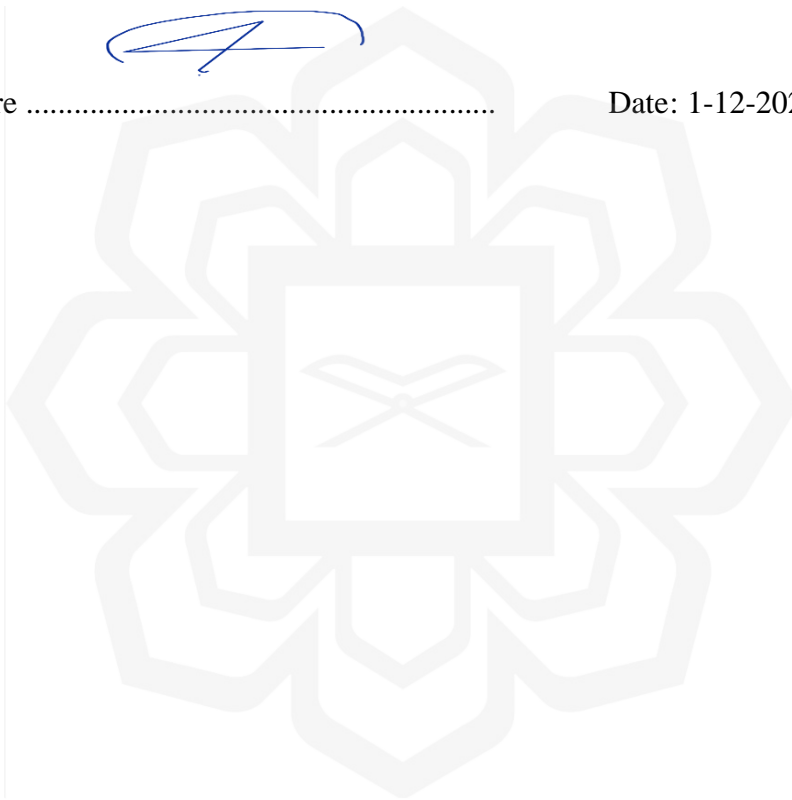
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## DECLARATION

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Kurds are an ancient Indo-European people inhabiting the region of Greater Kurdistan in West Asia. Located at the cross-roads of global history, Kurds and Kurdistan have always been of interest to regional and world powers in terms of religion, education, economy, politics, and culture. The first historical records of Kurdistan are Sumerian references to the region from around 3000 BC, referring to “The land of Karda”. Inhabiting a large and mountainous realm, Kurds have generally been relatively aloof from the fluctuations in major empires.<sup>1</sup> However, at one time or another in their early history, some or all of them came under the dominance of the Subari, the Lulubi, the Assyrians, and the Medians.<sup>2</sup> After the collapse of the paleo-Kurdish state known as the Media Empire, the Parthians and Romans variously held nominal sway over Kurdish areas (mainly in modern Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey) until the Muslim conquest (*Futuhāt*) of Iraq, the Levant, and Persia. Most Kurds then embraced Islam, and Kurdistan became a bulwark of staunch warriors defending the Muslim caliphate from the Christian Byzantine Empire and its allies.<sup>3</sup>

In the sixteenth century, during the height of Ottoman expansion, most of Kurdistan was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, with a small enclave coming under the sway of the new Safavid dynasty (est. 1501) in Persia. Both empires were in

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Robson, *Iraqi Kurds—their history and culture*, (Washington DC: the refuge service center, 1996), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammed Amin Zeki Beg, *Khulaṣa-i Tarikhi Kurd u Kurdistan* (A Brief History of Kurds and Kurdistan), (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu’un al-Ṣaqafa ‘ama, 2005), 58-69.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Mardokhi Kurdistani, *Mejuy Kurd u Kurdistan* (The history of Kurd and Kurdistan), translated by Mohammed Karim Mohammed Sa’ed, (Suleimani: Chwarchra Press, 2007), 61-69.

competition over Kurdish-populated areas, but the Ottomans were more successful negotiators, and an influential group of Kurdish notables opted to join the expanding empire. The level of autonomy granted to local Kurdish notables varied according to place and time, but the salient feature of political administration in the Kurdistan region was an understanding that they were engaged in a mutually beneficial arrangement with the Ottoman state, whereby the Ottomans would gain suzerainty over the land and loyalty of Kurdish chiefs and notables, and the latter would be assured a wide measure of local authority. While this arrangement was mostly satisfactory to Kurdish notables, it does not seem to have significantly changed conditions on the ground for the average Kurdish peasant or nomad, who largely continued to live under their Aghas and Sheikhs as they had for centuries. With the military campaigns in the region more or less over, they benefitted from the general advantages of increased peace, security, and stability that the new arrangement brought to the region, and its economic development.<sup>4</sup>

The region was largely unknown to Europeans during the middle ages, but by the time of the Ottoman ascendancy travellers had begun visiting from Western countries, including traders and Christian missionaries, who were often engaged in various forms of espionage. Similarly, Ottoman travellers frequented these areas for the purposes of travel and formal state duties. One of the most important Ottoman visitors was Evliya Çelebi (1611-1684),<sup>5</sup> who came to Kurdistan three times (in 1646, 1649, 1655) and dedicated the whole volume four of his a ten-volume travel book entitled *Seyahatname*, to Kurdistan. In this volume he gives details of his sojourn in

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<sup>4</sup> Janet Klein, *the Kurds History, Religion, Language, Politics* (Vienna: Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2015), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> “Evliya” means a pious person or saint, and “Çelebi” means a gentleman; both words are honorific titles. This study generally uses the latter to refer to Evliya Çelebi. Bzhar Othman Ahmed, *Kurdistan la Seyahatname-i Evliya Çelebi da-Bashi Yakam: Bashuri Kurdistan* (Kurdistan in the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi - first section: south of Kurdistan). (Suleimaniyah: Sara Press, 2019), 111.

Kurdistan, including key cities such as Erbil, Kirkuk, Zakho, Shahrizor, Diyarbakir, Van, Mardin, and Emdiyah, which he visited during the period 1655-1666. Evliya Çelebi paid attention to the Kurds' history, science, administration, religious lives, and contribution to Ottoman administration. He extensively described the period extending from the beginning of Islamic rule in Kurdistan until the rule of Sultan Murat IV (r.1623-1640).

Çelebi narrated important information about the Kurds' daily lives, economic activities (i.e. trade and agriculture), religious beliefs and practises, languages, foods, social and cultural lives, mosques, palaces, hammams, madrasahs, and antiquities. He also gave bibliographical information on Kurdish scholars from different branches of knowledge, and described the educational set-up. He undertook some linguistic analysis of different Kurdish dialects and lexicon. Çelebi met with the major Kurdish rulers of that period and explained the structures of their administration. He also recorded information about relations between the Ottoman Empire and Kurdish chieftains, and their role in and contribution to Ottoman administration.<sup>6</sup>

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Many studies have been written on Kurdish history during the rule of the Ottoman Empire in Kurdistan, and Ottoman-Kurdish relationships, which have cited Çelebi's book. It is very instrumental to re-claim the history of Ottoman-Kurdish history, but the problem is that defective sources and politically motivated narratives cloud the exploration of this history. While many studies have recounted the role of the Kurds in Ottoman administration, most of them did not narrate Kurdish role in due

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<sup>6</sup> Bzhar Othman Ahmed, "Evliya Çelebi *Seyahatnamesi*'ne göre Musul, Şehrizer ve İmâdiyye" (Musul, Shahrizor and Imadiyye According to Evliya Çelebi's Travel Book), (M.A Thesis, University of Sakarya, 2017), v.

detail. Although, they have given information about the socio-politico-economic and cultural history of Kurds, their information is incomplete and insufficient because of not using original manuscripts of Evlyâ Çelebi and other new documents on Kurdish history which shed new light on the subject.

Conversely, this study utilises all available sources to produce a more accurate and comparative narration on the subject, exploring Kurdish-Ottoman relations from Çelebi's perspective in depth and Kurdish life during the Ottoman's period according to *Seyahatname*. That is why this topic selected.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is important firstly in revealing new knowledge about the history of the Kurds and Kurdistan during the classical Ottoman period, addressing the limited scope of existing studies.

Secondly, this research discovers the role of Kurds in the administration and sheds new light on their place in Ottoman administration according to Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, because existing studies on Ottoman-Kurdish relationships do not have comprehensive information.

Thirdly, it solves some vagueness or historical contradictions, because many primary sources on Çelebi and the history of Kurds in the Ottoman Empire existing in the Ottoman archives have not been sufficiently scrutinized up to the present date. Therefore, this proposed research intends to address this negligence in the sufficient tapping of the archival sources and adopt a global approach in tackling that history through all of Kurdish history and that of Ottoman administration. Thus, it is very significant in filling the existing gaps in the studies on The Role of Kurds in the Ottoman provincial administration.

In addition, it offers a great contribution to the field of Ottoman and Kurdish studies, discussing the education and economic situations in Kurdistan during the Ottomans in the mid of 17th century by utilising extensive historical sources relative to Çelebi's book, including eastern and western travellers' accounts and Ottoman archival materials.

Lastly, it reclaims the narrative of Kurdish civilizational development and socio-cultural and political greatness, taking a closer look at the role of the Kurds in Ottoman administration according to Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, including Kurds in the Ottoman Empire outside of Kurdistan.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

By focusing mainly on the role of Kurds in Ottoman administration according to Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, the present work endeavours to answer the following questions:

1. What was Evliya Çelebi's contribution in narrating the history of Kurds and Kurdistan in *Seyahatname*?
2. How did Evliya Çelebi demonstrate the role of Kurds in political participation under Ottoman administration in Kurdistan?
3. How did Evliya Çelebi recount the Kurdish religion and educational life under Ottoman administration in Kurdistan?
4. How did Evliya Çelebi articulate the Kurdish socio-cultural and economic advancement during the Ottoman administration in Kurdistan?

## **1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

With the hope of addressing the issue at hand to the best possible extent, the study aims to:

1. Explore Evliya Çelebi's contributions in narrating the history of Kurds and Kurdistan in *Seyahatname*.
2. Demonstrate the role of Kurds in political participation under Ottoman administration in Kurdistan.
3. Recount the Kurdish religion and educational life under Ottoman administration in Kurdistan.
4. Articulate Kurdish socio-cultural and economic advancement during the Ottoman administration in Kurdistan.

## **1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW**

To study Kurdish role in Ottoman administration according to Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, the research used different kinds of literature such as archival manuscripts, daily and monthly publications (such as journals, newspapers, and magazines), dictionaries, sourcebooks, encyclopaedias, books, research works, and academic theses.

The first type of literature used in this research includes the documents found in the Ottoman archives in Turkey. The second category consists of a number of periodicals, scholarly journals, newspapers, and magazines which were issued in the Turkey and Kurdistan region of Iraq, such as *Al-Mishkat* magazine, *Raparin University Journal*, and the *PESA International Journal of Social Studies*. The third category consists of dictionaries, sourcebooks, the Sultan Suleiman Kanun-name (Law), and encyclopaedias, which are useful in giving information on Kurdish

emirates, personalities, and events. The last group of literature includes books, research works, and theses on the Kurds and Çelebi himself.

This literature review is divided into three sub-sections. Section one reviews the history of the Kurds, Çelebi's life, and his travelogue. Section two reviews the literature related to Kurds' participation in Ottoman administration, and Kurdish scholars in the Ottoman Empire. The final section comprises the literature review related to Kurdish economic life and Kurdish culture in the Ottoman Empire according to Kurdish and Turkish scholars such as Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş, Khalil 'Alī Murat, 'Imad Abdulsalam, and others. It should be noted that several important new books have been published in this field, as adumbrated below.

### **1.6.1 General Kurdish History and Evliya Çelebi's Life**

The first thematic group consists of some different sources, for example the most important books in Kurdistan and Kurdish history written by Kurdish writers such as Mohammed Amin Zeki Beg's *Khulaṣa-i Tarikhi Kurd u Kurdistan* (A Brief History of Kurds and Kurdistan).<sup>7</sup> Despite mentioning a lot of important information, Zeki Beg did not use conventional academic methods in writing this book, merely narrating a chronology of information about Kurdish history to the present. While it is a good rudimentary source to introduce Kurds and Kurdistan, presenting an outline of Kurdish history from the earliest times to the twentieth century, his information about Kurds and Kurdistan is narrow and insufficient. This research will show Kurdish history and Kurdistan geography in detail with reference to travellers' accounts.

Another book on this topic has written by Eastern and Western writers using different methods to discuss the history of Kurds and the geography of Kurdistan.

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<sup>7</sup> Mohammed Amin Zeki Beg, *Khulaṣa-i Tarikh-i Kurd u Kurdistan* (A Brief History of Kurd and Kurdistan), (Baghdad: Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafa 'ama, 2005).

They commonly trace Kurdish history back to around 3000 BC. For example, Kreyenbroek and Sperl's book *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*<sup>8</sup> focused on qualitative approaches and interviews to discuss Kurdish history and geography. However, David Mcdowall's study on the Kurds entitled *Modern History of the Kurds*<sup>9</sup> uses a descriptive analytical approach and gives importance to the contemporary history of Kurds as well as their origin and original homeland, making it one of the best studies in Kurdish history.

Arshak Safrastiyani's book *Kurd u Kurdistan (Kurds and Kurdistan)*<sup>10</sup> used qualitative approach dates Kurdish history back to 2500 BC, while Mohammed Mardokhi believes that Kurdish history goes back to the *Guti* state in around 3600 BC.<sup>11</sup> 'Othman 'Alī, a well-known Canadian expert on the Ottoman Empire and the history of Kurds, in his book *Chand Lekolinawayak Darbaray Bzavi hawcharkhi Kurd (Some Studies of the contemporary Kurdish Movements)*<sup>12</sup> summarizes Kurdish history and geography of Kurdistan in the Ottoman Empire, using primary sources. However, these works do not discuss the history of Kurds in the Ottoman Empire in detail, which we deeply discussed in this study.

Besides these general historical works, there are many studies done by Kurdish scholars to introduce the Kurdish national case to the world since 1990, using qualitative historical investigation and critical analysis, such as *Al-Mas'alah al-*

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Kreyenbroek & Stefan Sperl, the *Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> David Mcdowall, *A modern history of the Kurds*, third edition, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004). 33-35.

<sup>10</sup> Arshak Safrastiyani, *Kurd u Kurdistan (Kurds and Kurdistan)*, translated by Amin Shwan, (Erbil: Aras Press, 2005), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Kurdistani, 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> Othman Ali, *Chand Lekolinawayak Darbaray Bzavi hawcharkhi Kurd (Some Studies of the contemporary Kurd's Movements)*, (Suleiman: Rey New Press, 2010).

*Kurdiyah : al-wahm wal Haqiqah* (The Kurd's Case: Myth or Reality?)<sup>13</sup> by Mazn Bilal, and Munzir Musli's study *Al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah wal Hizbiyah fi Kurdistan* (Political and Partisan Life in Kurdistan)<sup>14</sup> published in 1991. Moreover, Hamid Mahmoud Isa's *Al-mushkilah kurdiyah fi sharq al-Awşat* (The Kurdish Problem in the Middle East)<sup>15</sup> and Mustapha Muslim's *Şafaḥat al-Mashriqah min al-Ta'rikh al-Kurd* (Bright Pages from the Kurdish History)<sup>16</sup> are comprehensive studies to introduce it to us Kurdistan's borders, and discuss the history of the *Mad*, *Mitanni*, *Gutty*, *Loulubi*, and *Ayybuid* dynasties.

The most important study about Çelebi's history is Robert Dankoff's *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Evliya Çelebi*,<sup>17</sup> based on historical and biographical studies. He discussed Çelebi's life from birth until death, *Seyahatname*, and Çelebi's strategies of travelling. It is a comprehensive study on Çelebi's history and his role in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the author focused on many secret aspects of Çelebi's life. He believes that Çelebi's death was in 1683, concurring with Mohammed Akbaş,<sup>18</sup> but some Turkish scholars believe he died in 1682 in Egypt.<sup>19</sup> In a seminal article written by Martin van Bruinessen on Çelebi's life and his travels in Kurdistan, *Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th Centuries, as Reflected in Evliya Çelebi's*

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<sup>13</sup> Mazn Bilal, *Al-Mas'alah al-Kurdiyah: al-Wahm wal Haqiqah* (The Kurd's Case: Myth or Reality?), (Beirut: Baylisan ilnasher wal tawzi', 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Munzir Musli, *Al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah wal Hizbiyah fi Kurdistan* (Political and Partisan Life in Kurdistan), London: Riyadh al-Ra'is lil kitub wal nasher, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Hamid Mahmoud Isa, *Al-Mushkilah kurdiyah fi Sharq al-Awşat* (The Kurdish Problem in the Middle East), (Qahira: Maktabah Madbuli, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Mustapha Muslim, *Şafaḥat al-Mashriqah min al-Ta'rikh al-Kurd* (Bright Pages of the Kurdish History), (Al-Riyaz: Işdarat jam'iyah 'Ulama' Kurdistan, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Dankoff, *An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Evliya Çelebi*, second edition, (Netherlands, Brill, 2006), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Mehmet Akbaş, "Evliya Çelebi'nin gözüyle Kürtler ve Kürdistan" (Kurds and Kurdistan in Evliya Çelebi's eyes), *Journal of Artuklu Academia*, issue: 2(1), (2015), 2

<sup>19</sup> Ülku Elik Şavk, *Sorularda Evliya Çelebi İnsanlık Tarihine Yön Veren 20 Kişiden Biri* (Evliya Çelebi is one of 20 people who have directed Influence on the History of Humanity), (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enistütüsü, 2011), 15.

*Seyahatname*.<sup>20</sup> His approach is more focused on historical comparative analysis. Martin spent a long time in Kurdistan and he presents a good comparative study between his information and that of Emir Sherefhan on Kurdistan. However, another book entitled *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakır*<sup>21</sup> written by Martin Van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten discusses Diyarbakır according to Çelebi's travel book also gives very important information on Çelebi's life and reasons of his travels to Diyarbakır, but the authors did not mentioned Çelebi's life in the whole of Kurdistan.

A conference was organized in 2011 on Çelebi's 400<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, *Doğumunun 400. Yılında Uluslararası Evliya Çelebi Sempozyumu* (International Evliya Çelebi Symposium on the 400th Anniversary of His Birth). The conference papers were subsequently published in the form of a book.<sup>22</sup> However, while the 40 papers presented during the conference from different countries discussed Çelebi's life in detail, there was no paper focused on his time in Kurdistan, possibly due to the political sensitivity of Kurdish issues. While Evliya spent more than eleven years in Kurdistan and provided a fourth volume about his life there. The thesis discusses Çelebi's life in Kurdistan and defines the book of travel (*Seyahatname*) in detail. However, it will also discuss the history of Kurdistan from ancient times to Çelebi's time, as well as the geography of Kurdistan in the Near East.

### **1.6.2 Kurdish Participation in Ottoman Administration**

The second section speaks in details about Kurds' participation in Ottoman administration, and the role of Kurdish scholars in the Ottoman Empire. There are

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th Centuries, as Reflected in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, issue 3, (2000).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen & Hendrik Boeschoten, *Evliya Çelebi'in Diyarbakır*, (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Yusuf Akçay, *Doğumunun 400. Yılında Uluslararası Evliya Çelebi Sempozyumu* (International Evliya Çelebi Symposium on the 400th anniversary of His Birth), (Istanbul: İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012).