

# The Beauty of Elbasan in the Verses of Zaimi Mehmed from Gyula

Nedim Zahirović

## Author:

PhD, Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences

[Nedim.Zahirovic@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:Nedim.Zahirovic@oeaw.ac.at)

ORCID: [0000-0001-6957-4879](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6957-4879)

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## Context

Evliya Çelebi left a detailed description of Elbasan, which he visited in 1670. He wrote that “Just as the city of Antep is the bride of Anatolia, so is this city of Elbasan the bride of Albania in Rumelia”.<sup>1</sup> According to Evliya, the city was famous among other things for having 47 doctors and pulse-takers.<sup>2</sup> However, the chroniclers called Elbasan the city of poets (*Dār-ı Şu‘arā*).<sup>3</sup> A certain Zaimi Mehmed (*Za‘imī Meḥmed*) was also enchanted by the beauty of the city of Elbasan, which he recorded in verses in his miscellany (*mecmū‘a*). His miscellany is kept in the Archives of the Francke Foundations in Halle under the shelfmark AFSt/H Q 44. Zaimi was from Gyula in Hungary but there is reason to assume that his ancestors were originally from Bosnia. Namely, in his miscellany (fol. 78v-79r) there is a copy of the firman by which the Bosnian fiefholders are granted the right that only their legal heirs can acquire fiefs in Bosnia, i.e. that people who were not born in Bosnia cannot obtain fiefs on its territory.<sup>4</sup> His miscellany spans the years 1678-1683. He noted that his daughter Ayşe was born on 10 Muharrem 1091 (11 February 1680) and his son Deli Ahmed on 15 Safer 1094 (13 February 1683).<sup>5</sup> Zaimi participated in the Ottoman campaign against Vienna in 1683. Near to Vienna, on 13 Şaban 1094 (7 August 1683), he wrote a folk song (*türkü*).<sup>6</sup> It cannot be said whether he died during this campaign or if he managed to survive.

His verses about the beauty of Elbasan read as follows (fol. 6r):

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dankoff, Robert Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)*. Leiden: Brill 2000, p. 160, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Dankoff, Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi*, p. 174, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Dankoff, Elsie, *Evliya Çelebi*, p. 170, 171.

<sup>4</sup> As far as I know, apart from this, the only known copy of this firman is in a miscellany that is kept in the Archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (former Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts) in Zagreb, see Nedim Filipović, “Odžakluk timari u Bosni i Hercegovini”. *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju i istoriju jugoslovenskih naroda pod turskom vladavinom* 5 (1955), p. 266.

<sup>5</sup> Fols. iv, 3r.

<sup>6</sup> Fol. 79v.

## Transcription

*Hüve el-Ḥayy el-Vedūd*  
*İlbaşanuñ dilberānı ḥabbezā bisyār imiş*  
*medḥ iderlerdi velī didüklerince var imiş*  
*şehir içi cennet-misāli bāğ u bağçe [sic] bī-ḥisāb*  
*mīvesi incīr ü engūr u daḥı hem nār imiş*  
*Ṭalibī dirlerdi şöyle böyledür bu İlbaşan*  
*Ḥaḳka minnet anı gördük gözlerümüz var imiş<sup>7</sup>*

## Translation

He [God]! The Ever-Living, the All-Loving God!  
They said the heart-ravishers of Elbasan – how charming! – were numerous.  
They praised them – but they were indeed as [lovely as] they said!  
They said the inner city was like paradise with countless orchards and gardens,  
Its fruits were figs and grapes and also pomegranates.  
Talibi!<sup>8</sup> They said this Elbasan was like this and like that.  
God be thanked! We<sup>9</sup> saw it, we had eyes for it!

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<sup>7</sup> *Remel* (- v - - / - v - - / - v - - / - v - -).

<sup>8</sup> Talibi was probably a friend of Zaimi because Zaimi himself wrote one *kit'a* about him. At the time Zaimi wrote his miscellany, Talibi was dead (*el-merḥūm*), see fol. gr.

<sup>9</sup> Presumably pluralis modestiae.



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