



AN OTTOMAN ANABASIS¹: REFLECTIONS ON MIR'AT UL MEMALİK BY SEYDÎ ALI REIS

Şebnem KÖŞER AKÇAPAR*

Ömer Faruk İSKENDERLİ**

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a historiography for the first travelogue in Ottoman Turkish entitled *Mir'at ul Memalik* (Mirror of Countries) written by Seydî Ali Reis. Depicting his adventurous travels starting from India and back to Constantinople through Turkestan, Kipchak Steppe, Khorasan and Iran between December 1553 and May 1557, the book is an important contribution documenting the cultures, peoples and his vivid observations along the route. This paper will first present a brief background regarding the importance of the Indian Ocean in the high politics of the 16th century at the time when three Turkic Empires ruled – Timurid, Ottoman and Safavid dynasties. In a fierce competition with the Portuguese to regain control of the silk and spice routes, Seydî Ali Reis was sent on a mission to South Asia yet failed due to adverse weather conditions and had to spend years before his return in India. One of the most intriguing themes in the travelogue is the self-identification of Seydî Ali Reis as being Rûmî (Roman) that indicates the common denomination for the citizens of Ottoman Empire during pre-modern classical age. Moreover, the book is a fascinating showcase indicating how an Ottoman intellectual of the time could easily harmonise the wisdom of various sources including mathematics, astronomy, poetry and even bibliomancy.

Keywords: Seydî Ali Reis, Mughals, Ottomans, Indian Ocean, South Asia, West Asia, Travelogue.

¹ *Anabasis* (in classical Greek *Ανάβασις*, literally “a journey up-country from the sea”) is a generic term for military expeditions starting from sea level towards the highlands and mountains. First coined in the Retreat of the Ten Thousand or “Anabasis” by the Greek historian Xenophon, a disciple of Socrates, as a description of his expedition in 401 BCE from the Aegean shores towards present-day Iraq and back through the eastern Anatolian highlands and Trebizond. The terms became the name of the genre with another famous account “The Anabasis of Alexander” by Arian of Nicomedia (c. 150 CE).

* Professor of Sociology, Social Sciences University of Ankara and Lecturer of Comparative Politics of South Asia at the Institute for Area Studies, sebnem.akcapar@asbu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-2168-8871.

** Graduate Student at the Institute for Area Studies, Department of Asian Studies, Social Sciences University of Ankara, omerfaruk.iskenderli@student.asbu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-2478-3962.

Introduction

The first travel book written in Ottoman Turkish was authored by Seydî Ali Reis, one of the greatest sailors who lived in the golden age of the Turks. In this era dominated by the powerful gunpowder empires, Egypt, Rumelia and Anatolia (*Diyar-ı Rûm*), the Levant and Mesopotamia, Iran, Turkestan, and the north of the Indian subcontinent were governed by the Turkish-speaking ruling classes. Seydî Ali Reis' *Mir'at ul Memalik* remarkably provides testimonies to some of the most important short-term *événements* of the 16th century, which can be considered as milestones for changes in the medium-term conjuncture of West Asia and South Asia instigated by the Portuguese aggressions around the Indian Ocean and Russian expansion through the Eurasian Steppe. Taking a long way home in his adventurous journey covering a vast geography between December 1553 and May 1557, Seydî Ali Reis reported his observations of peoples and cultures of South and West Asia in a clear and befittingly poetic style on his route back to İstanbul from India. His travelogue is surely a rare artefact and an important contribution documenting the sociology of the region at that time period by providing an alternative perspective to the literature mostly based on the testimonies of Western travellers and military expeditions. Nonetheless, *Mir'at ul Memalik* was first published by Westerners before it was publicly available to the Turkish audience. This article therefore sets off to contribute to the literature by providing an analysis and historiography of how *Mir'at ul Memalik* came to life and earned world-famous recognition it deserved with the help of the up-to-date online resources of the original texts. The article also provides background information regarding the importance of the Indian Ocean in the high politics of the 16th century when three important Turkic Empires – ruled by the Timurid, Ottoman and Safavid dynasties– were in power, with an emphasis on the Ottoman and Portuguese conflicts in an effort to control the much important spice route.

Other than his observations along the way, life (hi)story of Seydî Ali Reis also heavily relies on his own accounts provided in *Mir'at ul Memalik*. A detailed biography of his life was written by Şerafettin Turan thanks to the Turkish translation of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1965: 528-531).² Later, a more comprehensive biography including the citations of the original documents such as Register of Imperial Decrees³, financial records mentioning Seydî Ali Reis was provided (Orhonlu, 1970).

According to the sources cited above, the father of Seydî Ali named Hüseyin was the deputy⁴ of the Imperial Naval Arsenal in Galata as his father also served at the same post during the reign of Mehmed II (the Conqueror). Seydî Ali, assuming the profession as a family tradition, entered the shipyard service at a very young age, participated in the conquest of Rhodes in 1522, and the naval battles as an entourage of Hayreddin Barbarossa,⁵ the Grand Admiral who served between 1533 and 1545. In the Battle of Preveza (1538), he stood out as the left flank commander of the Ottoman navy, and after the death of Barbarossa, he participated in the conquest of Tripoli (1551) under the command of Sinan Pasha. He was later appointed as a clerk of Marine Corps,⁶ then climbed up the ladder and served as the deputy of the Imperial Arsenal like his father and grandfather before him. Afterwards, he was appointed as the Commander of the Royal Galleys.⁷

² The Turkish version of Encyclopedia of Islam was first published in 1940 on the decision of the Ministry of National Education based on Leiden publication but also including new copyright articles, amendments, completions and translations.

³ "Mühimme Defterleri"

⁴ "Dâr-ül-sinâ'a-i Âmire Kethüdası"

⁵ "Kapudan-ı Derya"

⁶ "Azebler Katibi"

⁷ "Hassa Reisi"

While Seydî Ali Reis was on the Tripoli campaign, the Portuguese attacked Jeddah and threatened the Suez shipyard. The legendary Piri Reis, the Admiral of Egypt,⁸ which had the authority to act as the Grand Admiral of the Ottoman navy in Egypt and the Indian Ocean, sailed with a fleet of 30 galleys to eliminate the Portuguese threat from Bab al-Mandab and Hormuz Straits. Although he could be able to reconquer Muscat, Oman; he failed to take Hormuz and returned to Egypt only with two galleys leaving most of the fleet in the harbour of Basra in the year 1552 (Reis, 2021: 12). Unfortunately, Piri Reis paid a huge price for this mistake with his life since he was executed in Egypt in 1553 by the endorsement of the Suleiman the Magnificent. Murad Reis was soon assigned as the Admiral of Egypt and he was ordered to bring the remaining fleet to Suez leaving only 8 ships in Basra (Reis, 2021: 12).

Meanwhile, Seydî Ali Reis was stationed in Aleppo accompanying Suleiman the Magnificent in his Iran Campaign in 1553. It was informed that Murad Reis entered a battle with the Portuguese navy off the coast of Hormuz, and the fleet, which were badly damaged, had to take refuge in Basra again. Thereupon, Seydî Ali Reis was appointed as the Admiral of Egypt (960 AH/1553 CE) and commissioned to bring the fleet in Basra back to Egypt (Reis, 2021: 13). However, his fleet was ambushed by the Portuguese and drifted in a storm, known as *Fil Tufani*, to the shores of west India. He and his remaining troops spent years trying to gain permission from local rulers and to find a safe passage back home.

After a long and adventurous journey that lasted almost four years, he was accepted before Sultan Suleiman (also known as the Magnificent and Lawmaker) in Edirne. He received the compliments and favours of Ottoman Sultan⁹ and Rüstem Pasha, the famous *Grand Vizier*¹⁰ and the groom of the Sultan, when he presented the 18 letters he brought from various Muslim rulers and chiefs. However, since his post had already been given to Kurdoğlu Hızır Reis upon the rumours of his death (Reis, 2021: 106), Seydî Ali Reis was assigned as a Councillor in the Imperial Court¹¹ with a considerable salary and a compensation for the last four years for him and his companions was duly paid (Reis, 2021: 109-110).

⁸ “Mısır Kapudanlığı”

⁹ It is arguable whether the term “Ottoman” was an appropriate reference to the *Devlet-i Aliyye* since it is a quite modern and even anachronistic usage mostly generalised by the post-republican era Turkish authors writing in foreign languages. As it was the case with the invention of the terms “Byzantine”, it can be asserted that “Ottoman” being the eponym of the political entity is initially promulgated by Habsburgian Austrians as a political agenda claiming the succession of the “Imperium Romanum”. It can be identified in the title of “Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches”, the monumental reference for some historians, by the Austrian orientalist historian Joseph v. Hammer published between 1827–1835, the denomination of “Ottoman Empire” appears to be rather a modern concept adopted by the successors of the Holy Roman Empire. This curious case of denomination as a tool for political propaganda requires an extended scrutiny which the scope of this article could not cover. Nonetheless, the contemporary books and atlases in major European languages as well as English almost always adopt the names such as Turkey (or Turkey), Turkish Empire (Imperium Turcicum), Eastern Emperor (Imperator Oriental), or Grand Turk and rarely extend the usage of “Ottoman” other than to refer the name of the dynasty and the surname of the emperor as can be seen in some sources written in different European languages, i.e. Le Guay, G. (1526). *Alliances du Roy avec le Turc et autres justifiées contre les calomnies des Espagnols et de leurs partisans*; Parma, G. A. D. (1533). *Le Cagioni che mossero Sultan Soliman Gran Signore de Turchia/ venir con tanti eserciti ai danni della Magna*; Geuffre, A. (1546). *Brifue description de la Court du Grant Turc*; Münster, S. (1554). *Cosmographiae Universalis*, Lib. VI, pp. 957-978; Gastaldi, G. & Ortelius, A. (1570). *Turcici Imperii descriptio* [Representation of the Turkish Empire]; Fletcher, G. (1597). *The Policy of the Turkish Empire: the First Booke* (London: John Windet); Ortelius, A. (1609). *Turcicum Imperium*. Antwerp; De Wit, F. (c. 1670). *Turcicum Imperium*. Amsterdam; Homann, J. B. (1725). *Imperium Turcicum in Europa, Asia, et Africa Regiones Proprias, Tributarias, Clientelares sicut et omens ejusdem*, Nuremberg.

¹⁰ *Vezir-i Azam* or Prime Minister of the time.

¹¹ Dergah-ı Ali Müteferrikalığı.

He was soon appointed to the Eyalet of Diyarbekir as the Head of Treasury of the timar lands in late May 1557 (Reis, 2021: 110) and died in this duty in the early days of 1563.¹² The tales of his adventurous journey spread all over the land in a short time, and the phrase “*Başına Seydî Ali halleri geldi*” (literally translated as ‘*the Seydî Ali circumstances befall on someone*’ or ‘*to have had a run of bad luck just like Seydî Ali that ended well*’) soon became a parable in Turkish (Çelebi, 1729: 30) in the sense of a hard-luck story of a person experiencing such similar unfortunate adventures resulting in a quite positive ending.

1. A Brief Historiography for Mir'at ul Memalik

The original manuscripts scribed by Seydî Ali Reis himself in 1557 can be found in İstanbul¹³ and Turin, Italy.¹⁴ Almost one hundred years later, Katip Çelebi provided a brief biography of Seydî Ali referring *Mir'at ul Memalik* in his history of the Turkish maritime wars, *A Gift to the Great concerning Naval Expeditions*,¹⁵ dated 1656 which was later published by İbrahim Müteferrika in 1729. The first printed version¹⁶ of the full book is relied on the original manuscript in the Topkapı Palace (R.1470) and printed by İkdam Matbaası, more than three hundred years later in 1895 under the editorship of famous publisher Ahmed Cevdet¹⁷ (d. 1935) with a preface by Necib Asım¹⁸ (d. 1935) (Orhonlu, 1970: 54).

The Italian Turkologist, Aldo Gallotta (d. 1997), provided a review for the manuscript reserved in the Royal Library of Turin. In his review, Gallotta reports that in the first page there is a note of an owner in Turkish with the indication that the manuscript is autographed and in the end of the fascicule the place and the date of composition of the work is mentioned as Galata, on 30 May 1557,¹⁹ and the date of copy as 20-28 February 1558²⁰ (Gallotta, 1984: 361 [13]). There are also manuscripts reserved in the British Library, German National Library, Egyptian National Library and Archives, Austrian National Library, French National Library.²¹

¹² The date of Seydi Ali's death is given as 2 Jumada al-awwal 970 AH, Monday (Orhonlu, 1970: 53). This hijri date corresponds to the Julian calendar as 28.12.1562 and to the proleptic Gregorian calendar as 07.01.1563.

¹³ Author's name Seydî Ali Reis b. Hüseyin (d. 970AH/1562), Topkapı Palace Museum, Collection of Turkish Manuscripts, R. 1470, dated 964AH (1557). In Turkey, there are other manuscripts in Turkish National Library, Topkapı Palace Museum, Kütahya Vahidpaşa Library that are scribed by other letterers in a later date.

¹⁴ Royal Library of Turin.

¹⁵ Müteferrika publication of *Tuhfet ül-kibar fi esfar il-bihar* is available online at Open Collections Program at Harvard University: <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/islamic-heritage-project/catalog/40-990046334830203941> and its English translation dated 1831 is available at <https://archive.org/details/historymaritime00elgoog/mode/2up>.

¹⁶ Reis, S. A. (1895). *Mir'at ül-Memâlik: Asar-i eslafdan* (A. Cevdet, Ed.). Dersaadet (İstanbul): İkdam Matbaası. The book was transcribed for modern Turkish alphabet and the language is simplified: Reis, S. A. (1975). *Mir'atü'l-Memâlik-Ülkelerin Aynası*. N. Akyıldız (Ed.). (Based on the publication dated 1895; original work scribed in 1557). İstanbul: Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser. Later the 1895 publication is reprinted in modern Turkish alphabet in 2021: Reis, S. A. (2021). *Mir'atü'l-Memâlik: Seydi Ali Reisin Maceraları, Basra-Hindistan-Türkistan-İran 1554-1557* (Ö. Tellioglu, Ed.). (Based on the publication dated 1895; original work scribed in 1557). İstanbul: Kitabevi.

¹⁷ He was known as İkdamcı and, after 1934, assumed the surname: Oran; İkdamcı Ahmet Cevdet was the maternal grandfather of Şerif Mardin, one of the prominent Turkish sociologists.

¹⁸ Necip Asım (Balhasanoğlu, assumed the surname: Yazıksız) was a member of Société Asiatique and was regarded as the founder of the Turcology Department at the University of Constantinople (Darulfünun).

¹⁹ “the first of Sha'ban 964”

²⁰ “the first decade of Jumada al-awwal 965”

²¹ The worldwide search for the manuscripts is available at <http://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/basit-arama>.

The first publication of the Mir'at ul Memalik was actually its German translation by H. F. Diez²² in 1815.²³ In this translation, Seydî Ali Reis was described as *Katibi Rumi*. Hence, the title of the book is translated as *Mirror of Countries or Travelogue by Admiral Katibi Rumi through the seas and through land*. Subsequently, this German version was translated into French by M. Morris and first issued in the 9th and 10th volume of *Journal Asiatique* between July 1826 and January 1827;²⁴ then a complete version of Morris' translation was published in Paris in 1827.²⁵ In the French translation, the title is quite long and descriptive: *Travels of Sidi Ally son of Husain, otherwise known ordinarily as Katibi Rumi, admiral of Suleiman II*. It was also made clear that the source of translation into French was the German version translated by M. Diez, and not the original.

The first translation into English was provided by Ármin Vámbéry²⁶ (d. 1913) based on 1895 Turkish İkdâm publication. Vámbéry's translation was first published in 1899 under the title of *The Travels and Adventures of the Turkish Admiral Sidi Ali Reis in India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Persia during the Years 1553-1556*.²⁷ In the English translation of the book's title, further comments and additions, such as adventures, list of countries and the dates of travel can be noted. The translated book then included in an anthology edited by C.F. Horne in 1917.²⁸

Svatopluk Soucek, a leading scholar of Turkish naval history, provides a thorough historiography in his review for a contemporary translation in French by Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont²⁹ and praises the critical edition and linguistic study of Mir'at ul Memalik by the Turkish scholar, Dr. Mehmet Kiremit.³⁰

²² The Prussian diplomat and orientalist Heinrich Friedrich Diez (1751-1817) appointed by the Prussian King Frederick II ("the Great") as the Prussian ambassador to Sublime Porte between 1786 and 1790. He later became a member of Prussian Academy of Sciences (1814), and Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (1816). He had acquired a vast library of manuscripts. He published his *Memoirs of Asia in Arts and Sciences* in two volumes that also included excerpts from Middle Eastern literature.

²³ Reis, S.A. (1815). 5. *Spiegel der Länder oder Reisebeschreibung des Admirals Kjatibi Rumi zu Wasser und zu Lande* (H. F. von Diez, Trans.). *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien: in Künsten und Wissenschaften, Sitten, Gebräuchen und Alterthümern, Religion und Regierungsverfassung*, Vol. 2, pp-133-267. Berlin und Halle. (Original work scribed in 1557). Retrieved at <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=I-xMAAAAcAAJ&rdid=book-I-xMAAAAcAAJ&rdot=1>

²⁴ Reis, S.A. (1826, 1827). *Miroir des pays, ou relation des Voyages de Sidi Aly fils d'Housaïn, nommé ordinairement Katibi Roumi, amiral de Soliman II*, traduite sur la version allemande de M. Diez (M. Morris, Trans.). In *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 9 and 10. (Based on a translation published in 1815; original work scribed in 1557). Retrieved at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000681547> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34348774p/date1826>; Reis, S.A. (1826, 1827). *Miroir des pays, ou relation des Voyages de Sidi Aly fils d'Housaïn, nommé ordinairement Katibi Roumi, amiral de Soliman II*, traduite sur la version allemande de M. Diez (M. Morris, Trans.). In *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 9 and 10. (Based on a translation published in 1815; original work scribed in 1557). Retrieved at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000681547> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34348774p/date1826>

²⁵ Reis, S.A. (1827). *Relation des Voyages de Sidi Aly fils d'Housaïn, nommé ordinairement Katibi Roumi, amiral de Soliman II*, écrite en Turk, traduite de l'allemand, sur la version de M. de Diez (M. Morris, Trans.). Paris: Librairie Orientale de Dondey-Dupré Père et Fils. (Based on a translation published in 1815; original work scribed in 1557). Retrieved at https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=-f7fAAAAMAAJ&pg=GBS.PP4&hl=en_GB

²⁶ Hungarian-Jewish Turkologist and traveller who actually visited Turkey, Iran, Khorasan and Turkestan through the traditional route also taken by Seydi Ali Reis on his return to homeland.

²⁷ Reis, S. A. (1899). *The Travels and Adventures of the Turkish Admiral Sidi Ali Reis: In India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Persia, during the Years 1553-1556*. (A. Vámbéry, Trans.). London. (Original work published as *Asar-i eslafdan Mir'at ul Memalik* in 1895 based on the manuscript dated 1557). Retrieved at <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/sidialireis/index.html>

²⁸ Horne, C. F. (Ed.). (1917). *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East: With Historical Surveys of the Chief Writings of Each Nation*. (Vol. 6, p. 327-395). Parke, Austin, and Lipscomb. Retrieved at https://ia600903.us.archive.org/4/items/sacredbooksearly06hornuoft/sacredbooksearly06hornuoft_bw.pdf

²⁹ Reis, S. A. (1999). *Le miroir des pays: Une anabase ottomane à travers l'Inde et l'Asie centrale*, trans. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont. Paris: Actes Sud.

³⁰ Reis, S. A. (1999). *Mir'at ul Memalik*. (Mehmet Kiremit, Ed.). Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu.

Soucek emphasises that Kiremit based his study on five manuscripts from İstanbul, Paris, Torino and provided a facsimile reproduction of Torino manuscript (Soucek, 2001: 103). It should be noted that the title of Bacqué-Grammont's translation (in English: *The Mirror of Countries: An Ottoman Anabasis through India and Central Asia*) clearly reflects the fact that it is a work of literature more than a plain travelogue.

2. Background of Ottoman-Portuguese Conflicts in Indian Ocean

Prior to the Portuguese breakthrough in changing the course for the centuries old mode of intercontinental trade known as the Spice and Silk Routes, Arabian sailors and merchants had brought Indian goods to the Egyptian markets first and then Venetians ships in Alexandria were loaded for the European ports with the treasures of the East ranging from basic necessities, such as spices for preserving meat, to exotic luxury manufactures like Chinese silk woven in Gujarat. The diplomatic relations between Ottomans and Indian Muslims had been initiated as early as the conquest of Constantinople when Muhammad Shah III, Bahmani Sultan of the Deccan in South India, congratulated Mehmed the Conqueror upon his success (Manav, 2020: 39). Moreover, the presence of an ocean-faring Christian force along the coasts of Arabia, tradition of crusades against Ottoman and Muslim lands, and the loss of Andalusia in 1492 was a strong call of duty for Ottoman Turks to protect their religious, military, and economic interests.

Following the Spanish initiatives to circumnavigate the globe westwards and Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 which granted the Spanish all the rights of western route to India, the eastward conquest of the Indian Ocean became more than a matter of the competition for the Portuguese Kingdom. The Portuguese King appointed Bartolomeu Dias to command another expedition down the African coast. In the meantime, Pêro da Covilhã, a Portuguese secret agent, was assigned for an expedition of the ocean route through Egypt in the discovery of India. Around the same time that Dias reached Cape of Good Hope, Covilhã sailed from Aden to India, from the Persian Gulf to the eastern shores of Africa and then back to Egypt with conventional merchant ships. The motivations of the Portuguese and Covilhã were described as follows:

Crisscrossing the ocean, collecting and secretly recording information about sailing routes, winds, currents, ports, and politics, he picked up a ship going from the east coast of Africa to Sofala, far to the south, opposite Madagascar, the farthest point of Arab navigation in the southern Indian Ocean. He was attempting to find out about the feasibility of rounding Africa by sea, and navigation along its east coast. (Crowley, 2015: 17).

Building upon the achievements of Dias and Covilhã, Vasco da Gama opened the oceanic route to India for the Portuguese in 1498. They began to establish their dominance along the shores of the Indian Ocean relying on their strong navy. Soon, the Portuguese was able to capture Socotra in the mouth of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf; thus, shutting the naval routes to Muslim ships that transported the Eastern goods to the Mediterranean ports. The closure of these two routes and the trade posts along the Indian Ocean paved the way of a Portuguese dominance over the traditional source of the Egyptian and Iraqi bazaars' wealth derived from trade with South and East Asian countries.

The Mameluke Sultanate, whose name is merely a posthumous reference for *al-Dawla al-Turkiyya* (the Turkish State) in Egypt (Northrup, 2008: 250), was shocked by the presence of Portuguese and suffered from the disruption of this novel enemy in the Indian Ocean deeply.

Egypt soon fell into a financial crisis after the end of its monopoly on the Eastern goods as a new route to India had been opened and the traditional route became subject to regular blockade and piracy by the Portuguese (Winter, 2008: 494). As Garcin states:

The European threat demanded a new type of riposte which appeared unseemly to contemporaries accustomed to the classic Mamluk army. The threat was felt too on the Mediterranean shore which Qaytbay had already started to fortify. Ships began to be built on both seas. The alliance with the Ottomans was strengthened; since 1502, they were themselves confronted by the Safavid movement, also linked with Europe. Egypt was thus able to obtain timber and iron. After the defeat of the Egyptian fleet off Diu in 1509, it was the Red Sea that had to be defended (2008: 298).

Upon the emergence of a Portuguese threat in Arabian Sea, the Mameluke navy supported by the Ottoman supplies and troops encountered the Portuguese in Indian Ocean in 1508 when they destroyed a Portuguese fleet in the Battle of Chaul; yet, lost the Battle of Diu in 1509 (Chaudhuri, 1992: 58). In order to tackle with the mutual enemy at the gates of the Muslim Holy Lands, the Mamelukes applied to Sublime Porte as advised by their traditional trade partners, the Venetians (Hess, 1973: 67). In 1511, Sultan Bayezid II provided Egypt with war supplies to build ships in the Suez Shipyard. The ships were ready in 1515 and armed with 2000 matchlock-men (tufangchian) under the command of Selman Reis, an Ottoman captain (Hess, 1973: 67; Winter, 2008: 493; Manav, 2020: 41). The subsequent Ottoman defence against Portuguese attack in Jeddah - the port of Muslim Holy Lands - in the course of the conquest of Egypt (Özbaran, 2001: 68; Manav, 2020: 42) landmarked the hundred years of rivalry in the Indian Ocean which reached to climax in 1538 with the Turkish Siege of Diu in response to the Portuguese atrocities taking advantage of the struggle between Bahadur Shah of Gujarat and Humayun Shah, son of Babur Shah (Yazıksız, 2021: 2). Ottomans gained an upper hand once again in the trade routes along the Indian Ocean albeit for a short while:

During his many years as governor of Egypt, Hadim Suleyman (Pasha) provided logistical support for the corsair Selman Reis's naval operations in the Red Sea (1527); supervised the construction of an expanded arsenal and fleet in the port of Suez (1529-1531); and most famously, sailed to the Indian Ocean at the head of an armada of some seventy vessels (1538). This last mission, which extended Ottoman rule to Aden and the Yemeni coast, came on the heels of the Ottoman conquest of Baghdad from the Safavids (1534) and the vassalage of the formerly independent Emir Rashid of Basra (1535), two more operations in which Hadim Suleyman had played a significant role. Together, these victories gave the Ottomans exclusive control of the entire Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade routes with the solitary exception of Hormuz – a feat unmatched by any Middle Eastern power since the early Abbasid Caliphate (Casale, 2006: 173).

Moreover, Seydî Ali Reis voyage to India and his way back home coincided with the Third Campaign in the Ottoman-Safavid War and the subsequent treaty ending the twenty-three years of hostility between the two Turkic states. Although the close relationship between Turkey and Turkestan could be traced back to the earliest years of Safavid Turkish Shia dominance in Iran during the reign of Bayezid II, the first official correspondence forging an alliance between Turkey and Turkestan states as Sunni Hanafi Maturidi belief axis against Twelver Shia Iran were documented during the reign of Selim I (known as the Grim) between 1512 and 1520 (Çınar, 2011: 51).

Following the devastating defeat in the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, Safavids formed an alliance with the Portuguese the following year and received matchlocks and cannons. They initiated further coalitions with Hungary, Austria, Spain, and later with Russia against Ottomans (Çınar, 2011: 139-173). Accordingly, as it was also recorded by Seydî Ali Reis that Selim's successor Sultan Suleiman supplied the Bukhara Khaganate in Transoxiana with the gunpowder technology and elite troops in 1554 (Çınar, 2011: 131). Reis also witnessed the restoration of Mughal Empire³¹ in India, and the Russian invasion of Astrakhan which are also significant turning points in the history of Asia.

3. Reflections on the Mir'at ul Memalik

Against this background of fight for trade and hence economic power, Seydî Ali Reis (1498-1563) summarises the circumstances he faced during his adventurous voyage back home in a poetic and quite non-fictional style. Although his book bears the tone of an apology for his failed task, he maintains that the insistence of his friends in Baghdad drove him to write his memoirs right after his return from India and completed along his way back to the Imperial Capital in January 1557. In line with the traditional literary style at the time, he started the book by giving glory to the God Almighty and praising the Prophet Muhammed and writing a eulogy to the Ottoman Sultan:

Praying for Padishah of Islam that spreads happiness is necessary and important, perhaps it is a duty and essential for every believer. Especially the sultan of the world's sultans and the khagan of space and time, Alexander of the might, Fereydun of the majesty, Anushirvan of the justice and the last resort, the Caesar of aggression, Darius of commonweal, the sultan of the land and the sea, the owner of the glory and the victory, the lord of the conjunction of the time, Sultan Suleiman Khan son of Sultan Selim Khan may God extend his lifetime and reign until the end of the time and the cycles...

*My prayer, oh God, is the years and months
of the shah of Rome may pass with happiness.
Chinese khagan is obedient to him,
Padishah of India and Sindh is submissive (Reis, 2021: 8).*

Afterwards, in order to exemplify his merits for the assigned task as the Admiral of Egypt, Seydî Ali Reis states that both of his maternal and paternal forefathers had been the deputies³² of the Imperial Naval Arsenal in Galata since the conquest of Constantinople, and skilled in the profession both as practitioners as well as scholars. Thus, as the heir of maritime profession that runs in the family, he was introduced to seafaring at an early age and entered the Imperial service. He participated in the Rhodes Campaign of Suleiman the Magnificent at a young age (928 AH/1522 CE); and he learned all parts of the Mediterranean thoroughly while working in the entourage of Hayreddin Barbarossa (d. 1546). He served on the right wing at the Battle of Preveza and went to Tripoli expedition with Sinan Pasha, the Grand Admiral in 958 AH/1551 CE. Thus, he was well educated and mastered in every field related with the nautical sciences, and authored many books on astronomy³³ and philosophy³⁴ (Reis, 2021: 13).

³¹ Mughal was the term given by the British wrongly referred to the Mongols. The Timurid Empire was known as 'Babürlüler' in Turkish language and one of the 16 stars in the Turkish Presidential emblem denotes its Turkish origins. Although coming from the house of Timur, the first Emperor Babur referred himself as a Turk. Ethnic identity, however, was not given too much importance in the creation of the Empire. Over time, due to intermarriages, rivalry and geographical distance, ruling elites became more Persian and Rajput in ancestry than Turkish (Balabanlılar, 2010; Nizami, 2009) and the word Turk became synonymous with being Muslim and fair skinned (Akçapar, 2014: 54-59).

³² "Tersane Kethüdası" in Classical Turkish.

³³ "İlm-i hey'et" as referred by Seydî Ali Reis.

³⁴ "Fenn-i hikmet" as referred by Seydî Ali Reis.

Following the tragic failure of Piri Reis (d. 1553), one of the most famous Turkish navy commander and cartographer, during the naval conflict with the Portuguese fleet in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea and the subsequent unsuccessful attempts by Murad Bey in order to retrieve the Indian Ocean fleet stuck in Basra back to Egypt, Seydî Ali Reis was duly appointed as the Admiral of Egypt. Yet, he also failed to get the ships back to the safe havens in Suez when he lost most of his fleet in a typhoon and drifted along the shores of the Arabian Sea to Gujarat. Later he tried to get back to his duty station following a land route since the sea route is blocked by the Portuguese. However, due to obstinate requests of the local Muslim rulers to use superior firearms capabilities of the Ottoman military during the internal conflicts in India, increasing threats from the presence of thugs along the way, adverse weather conditions, political instability in the region because of ongoing war between the Ottomans and Safavids, and the latest Russian invasion of the northern Caspian route, the voyage could not be embarked upon. Hence his travels back to homeland was delayed for almost three years.



Figure 1. The Route taken by Seydî Ali Reis (prepared based on the descriptions in the book and applied open source imagery from Google Earth).

As depicted in the above map (Figure 1), the journey of Seydî Ali Reis started with his appointment when he received the Imperial Decree in Aleppo in December 1553.³⁵ He reached the city of Basra in February and sailed to Egypt in July 1554.³⁶ The first encounter with a Portuguese fleet took place on the 9th of August. Although the Ottomans won this battle, the second encounter on 25th of August resulted in a draw. When they tried to sail back to Egypt, a typhoon hit them and the fleet under the command of Seydî Ali Reis drifted to Gwadar, south-western shores of India. Thereafter, they landed in Gujarat and sought a way home through Sind and Lahore. His misfortunes did not end here.

³⁵ “in 961AH, the first day of Muharram”

³⁶ “in 961AH, the first day of Shaban”

When they reached the court of the Mughal Emperor, Humayun Shah,³⁷ to meet him and take his permission for the alternative route, they were deferred by a series of political and military events, such as the conquest of the Mughal throne by Afghans and eventually the sudden death of the emperor.

During his long stay in India, Seydî Ali Reis also witnessed first hand the take over the throne by Humayun Shah after the death of Selim Shah, the son of Sher Shah (Reis, 2021: 48). The newly founded Turkic dynasty's control over north India remained very shaky and tenuous under Babur's son, Humayun Shah. An Afghan challenge from eastern India led by Sher Shah Suri³⁸ forced young Emperor Humayun to flee the country in 1540 and take refuge in the court of Safavid Iran. Sher Shah (1540–45) brought about an imperial unification of much of northern India and set up an administrative framework, which was to be further developed by Akbar later in the century. The weakening of the Suri dynasty (1540–55) after Sher Shah's death finally enabled Humayun to return in 1555 to reclaim his Indian patrimony. However, only a few months after his return, he took a fatal tumble down the stairs (Reis, 2021: 60) leaving the Mughal throne to his young son, Akbar.

Seydî Ali Reis visited and provided his account on Baluchistan, Gujarat, Sind, Afghanistan and Punjab just decades before Akbar Shah's great expansion. The political condition of India prior to Seydî Ali's presence and its aftermath are shown in the map below (Figure 2) under Conquest 1 and 2:

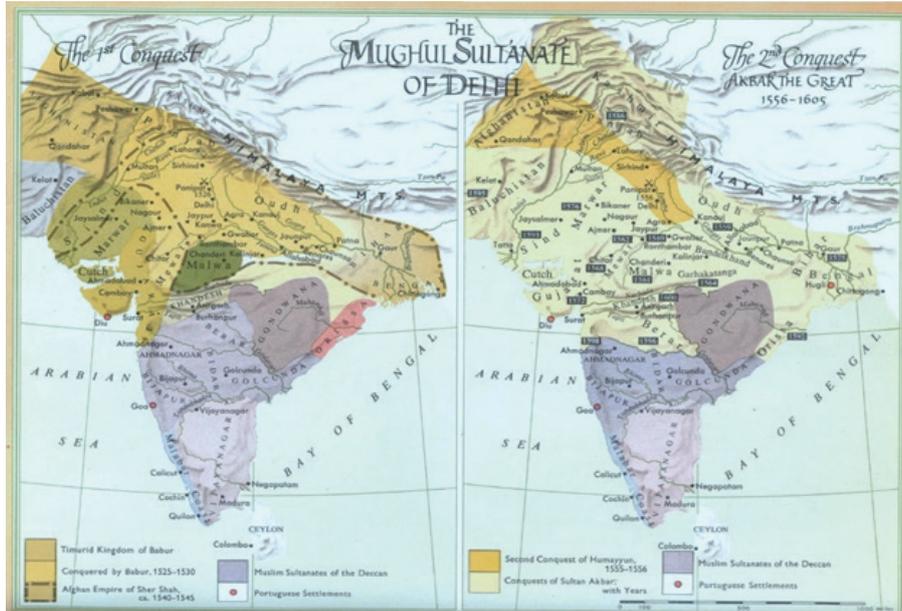


Figure 2. The Sultanate of Delhi, 1556-1605. Source: Roolvink, R. (1957). Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples, Harvard University Press, pp. 32-33.

³⁷ The second Timurid Shahanshah of Hindustan (the Emperor of the Mughal or Timurid/Baburite Empire) reigned between 1530 and 1540; later between 1555 and 1556 after his father Babur Shah. Seydî Ali Reis witnessed his regain of power in 1555 and sudden death in 1556. After receiving Seydî Ali Reis at the imperial court, Humayun Shah also wrote a letter to the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman II, accepting him as the caliph of all Muslims and opening the channel for correspondence, yet never answered by the Ottomans due to his demise soon afterwards (Farooqi, 2009; akt. Akçapar, 2014: 60).

³⁸ Sher Shah Suri was originally a member of a Pashtun tribe, Sur, of Afghanistan. His family had been settled in the Bihar region in the eastern India since the rule of the Lodi Dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate that ended by Babur Shah in 1526. Although previously served for Babur Shah, he renounced the reign of his son and his successor, Humayun. Defeating Humayun Shah in two battles, Sher Shah Suri forced him to go into exile until the death of Sher Shah Suri in 1555.

In his first encounter with the peoples of the Indian subcontinent, Seydî Ali Reis emphasised the importance of Ottoman support to the local states against the Portuguese intrusion regardless of their religious orientation. When Seydî Ali Reis met with the representatives from the Hindu Zamorin of Calicut paying homage to Suleiman the Magnificent, he promised salvation of the region. In the book, he asserted that the enthusiasm of the Gujaratis towards the presence of his remaining troops in their land clearly depicts a local will for a possible annexation to the Ottoman dominions to end the vacuum of authority (Reis, 2021: 30). He also witnessed a bloody *coup d'état* in Gujarat following the assassination of Mahmud Shah III. Ottoman troops took side with the child successor Ahmad Shah III in the fight for the throne and actively fought in the skirmishes against the Portuguese-supported insurgent, Nasir-ul-Mulk. Following several unsuccessful assassination attempts and the failure of the insurgency, the Portuguese's official request from the Gujaratis to turn the Ottoman admiral over was solidly rejected by the Gujarati Governor of Surat (Reis, 2021: 31).

Subsequently, Seydî Ali Reis reported an incident that the Ottoman soldiers intoxicated with a local toddy (*tārī*) palm wine which ended up killing one and leading to the execution of another in Surat. In this case, the Admiral rejected the request of the commander of the attacked soldiers to bring a verdict in line with the Ottoman law reckoning that the incident happened on the soil of another ruler. However, as the commander insisted that the rule of the Ottoman Sultan is valid everywhere with the same force, Seydî Ali Reis had to justify his verdict with the reliance of Holy Quran and ordered the *lex talionis*³⁹ on the aggressor (Reis, 2021: 32, 33). The incident was immediately reported by the Portuguese envoy to the Ahmed Shah III. Since the supplies and equipment of the moored fleet were used up, Seydî Ali Reis together with 50 of his men headed to the Gujarati capital, Ahmedabad, although many of his troops dispersed and left in Surat (Reis, 2021: 34). Portuguese envoy in the capital city once again requested the Gujarati court to hand the Ottoman troops over. The Portuguese request was declined by the Gujarati grand vizier, Imad al Mulk, asserting that they were in need of the “*Roman Emperor*”⁴⁰ as the Gujarati merchants relied on their ports and since he was a Muslim ruler. Taking heart from this reaction, Seydî Ali Reis defied the envoy and in response, the Portuguese declared blockade of the sea route. Rejecting the proposals coming from the Indian side to assume an administrative post in Gujarat, he decided to take his journey by land instead. At that moment, Seydî Ali Reis also received a revelation from Imam Ali justifying his decision to hit the road back home (Reis, 2021: 35-36).

Mir'at ul Memalik includes the first records in Turkish on the demographics and sociology of the Indian subcontinent. At the beginning of his journey back home, Reis reports about the forefathers of Mohandas Gandhi, the Bania caste in Gujarat and their status in the eyes of the Rajputs:

Amongst the learned⁴¹ of this land of Banians⁴² there is a tribe which they call the Bats, whose business it is to escort merchants or travellers from one land into another, and for a very small remuneration they guarantee their perfect safety. Should the Rajputs, i.e. the mounted troops of the land, attack the caravan, the Bats point their daggers at their own breast, and threaten to kill themselves if they should presume to do the slightest harm to the travellers entrusted to their

³⁹ *Lex talionis* is Latin for the principle of retaliation of a crime committed, or retributive justice.

⁴⁰ “Padişâh-ı Rûm”

⁴¹ In the Vambéry's translation (1899), he notes that “Bami” may possibly be a slip of the pen and intended for Brahmin.

⁴² Indian caste of traders. Vambéry (1899) states that the Bats from the Province of Gujarat have always traded with the harbour towns of Arabia from time immemorial.

way unmolested. Occasionally, however, the Bats carry out their threat, otherwise it would have no force. But if such a thing does happen, if a caravan is attacked and the suicide of the Bats becomes necessary, this is considered a terrible calamity, and the superstition of the people demands that the offenders be put to death, and not only the offenders themselves, but the chief of the Rajputs deems it necessary to kill their sons and daughters also; in fact, to exterminate the whole of their race. The Mohammedans of Ahmedabad had given us two such Bats as an escort, and so, about the middle of Safar of the said year, we started on our overland journey to Turkey (Reis, 1899: Chapter VI; Reis, 2021: 36-37).

Moreover, Reis witnessed the practices of Sati, the ritualistic widow burning of Hindu culture, and reported the attitude of Muslim rulers against this formidable custom of the unbelievers:

Amongst the many strange and wonderful things I saw in India, I must make mention of a few. The unbelievers are called in Gujarat "Banian" and in India "Hindu". They do not belong to the Ehl-i-Kitab, and believe in fate (kadem-i-alem). When a man dies his body is burnt by the riverside. If the deceased leaves a wife past child-bearing she is not burnt; if, however, she is not past that age she is unconditionally burnt. If a wife of her own free will offers herself to be burnt, the relations celebrate the occasion with great rejoicings (Reis, 1899: Chapter VIII; Reis, 2021: 63).

He later states that if some of the Muslims are gathered together and take the widow from the crowd by force while the crowd wants her to be burned, she becomes theirs. The congregation can no longer demand her back. For this reason, men from the sultan's side would be ready when they are burning the widows, so that the people will not interfere.

When he reached Lahore, Humayun Shah ordered him and his troops to come to Delhi. This resulted in almost a year long delay in his return trip. Impressed by his knowledge in astronomy and mathematics, Humayun Shah ordered him to write text books on the astronomical tables and astrolabe. When Humayun Shah suddenly stumbled in the stairs and plunge to an untimely end, Reis counselled the recently re-established imperial court as an "elder statesman" (Faroqhi, 2004: 184). Recalling the experience of the enthronement of Suleiman the Magnificent after the unexpected death of Selim the Grim, Reis advised the Mughal court to conceal the death of Humayun in order to soothe the stressed army and utilise a stuntman vested with the garments of the deceased emperor to fake his well-being as he was in remission (Reis, 2021: 60, 61).

When Reis reached Afghanistan, his route had to be circuitous due to the internal conflicts in the region. He adored the city of Kabul; yet, his longing for home naturally surpassed (Reis, 2021: 65, 66). His journey had to be slowed down for the similar reasons in Turkestan as well: fighting city-states, bandits, terrorising rough riders etc. Although it had been more than year since the end of the war between Turkey and Iran, he preferred not to pass through the long-time hostile territories and wended his way towards the north to reach the Black Sea as soon as possible to sail to Constantinople. When he reached to the capital city of the Nogai Horde, at the shores of the Ural River, Sarayshyk, he found out that Astrakhan had fallen to Russian invaders (Reis, 2021: 81) and Circassian rebels were storming the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea; therefore, he had no option but to go back and try the Iranian route at all causes.

⁴³ "Diyar-ı Rum"

Although Turkey and Iran came to terms together, due to the long-standing warfare between two great empires he was warned of the hostilities from the local warlords on the way through the country (Reis, 2021: 83). As anticipated, he was received with suspicion and was briefly detained in Khorasan (Reis, 2021: 87). However, he was released and later accepted to the Imperial Court and met with Tahmasp I, the son of Shah Ismail (Reis, 2021: 101). Reis also brought the letter of him to his previous enemy Suleiman the Magnificent together with many other letters received from previous courts including the one from Humayun Shah.

One of the most interesting points of this book is the fact that Seydî Ali Reis constantly refers his nationality as Roman (Rumî) (Reis, 2021: 13, 57, 60, 72, 73, 75, 81, 83, 87, 105, 106), his country as Rome (Rûm) (Reis, 2021: 11, 30, 37, 50, 56, 57, 72, 83, 96, 99, 100, 101, 101, 104, 106, 107, 108) and his sovereign as the Roman Emperor (Padishah-ı Rûm) (Reis, 2021: 8, 36, 56, 57, 62, 91, 106); almost never refers himself as Turkish or Ottoman.⁴⁴ As it can be traced in the Portuguese resources of the time, the term “Rûm” is used as an ethnonym synonymous with “Turk” (Özbaran, 2001). When Humayun Shah requested him to make a comparison between “Roman” lands and “Hindustan”, Seydî Ali Reis clarified that there was a Rome proper (Diyar-i Rum) which lays beyond the western shores of Euphrates up until the Danube; a “Province of Rome” with its capital in Sebastia (Sivas) which is much smaller; and the dominions of the *Diyar-i Rum* which are, when combined, ten times larger than Hindustan ruled by the Shah. Emphasising the strategic importance of the region, he also claimed that Alexander the Great’s authority over seven *climes*⁴⁵ is a result of his rule as the sovereign of *Diyar-i Rum* (Reis, 2021: 56). On his expedition over the Caspian Sea, he was told to change their attire to a more Turkic type in order not to be mistaken by Uzbeks or Noghais as “Russians” (Reis, 2021: 80). As he was once again asked to contribute to a comparison regarding the politics of *Diyar-i Rum* in the Royal Court of the Safavid dynasty, he elaborated on the classical land regime and army system of his country as a well-established distinguished example that the Safavid state officials were not quite aware of (Reis, 2021: 100-101). When he reached the court of the *Diyar-bekir Beylerbeyi*, he recites the lines from Quran’s “Chapter of Romans” as a testimonial of the good fate of Romans despite a series of unfortunate events (Reis, 2021: 105).

Another interesting point also depicted in the book is the dominance of the Turkic language, suggesting a linguistic uniformity in the region at the time. Although the native language of Seydî Ali Reis is another dialect of Turkish language, it was quite well understood in the courts of Gujarat and actually spoken by the ruling classes of Hindustan (which he refers as Chagatai language), Turkestan and Safavid Iran as well as bandit nomads in Afghanistan and Khwarazm. He would not exhibit any ethnic sympathy towards bandit nomads; but asserts common solidarity on the basis of Sunni sect of Islam which evidently contrasts some practices of the Iranians (Reis, 2021: 100). Therefore, it could argued that particularly the educated state officials during classical period of Ottoman Empire were regarding themselves as *Turkish speaking civilized Romans of Sunni Muslim belief*.

Throughout the memoirs, Seydî Ali Reis applied a harmonious way of thinking as a believer, diplomat, poet, scientist, and soldier. His way of thinking and mode of operation (*modus operandi*) reflects the characteristics of a renaissance man harmonising both esoteric wisdom, scientific pragmatism, and artistic elegance.

⁴⁴ He once intimidates the Portuguese delegate attempting to apprehend him from the Gujarati by referring himself and his band as “Hayreddinli” (of the Barbarossa) (Reis, 2021: 35). He once the dominions of the state as the “Memalik-i Osmaniye” and “Memleket-i Osman” (Reis, 2021: 30, 60).

⁴⁵ Seven division of inhabited quarter of the world in Greco-Roman-Islamic geography and astronomy.

When he encountered problems, he strategically used his technical skills based on his academic knowledge as well as soft skills guiding his manners towards novel situations. He recited touching ballads in the Imperial Courts in order to gain the sympathy of his majestic audience in a highly elegant manner. He drew his route for escape as an expert navigator and also referred to the Holy Qur'an for fortune telling as it was a common form of bibliomancy⁴⁶ of his period (Reis, 2021: 26). Following a Sufi tradition, he also relies on the inspiring dreams (Reis, 2021: 15, 44, 85, 91). For instance, when he was residing in Basra, he saw a malicious dream of a scarred sword. He recalled a similar dream of the Prophet Muhammad which resulted in a defeat of the Muslim forces. When a military mission to a castle in the shores of Persian Gulf failed and more than a hundred of his matchlockmen were killed in action, he deemed this as the revelation of his dream (Reis, 2021: 16).

Another remarkable point in the book was his reverential visits to the sacred places as he never missed an opportunity to make a stop or even divert his route for the holy tombs or mausoleums of Muslim saints in every step of his voyage. As he pursued the traditional northern Mesopotamian route from Aleppo to Mosul, he visited the holy site of Prophet Abraham in Urfa and he paid his respects to the tombs of Prophets Jonah and George as well as the shrine of Sufi Al-Fath al-Mawsili (d. 835) along with two other Sufis of Mosul. In his way to Baghdad, he also visited the tombs of Imam Ali al-Hadi⁴⁷ (d. 868) and his son Hasan al-Askariy⁴⁸ (d. 874) in Tikrit. In the capital city of Caliphate during the Abbasid era, he visited the tombs of Prophet Joshua and the madhhab imams Imam al-Azam Abu Hanifa⁴⁹ (d. 767) and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal⁵⁰ (d. 855); the two prominent disciples of Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf⁵¹ (d. 798) and Imam Muhammed (d. 805); Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the polymath and influential philosopher; as well as Esau, the son of Prophet Isaac and many other Islamic scholars and Sufi saints. Prior to his voyage from Baghdad to Basra on river, he got off his route and went to Karbala to visit the shrines of Imam Hussein (d. 680) and other martyrs; then he went to Najaf and Kufa. In Najaf - one of the holiest cities of Shia Islam - he visited the mausoleums of Prophets Adam, Noah, and Simon, and Imam Ali⁵² (d. 661). Later, in Kufa, he also visited the home of Ali; Qambar, the freed slave and Imam Ali's loyal companion; and Duldul, Imam Ali's mule. Among many other shrines and tombs, he also mentions the ruins of Ctesiphon, the capital of Sassanid Empire, and the palace of Shahzanan, the daughter of the last Sassanid emperor and the wife of Imam Hussein, thus the matriarch of later imams (Reis, 2021: 13-14). Underlying his piety and devotion, his shrine visits constantly continued in the Persian Gulf, in India, as well as throughout his route in Turkestan and Iran.

Although Reis mostly remained rational and loyal to the factual data, he took the liberty to exaggerate time to time perhaps for the sake of audience when describing the "unprecedented" scale of sea battles (Reis, 2021: 18-20), the size of the whales (Reis, 2021: 24), bats (Reis, 2021: 34) and ants (Reis, 2021: 44), or the royal audiences' admiration for his excellence in Chagatai-style poetry. For instance, he modestly accepted the praise of Humayun Shah in the imperial court:

⁴⁵ "Tefeül"

⁴⁶ The tenth generation direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali al-Hadi also venerated by Shia Muslim as the tenth of the Twelve Shia Imams.

⁴⁷ He is also venerated by Shia Muslims as the eleventh of the Twelve Shia Imams.

⁴⁸ The founder of Hanafi madhhab of Sunni Islamic tradition. With the exception of the Shia adherents, the Muslim Turks in Turkey and Turkestan as well as Indian, Egyptian, Levantine and Iraqi Muslims are predominantly of Hanafi madhhab.

⁴⁹ The founder of Hanbali madhhab of Sunni Islamic tradition. He was the youngest of four major madhhab imams of Sunni faith. The adherents of Hanbali madhhabs are mostly observed in the Arabian Peninsula.

⁵⁰ He was the first appointed chief judge (qadi al-qudat) in the Islamic statedom.

⁵¹ The cousin and son-in-law of prophet Muhammed revered by the Shia as the first of the Twelve Shia Imams.

This incident furnished the material for a Ghazel, with which the Sovereign was so delighted that he called me a second Mir Ali Shir. I modestly declined the epithet, saying that it would be presumption on my part to accept such praise, that on the contrary, I should consider myself fully rewarded to be allowed to gather up the gleanings after him. Whereupon the Sovereign remarked: "If for one more year thou perfectest thyself in this kind of poetry, thou wilt altogether supplant Mir Ali Shir in the affections of the people of the Djagatais." In a word, Humayun loaded me with marks of his favour (Reis, 1899: Chapter VIII; Reis, 2021: 53).

He describes his encounter with the Portuguese fleet as the most legendary naval war even exceeding the Battle of Preveza that Barbarossa defeated a united Holy League navy under the command of Andrea Doria (Reis, 2021: 20). Likening himself to Barbarossa, he attributes the main cause of the failure of his task to an extraordinary and unavoidable natural disaster - namely the Elephant Typhoon (Reis, 2021: 24), in an obvious attempt to dodge the unfortunate fate of his predecessor, Piri Reis. It was also an undertaking to find excuses for his failed mission not to be considered as totally futile (Faroqhi, 2004: 183). Although he failed as an admiral, he definitely rose like a phoenix from the ashes as self-designated diplomat⁵³ and eloquent writer. He was quite successful not only in saving his head but also securing a fortune for his men and his family.

Conclusion

The period of Seydî Ali Reis' unintentional expedition through India, Turkestan and Iran could be considered as a milestone in the history of South and West Asia. Following the increased influence of Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and the political turmoil following the exile of Humayun Shah, the subcontinent apparently fell in disorder. The non-Muslim Rajput tribes and Uzbek clans were terrorising the inland trade routes whereas the traditional ocean routes were subject to Portuguese permission.

As the Portuguese domination in the Indian Ocean trade was in its heydays, the capability of Indian Muslim kingdoms against the Portuguese presence along the shores of the sub-continent was obviously in a steep decline regardless of previous Turkish military support. When the defeated Humayun Shah returned to Hindustan and re-established his throne in India, a new phase and alliance could be established between two Empires against the common enemy. However, sudden death of the Humayun Shah and to further pursue an unauthorised diplomatic endeavour, his advisory role in the re-established state's tackle with a potential interregal conflict remained somewhat superficial.

It is observable that Seydî Ali Reis paid a special attention not to claim a superiority of the Ottoman Sultan over the heirs of Tamerlane residing at the Mughal throne, which contrasted with his accounts on many other states in his routes and even the Muslim minority in China which he personally told Humayun Shah, that chose to be voluntary subjects of the Ottoman Sultan (Reis, 2021: 57). Reis, therefore, indirectly managed to make Humayun Shah acknowledge the grandeur of the Ottoman Sultan (Faroqhi, 2004: 184).

⁵³ He wrote about presenting his credentials to Humayun in 1555 as the Ottoman Ambassador despite the lack of presence of such a letter from the Ottoman Sultan (Akçapar, 2014: 60).

He also experienced the doomed fate of the Turkish military bases in Transoxiana and Khwarazm established for a Sunni alliance against Safavid Iran. Although, he was one of the earliest witnesses of Russian transgression into Turkestan, he considers the strategic prioritisation of Ottomans' interests over the Hormuz Strait and Gujarat as vital since he deemed the fate of Gujarat Sultanate as irredeemable.

Taking everything into account, it can be asserted that even prior to the beginning of its dominance in the north-western shores of Indian Ocean, Ottomans had close interest in the activities of Portuguese and established a close partnership with the fellow peoples of the subcontinent. Seydî Ali Reis' testimony actually reflected Ottoman State's long-term strategy in South Asia and Central Asia. On the other hand, bearing in mind the Necib Asım's portrayal of Seydî Ali Reis as "one the greatest orientalist of the Ottomans" (Reis, 2021: 5), this adventurous voyage of a brigade of soldiers commanded by a skilful intellectual strategist seeking a safe route to get back home is a striking reminiscent of the celebrated work of the Ancient Greek commander, philosopher and historian Xenophon (c. 430-355 BC) and his book titled *Anabasis: The March of the Ten Thousand* in terms of its historical importance as well as its literary value.

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