

Five Famous Ottoman Turks of the Sixteenth Century*

Svatopluk Soucek **

Onaltıncı Yüzyılın Beş Meşhur Osmanlı Türkü

Öz ■ Selman Reis, Piri Reis, Barbaros Hayreddin, Seydi Ali Reis ve *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*'nin anonim yazarının denizcilik, deniz savaşları ve keşifler sahalarındaki önemi ve onların gerek edebi gerekse kartografik eserleri değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Selman Reis, Piri Reis, Barbaros Hayreddin, Seydi Ali Reis, *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*, Tophane, Venüs, Tanzimat

This article discusses Selman Reis, Piri Reis, Hayreddin Barbarossa, Seydi Ali Reis, and the anonymous author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*; their significance in the field of seafaring and naval warfare, exploration, discovery, and the literary as well as cartographic expression of these achievements; what they meant for the Ottoman Empire and what they reveal about it, and how they compare with their peers in the West.

* From among the contributors to the volume honoring professor Goodrich, I may well be the one who has known him the longest. Since our student days at Columbia University, we have shared our lives professionally as well as personally. He worked on *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi* and I on Piri Reis, and most of our common interests have sprung from those two subjects. Personally we started by discovering that just five days separate our birthdays (although only one of us was born on Guy Fawkes' day); more importantly, we became ever closer friends and witnesses to our lives' blessings as well as adversities. Tom has at times had to wage a heroic struggle through the latter, and has done so with admirable courage and devotion. He must have been a wonderful teacher, and it was a pleasure to watch how his reputation spread and grew among historians in this country as well as abroad both as a dedicated scholar and a generous colleague. Those who conceived of this volume should be applauded, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to them.

** Svatopluk Soucek is a librarian retired from Princeton University.

1) Selman Reis: Circumstantial evidence suggests that he was a native of Midilli (Lesbos). His main recorded activities occurred between the years 1514 and 1528, and can be divided into three phases: the first, in the service of the Mamluk sultanate, which began toward the end of Bayezit II's reign but is firmly documented only for the final three years of the Mamluks, 1514-1517; a middle one, from the end of 1517 to 1520, which were years of disgrace in Cairo, transfer to Istanbul, exoneration, and return to Egypt; and the final one, as commander of the now Ottoman naval base and fleet in Suez, with activities in the Red Sea and Yemen. The first phase was the most remarkable one; its inception is best illustrated by the contemporary Egyptian historian Ibn Iyas:

On Saturday 18 muharram [= mid-February 1514] ...the sultan traveled to Suez in order to inspect the ships which he had built there... Upon his arrival, the day when he entered Suez was a festive one... There was there the captain Salman the Ottoman and a company of Ottoman mariners, and the sultan expressed his great appreciation of this company... Some two thousand Ottomans were there, and when the sultan arrived he inspected those vessels which he had built there, some twenty grabs. Those whose construction had been finished were launched in the sultan's presence, it was a great day... [366] Captain Salman the Ottoman was the one who had supervised the construction of these vessels... When the sultan arrived, captain Salman gave him an enthusiastic welcome, and the sultan dressed him in a red robe lined with sable and gave him a gift of one thousand dinars; he also gave robes of honor to each member of the company of carpenters, ironsmiths and caulkers...¹

The construction of ships and presence of Turkish mariners at Suez and all the rest did not start in 1514, but was a continuation of efforts begun several years back when Mamluk sultans decided to counter the Portuguese irruption into the Indian Ocean and its consequences: deflection of the spice trade flow from the Near East to the Cape route, and projection of that irruption into the Red Sea with a threat to the *Harameyn* (Mecca and Medina). These early efforts culminated in two naval battles: in 1508 off Chaul, when the Egyptian fleet defeated that of the Portuguese, a memorable event in which the Portuguese commander D. Lourenço de Almeida, son of the viceroy of the *Estado da India* D. Francisco de Almeida, perished. This was a great victory for the Egyptians, and although a year later their fleet lost a second battle fought off Diu, in which the viceroy himself took command, the initial success showed

¹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i' al-zubūr*, ed. M. Mustafa (Cairo, 1960), v. 4, pp. 466-7.

that further efforts were worthwhile, and the Mamluks set about making them. Ottoman help continued to be essential, both in terms of logistics and of expert mariners. Selman Reis became prominent in this contest, and squadrons under his command began to operate across the Indian Ocean all the way to the coast of the subcontinent, on occasion seizing valuable booty. None of that sufficed, however, to adequately avert the new threat and bring back the spice trade to the traditional transit zone that was the Red Sea and Egypt. Clearly, still greater effort and naval power were indispensable, and to succeed, the Mamluks needed continued and increased help from the Ottomans. Relations between the two had worsened after 1514, however, and ruled out any such assistance. There thus developed a contradictory situation which placed Selman Reis in an awkward position. He served the Mamluk sultan with the task of combating the infidels, but, as an Ottoman Turk, he owed allegiance to the Ottoman sultan, who would soon be at war with the Mamluk sultan. The tension between the two roles peaked in April 1517, when Selman Reis with his fellow Turks repulsed a Portuguese attack on Jedda, just over a month after Selim I's defeat of the Mamluks and entry into Cairo. Selman Reis then joined the Ottoman sultan in the Egyptian capital, but was arrested and imprisoned in the city's citadel, and the following spring was sent in chains to Istanbul. No known source explains the reason for the disgrace into which he fell in the eyes of Selim I, but most probably it was the latter's irritation at Selman for serving a power with which he was at war, and the fact that he had stayed in Jedda too long before joining him in Cairo. He was eventually exonerated and sent back to Egypt at the beginning of Süleyman's reign. Rehabilitated, he was appointed commander of the naval base and fleet at Suez.

It was thus the Mamluks who made full use of his services, and would certainly have continued doing so if Egypt had not been conquered by the Ottomans. The rough treatment Selman Reis received under Selim, and the scant attention given him by Süleyman the Magnificent, speak volumes. This mariner is the probable author of the *Layiha*, a survey of the strategic features of the Indian Ocean and a blueprint for how the Ottomans should proceed to oust the Portuguese and establish their own dominance there. Dated 10 Sha'ban 931/2 June 1525, the manuscript was presumably brought to Istanbul by the grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha after his return from Egypt, where he had gone to quell a governor's rebellion. There is no evidence that the *Layiha* had been written as part of the Porte's plans for the Indian Ocean, or that it was subsequently used for such a purpose. It made its way to Istanbul through

the lucky coincidence of the grand vizier's visit to Egypt.² The author was ultimately given a task others could have assumed, while he himself might have been better employed toward the goals sketched in the *Layiha*. In contrast to his ventures into the Indian Ocean and struggle with the Portuguese while in Mamluk service, however, under the Ottomans his main assignments remained focused on the Red Sea and Yemen. Sent to the latter country to quell a rebellion, he carried out this assignment but was then murdered there by his aide, Hayreddin Beg, in 1528.

2) Piri Reis: He was apprenticed to the trade of seafaring and the *course* by his uncle Kemal Reis, the first famous Ottoman Turkish corsair, during their forays over the entire expanse of the central and western Mediterranean from the 1480s until Kemal's death in 1510. In the course of those years, Piri Reis went one step further and amassed materials of a cartographic and textual nature describing the Mediterranean but also containing information about the oceans and about voyages of discovery. He then produced two seminal works: a world map that he drew in 1513, and a portolan he wrote and drew in 1526 as a finished and expanded copy of a draft made in 1520. The world map, a combination of the mappamundi type with that of the portolan chart, is famous because it was partly based on a now lost early map of the New World made by Columbus. Where it stands out in the entire range of contemporary cartography, however, is its missing two thirds. In his account of how he produced the map, Piri Reis states that he used a number of maps made by both Portuguese and Arab cartographers. This combination was an unprecedented and unique procedure, and had the map survived, it would now be a priceless historical document. Even in its truncated state, the map holds a pride of place in the annals of Ottoman Turkish civilization. The portolan, which bears the title *Kitab-i Bahriye* (the Book of Maritime Matters), is unique as well, for Piri Reis describes the entire Mediterranean verbally while integrating a great number of detailed charts in the text, a method unequalled by anyone else. While the world map was primarily the product of intellectual curiosity and professional expertise, the portolan had originally a practical purpose – providing his fellow-seamen with a manual of sailing directions; nevertheless, with the second version he went one step farther by prefacing the book with a long and detailed account of voyages of discovery that had taken place up to his time, and enriching it with a description of navigational tools and methods.

2 Topkapı Palace archive, E. 6455. See Michel Lesure, "Un document ottoman sur l'Inde portugaise et les pays de la Mer Rouge," *Mare Luso-Indicum* 3 (1976): 137-60.

Piri Reis produced this cartographic and textual work as a kind of avocation, while earning his living as a mariner: first as a corsair by the side of his uncle Kemal Reis, then as one of the associates of Hayreddin Barbarossa, and finally as a staff member of the Ottoman arsenal at Gallipoli or Istanbul. Assigned to pilot the ship that carried grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha to Egypt in 1524, he seized the opportunity to show the high official the *Kitab-i Bahriye*, and the vizier then suggested the production of a more finished copy that could be presented to the sultan. Piri Reis undertook this, and the result was the splendid 1526 version. The cartographer-mariner made another, unfinished map of the world in 1528, but subsequently faded into obscurity until re-emerging in 1547 as admiral of the Red Sea fleet at Suez, in which capacity he commanded a campaign that a year later recovered Aden for the Ottoman Empire. In 1552 he led another campaign undertaken with the purpose of seizing Hormuz from the Portuguese. Failing to bring the siege of the fortress on the island to a successful conclusion, and receiving reports that an enemy relief fleet was approaching from Goa, Piri Reis retreated with his fleet to Basra. He then returned with two swift galleys to Egypt in 1553, but was arrested by the governor, Semiz Ali Pasha, who upon instructions from the highest quarters ordered his execution.

Much of what has been said about Selman Reis thus also applies to Piri Reis. Here too there is no evidence that the 1513 world map or the 1526 version of the *Kitab-i Bahriye* had been produced as part of the Porte's interest in mapping the world or mapping the Mediterranean, with the concomitant intention to embark, on a par with European powers, on a contest for the world oceans and access to the Orient's spices. The fact that the cartographer presented the world map to Selim I in 1517 was the result of a lucky coincidence of their encounter at the Egyptian capital; and the fact that he produced and then presented the 1526 version of the *Kitab-i Bahriye* to Süleyman the Magnificent resulted from a coincidence eerily reminiscent of the *Layiha* – the voyage of Ibrahim Pasha to Egypt. Again, there is no evidence that the world map elicited any interest on the part of the sultan other than that the latter may have torn it into two parts, of which the larger one then disappeared, while the smaller one made its way to Topkapı Sarayı where it languished until its discovery in the 20th century. As for the *Kitab-i Bahriye*, the case is more complicated, but essentially the same imbalance reigns here as well. Both versions of the book, the first intended as a manual for sailors, the second produced as a presentation copy for the sultan, were copied and recopied many times. Instead of being placed – as he ought to have been – in

charge of a workshop established to produce more similar and constantly evolving work competitive with that multiplying in Europe, however, Piri Reis was ignored and ultimately assigned to tasks for which others were better suited. It is not even certain that Süleyman the Magnificent ever received Piri Reis in a personal audience. What we do know is that during this sultan's reign an order was issued in 1554 decreeing Piri Reis's execution, which was carried out in the city where thirty-seven years earlier he had presented Selim I with his cartographic masterpiece. His place of burial is unknown, and the treasures of cartographic, textual and nautical materials he must have gathered in the course of his life were dispersed.

3) Hayreddin Barbarossa: The son of a Janissary settled on the island of Midilli (Lesbos) after its 1462 conquest by Mehmet Fatih, Hızır – to use his original name – and his elder brother Oruç took up the seafaring profession. Two kinds of adverse circumstances transformed them from peaceful merchants into redoubtable *gazi*-corsairs. The first was a clash with the Knights of St. John, corsairs operating from Rhodes, while the second was the succession struggle between Bayezid II's sons Selim and Korkut. Obligated to leave the home waters of the eastern Mediterranean, they moved to the central and then western Mediterranean where Hayreddin – as Hızır came to be known – gained fame through his raids on infidel shipping and coasts. He became powerful to the point of establishing his own rule at Algiers, an ideally located base for the *course*. This happened in 1517, but two years later Hayreddin sent a mission to Istanbul with the purpose of proclaiming his loyalty to the sultan. In 1520, thus shortly before his own death, Selim I sent him a document of investiture as *beylerbey* or governor of the new *eyalet* or province, known in Turkish as Cezayir. His victories in the seaborne *gaza* against infidel shipping and coasts grew and multiplied, and made him the universally feared Turk among the Christians of the Mediterranean, amongst whom he became known as Barbarossa. His career then peaked when in 1533 Süleyman the Magnificent appointed him commander of the Ottoman navy. In that capacity, he led the imperial fleet on several campaigns against Süleyman's perennial adversaries, the Habsburg monarchs of Spain, partly in support of his equally persistent allies, the kings of France. Victory in the 1538 battle of Prevesa consecrated the status of the Ottoman Empire as the premier naval power in the Mediterranean.

The contrast between the lives of Piri Reis and Hayreddin Barbarossa is sharp and revealing, as is that between the effects they had on their societies. Hayreddin was a superb achiever in the mainstream of the Ottoman ruling

and religious class's aspirations, which were expansion of the empire's frontiers into Europe and victories over the Infidels. Theirs was a rich and self-sufficient world of Dar al-Islam, and they had little interest in infidel Christendom except where matters of prestige and primacy were in play. Süleyman the Magnificent, assured of his status as the greatest Muslim ruler, also aspired to that of the Roman Caesar.³ On land, this was expressed by the ever resuming campaigns against the Austrian Habsburgs, as well as by the "triple crown" he donned at certain moments during those campaigns.⁴ At sea, the target was the ships and coasts of the realm of the Habsburg emperor himself, Charles V, and here the sultan's great admiral, Hayreddin Barbarossa, rendered invaluable service. This made him one of Süleyman the Magnificent's favorites, a fact illustrated by a frequently reproduced miniature painting; and it was the sultan who suggested that the admiral record his eventful life in written form. The result was the *Gazavat-i Hayreddin Paşa*, a splendid document and captivating reading. Moreover, a wide swath of the Ottoman ruling class and the maritime profession bestowed on him their appreciation, as did, in a reverse sense, the infidel world of Christian Europe where he was as famous as he was feared. When Hayreddin died, the great architect Sinan was commissioned to build a *türbe* or tomb for him at the *iskele* of Beşiktaş. This *iskele* then became a hallowed stretch where the *donanma-yı humayun* gathered before departing for campaigns in the Mediterranean.

4) **Seydi Ali Çelebi:** An official at the imperial arsenal and officer participating in several campaigns such as the 1538 battle of Prevesa under Hayreddin Barbarossa, he was in 1553 given the task of taking the Ottoman fleet left in Basra by Piri Reis to Suez. Storms and the Portuguese off the Omani coast deflected his course toward India where the remainder of the fleet was wrecked. The crews, stranded, split into two groups, one remaining in India as welcome warriors employed by local rulers, the other, under Seydi Ali's command, setting out on an overland anabasis back to the Ottoman homeland. After his return in 1556, Seydi Ali wrote the *Mir'at ul-Memalik*, an

3 Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and early modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 109.

4 Marino Sanuto, *Diarii* (Venice 1858-91), v. 56, pp. 594, 634-5. The crown is known pictorially from three Venetian woodcuts as well as from an engraving by Agostino Veneziano, and textually from several sources; see Gülru Necipoğlu, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the representation of power in the context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal rivalry," *The Art Bulletin* 71/3 (1989): 401-427, reprinted in *Süleyman the Second [i.e. the First] and his time*, eds. Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993), 163-93.

account of his adventures at sea and on land. It became a classic of Ottoman Turkish travel and adventure literature, overshadowing the *Mubit*, an assortment of navigational instructions Seydi Ali mostly translated from Arabic during or after his anabasis. The adventures it narrates can be divided into two stages: the sea voyage from the Persian Gulf to India; and the overland journey through India, Central Asia and Iran to the Ottoman homeland.

While each of the three Ottomans discussed above performed tasks or produced works of deliberate design, Seydi Ali's *Mir'at ul-Memalik* was the result of adverse circumstances that had deflected him from the task entrusted to him. It is undeniably a captivating story, which moreover is seasoned with poems of his own composition. Its documentary value is marginal and incidental, however. Moreover, the focus of interest he displays during his overland travel is religious, in particular with respect to Islamic shrines. This was not unusual in the case of Muslim travelers, but the truly great ones, Ibn Battuta and Evliya Çelebi, broadened their interest to a wide range of what they saw and heard. Seydi Ali Reis was rewarded by the sultan's kind reception, and awarded a comfortable position; his house in Istanbul became a gathering place of the city's intellectuals.

5) The *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*: The author of this book chose to conceal his identity, its title varies from manuscript to manuscript, and even year of its composition is unknown. Only through indirect evidence has it been dated it to 1580.⁵ The *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*, the last of the group under discussion, had the privilege of being the first to appear in print, for it was published by Ibrahim Müteferrika in 1730.⁶

If discovery of America was the sensation of the final decade of the 15th century, its exploration, colonization and description filled the 16th. Piri Reis was the first to alert his countrymen to the new world and all the rest, and a sufficient stream of narrative and cartographic materials must have been reaching Istanbul to enable the author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi* to gather several Italian and Spanish texts from which he or someone for him translated a selection into Turkish.⁷ The story of the discovery of America and the description of the New World constitutes the purpose and main part of this book, but this is preceded by a long description of the Old World, especially

5 Thomas D. Goodrich, *The Ottoman Turks and the New World: a study of the Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi and sixteenth-century Ottoman Americana* (Wiesbaden, 1990), 19-21.

6 Ibid., pp. 28-29.

7 Ibid., pp. 32-33.

the Indian Ocean and the Islamic Orient. While the former is based exclusively on Western sources, the latter derives as preponderantly from Islamic ones.



An historian wishing to assess the place of the Ottoman Empire in the age of multifaceted discoveries marking the long 16th century – final two decades of the 15th and first decade of the 17th – may choose the five above-mentioned authors or works as the pivot around which to proceed and draw his conclusions. The five cases under discussion invite two opposite interpretations:

a) Selman Reis, Piri Reis, Hayreddin Barbarossa, Seydi Ali Reis, and the anonymous author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi* all illustrate, each in his way, the existence of the Ottoman Empire's official and planned version of exploration, discoveries, and commercial expansion, as equaling or surpassing that undertaken by Christian Europe. Selman Reis's *Layiha* reflects the Porte's activities on the Indian Ocean. Piri Reis's work shows the Porte's interest in the world at large and in gathering information about it in the framework of the Ottoman Empire's own exploration and expansion. Hayreddin Barbarossa's victorious campaigns throughout the Mediterranean not only reflect the dominant role of Ottoman sea power, but also the role of Süleyman the Magnificent as a major player in the politics of Christian states, and thus that of the Ottoman Empire as a prominent member of the European community. Seydi Ali's travelogue is another illustration of the Ottoman Empire's presence on the Indian Ocean and intelligence gathering about it. And the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi* is proof that Ottoman society, no less than that of the West, was keenly interested in the New World.

b) All five prove, in varying ways and degrees, the contrary. Careful examination of their careers and activities leads to this conclusion, which has been implicitly embedded in the preceding pages. What the sultan and the governing elite were attuned to were the achievements of Hayreddin Barbarossa. These, however, harbored a peril that ultimately turned into a trap. Like the triumphs of the sultan's armies on land, victories at sea reinforced the Ottoman elite's feeling of superiority over Christian Europe and conviction that the infidel world's own achievements could safely be ignored. Such interest as there was remained confined to political manipulation of European states, and to those features of Europe's past that could reinforce the Ottoman sultan's primacy on the world scene. The towering exception of Piri Reis thus should not mislead us. First of all, he remained outside the mainstream

establishment; Ibrahim Pasha made a valiant effort to gain the sultan's interest in the mariner-cartographer, but without avail. The presentation copy of the *Kitab-i Bahriye* was copied and recopied, but more for its belletristic and decorative qualities than as a stimulus for generating further activities of exploration and discovery. His work was either destroyed or remained frozen in time. In the case of the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*, the first question one might ask is why its author chose to conceal his identity. The most plausible explanation is given by Thomas Goodrich: "Early in his reign Murat III had a large observatory built, which was torn down in 1580 under pressure from the conservative religious forces in Istanbul. It might very well have been that someone who worked there prepared the work on the New World, partly to achieve advancement in the observatory, and then sensed the danger of associating his name with it after 1580. If so, he has been successful for over four centuries in keeping his name from being known."⁸ What we witness during the sixteenth century, the age of the rise of the modern West, is a rise of conservatism in the Ottoman Empire, an attitude that included a rejection of change, exploration, and discovery, with one exception: the unceasing efforts to expand the empire's frontiers at the expense of infidel Europe. Individuals or groups who felt and acted differently may have been successful for some time, but then ran into obstacles that grew, stiffened and settled in for a long time. The fate of the observatory built at Tophane in the late 1570s is a telling example. It began to thrive, benefiting from the presence of Taqī al-Din, an Ottoman Arab who had previously held posts as *müvekkit* at Cairo and Damascus. He gathered a team of colleagues and disciples as well as various instruments and tools of observation and study, including a remarkably modern-looking globe. In 1580, however, the *şeyhülislam* Ahmet Şemseddin Efendi persuaded Murat III that the observatory was harmful to nobler pursuits, upon which the sultan ordered its demolition. This verdict was no less significant than that of Piri Reis's execution.

Further Considerations:

Exploration and discovery had practical, ideological, and intellectual motivations as well as consequences. Access to overseas sources and trade led the roster. The first consequence of Portuguese irruption into the Indian Ocean was an almost overnight deflection of the spice trade from the partly overland route through the Near East to the all-maritime route around the Cape of

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Good Hope. Mamluk Egypt stood to lose most, and the sultans launched a brave campaign to thwart the intruders. They won the first battle, and although they lost the second, they by no means intended to give up the struggle, as the career of Selman Reis in their service shows. This state of affairs changed when Selim I conquered Egypt. The Ottoman sultan put an end not only to Mamluk rule, but also to efforts by a major Muslim power to seriously confront the Portuguese. Instead of appointing Selman Reis as head of a group ordered to plan expansion into the Indian Ocean, he had him thrown into jail. He missed an ideal opportunity, for Piri Reis too was in Cairo, and with other officers, Turks and Arabs, who must have been Selman Reis's companions, the sultan had a chance to establish a dream team unmatched by any European state. Selim did no such thing, but set out on his leisurely journey back to Istanbul, ready to resume the expansion of the arsenal at Galata and the building of a great fleet with which to attack the empire's Habsburg adversaries. In short, the Ottoman conquest of Egypt sounded the death-knell of Muslim efforts to oust the infidels from the Indian Ocean and replace their dominance with that of the believers.

Selim I's hour struck before he could confront the Habsburgs, but his son Süleyman the Magnificent more than compensated for it. One year after his enthronement he conquered Belgrade, and in 1526 his victory at Mohács made him master of a good part of Hungary. Three years later he laid siege to Vienna, and then began to prepare the first of his three wars against the Safavids. The Indian Ocean was all but forgotten, until Süleyman was reminded that it was his duty to relieve the plight of Muslim pilgrims who were trying to reach Mecca but were being stopped on the way by the Portuguese. In 1538, he ordered Hadım Süleyman Pasha:

You who are Governor-General of Egypt, Süleyman Pasha, as soon as this imperial edict arrives, will immediately gather weapons, supplies, and provisions and prepare for holy war in Suez; having equipped and outfitted a fleet and mustered a sufficient quantity of troops, you will cross over to India and capture and hold the ports of India; you will free that country from the harm caused by the Portuguese infidels, who have cut off the road and blocked the path to the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina (may God Almighty ennoble them!), and you will put an end to their depredations at sea.⁹

9 Hasan b. Tulun, *Tarikh-i Misr*, British Museum, Ms. Add. 1846, fol. 353b, quoted by G. Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford, 2010), p. 82.

This was the purpose of the famous 1538 campaign of the Ottoman fleet in the Indian Ocean, with the Portuguese fort at Diu as its specific target. The siege failed, and when reports came that a Portuguese relief fleet was approaching, Hadım Süleyman Pasha beat a quick retreat to the Red Sea. He managed to return with his fleet unscathed, and a promising career awaited him in Istanbul, for he later became grand vizier. The campaign stands out for several reasons. It was the only time the Ottoman navy made a full-fledged sally into the Indian Ocean, but even then it still avoided confronting the Portuguese. The principal motivation of the campaign was ideological, as Süleyman the Magnificent's order shows. In the last analysis, it was a meaningless gesture, possibly made by the Ottoman sultan to display his concern for Muslim coreligionists. But truly astounding is the Ottoman refusal to engage the Indian Ocean for the sake of the economic windfall beckoning to whoever proved ready to load spices from India and Indonesia and ivory and gold from Africa, and take them to the destinations of his choice. This ocean, after all, was the Ottoman Empire's backyard, and the Turks had every reason to substitute there their own dominance for that of the unbelievers. They had resources and geo-strategic advantages vastly superior to those of the Portuguese, yet they stopped at the threshold of that expanse and then turned their backs on it.

The resources were indeed formidable, as was the potential of the Ottoman state and society, a fact illustrated by Piri Reis. Geo-strategically, the Ottoman Empire occupied the crossroads of East and West. Istanbul was a city like no other, a place where East and West met, where Turkish and Greek and Slavic were spoken, where Arabic and Italian were understood, where Islam, Christianity and Judaism lived in peace side by side. The stage was set not for a clash but for a convergence of civilizations, leading to a rise of an East comparable and with its ecumenical potentials even superior to that of the West. A segment of Ottoman society endeavored to embark on this path, but after initial or transitory success, its efforts hit the insuperable roadblock erected by the empire's conservative mainstream.

This created an increasing weakness on the level of competitive confrontation with the rising West, which however was for a long time camouflaged and compensated for by the empire's considerable qualities and assets of a different sort. The vigorous nature of its religious ideology fuelled the empire's expansive military dynamism, besides providing a glue that endowed the huge state with a cohesion, discipline and sense of unity absent in splintered and quarreling Christendom. The state's bureaucratic structure was remarkably

efficient as well as innovatively resilient. The empire may not have embarked on overseas ventures in quest of the Orient's riches, but its own size, productivity and longevity sufficed to create a self-sufficient world of long duration, an Ottoman version of the *économie-monde* praised by Fernand Braudel.

These assets have provided fuel for a revisionist trend in Ottoman historiography that appeared in the 1970s and has since then all but monopolized the field. The verdict is clear: There never was a decline of the Ottoman Empire. Contemporary critics like Mustafa Ali and Koçu Bey either got it wrong or wrote with a special agenda in mind; modern historians based their fallacies on those of that early lot or on misunderstanding their hidden agendas. Bernard Lewis's "Ottoman observers of Ottoman decline", published in 1958, received in 2000 a trenchant rejection by Molly Greene: "Happily for scholarship, and for this book,¹⁰ it is no longer necessary to stuff these facts through the famous meat-grinder known as the 'Ottoman decline thesis.'" The victory of these academic revolutionaries is truly remarkable, but equally noteworthy is the fact that this revolution has been confined to the English-speaking world. The Turks themselves have remained immune to it, and the trend has made little headway on the continent from France to Russia.

The phenomenon merits psychological and sociological analysis, which is beyond the scope of this essay. Here I want only to suggest that like many other concepts, 'decline' can mean many things, and a meaningful discussion first needs clarification which aspect, intrinsic and chronological, is meant. There indeed has never been an Ottoman decline in the field of scientific and technological revolution, global exploration, and commercial expansion, to name the principal features characteristic of the rise of the modern West, because there was no comparable rise of a modern East. There was, however, a dramatic rise of the Ottoman Empire as a military power, whose victories established a pattern that would last, despite eventually multiplying reversals, until a war with Russia that erupted in 1768. The structural resilience, innovativeness, economic strength, and longevity of the Ottoman Empire have facilitated the general onslaught on the decline thesis. None of this negates, however, the at first veiled but gradually ever more evident absence of the kind of rise that marked sixteenth century Europe and eventually led to its global dominance. The rise of the West never slackened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereas the Ottoman Empire persisted in clinging to its set ways, and this ultimately affected even that dimension which had

10 *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton, 2000), p. 20.

been the defining aspect of the empire's greatness, namely military strength and territorial expansion. The fundamental cause, I would suggest, was ideological. The *gazi* roots theory of the Ottoman state may have been definitively disposed of by three stalwarts of early Turkish history, Rudi Lindner, Heath Lowry, and Cemal Kafadar, but the *gaza* played an undeniable role once the empire was established. It is hard to imagine Süleyman the Magnificent marching all the way to Vienna if not Islam but shamanism had been the ideology of the Ottoman Empire. When Mustafa III declared war on Russia in 1768, the ostensible reason was the defense of Poland against Russian aggression. The intrinsic motivation, however, was the conception of the *gaza* against the infidel as a permanent fixture in the mentality of both the prevailing segment of the ruling class and the ulema and populace of Istanbul. This is well expressed in the *Hulasat ul-İtibar*, an essay written by Giritli Resmi Ahmet Efendi, a contemporary Ottoman official and diplomat, and quoted by İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı:

“...her zaman düşmanın burnunu yere sürüp haddini bildirmek ehl-i İslâmın üzerine vaciptir diye itikat eden yadigârlar, hareket olmayınca bereket olmaz; bu memleketler seyf ile alınmıştır; padişah-i islamın bahtı ali, ricali pişkin, kılıncı keskindir; dünyada dindar, bahadır, vezir-i aristo-tedbir ve beş vakti cemaatle kılar on iki bin güzide asker tedarik ettikten sonra Kızılelma'ya dek gitmeğe ne minnet vardır diye tumturak-ı elfaz ile cehlîni itiraf ve sandalya üzerinde Hamzaname nakleden pehlivanlar gibi lâf u güzaf edip Kızılelma semtini Boğdan'dan gelen Alyanak elma gibi yenir şey zanneden sadedillerin de” hareketiyle harp açıldığını yazmaktadır.¹¹

[Ahmet Efendi] writes that the war was started through the influence of bombastic palaver of the order that ‘it is an unflinching duty of Muslims to remind the enemy of his limits by dragging his nose to the ground, that there can be no blessings without [such] actions; that these domains have been conquered by the sword; that the lot of the padişah of Islam is lofty, his men are strong, his sword is trenchant; that, ready to set out with twelve thousand choice soldiers, a company [led by] a pious, brave vizier adroit as Aristotle who pray five times a day, what a reward it will be to go all the way to Kızılelma [i.e., to Rome],’ all that proclaimed by armchair champions who, reciting the Hamzaname,¹² through this babble

11 *Hülasatül-İtibar*, ed. 1286, p. 3, quoted by İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara, 1988), vol. 4, part 1, p. 373. For Ahmet Resmi Efendi, see Virginia Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700-1783* (Leiden, 1995).

12 Hamza was an uncle of the Prophet. The story of his exploits, given literary form as the *Hamzaname*, gained great vogue throughout the Muslim world.

reveal their ignorance, thinking that the Kızılelma quarter is something edible like the red apples brought from Moldavia.'

The Ottoman Empire thus embarked on one more major *gaza*, and the successful defense of Khotin in 1769 caused euphoria in Istanbul, with the sultan assuming the official title of *gazi*. It was this mentality that thwarted attempts to join the rise toward modernity that began in sixteenth-century Europe; the chasm between the rising West and the static East endured, and the enterprise launched in 1768 confirmed it. While the Porte was declaring war against the infidel, the Royal Society was dispatching captain James Cook to the Pacific on a mission that was part of an international astronomical project conceived to measure the distance of the earth from the sun with the help of data gathered from observing the transit of Venus due on 3 June 1769. The staff on the *Endeavour* made the observations from Tahiti, and Cook then crisscrossed the Pacific, mapping it and exploring its wonders before returning home in 1771. Meanwhile in 1769 a Russian war fleet sailed from the Baltic, and when warned that it might make an appearance in Turkey's waters, members of the divan dismissed this as a geographical impossibility. Destruction of the Ottoman fleet at Çeşme in July 1770 was one consequence, but that was minor when projected against what the war led to: rise of the Eastern Question. It also intensified the Ottoman leadership's awareness that reforms were needed, and efforts to modernize the navy and army marked their first phase, before being expanded into the broader program of the *tanzimat*.

Neither the reforms nor even the *tanzimat* quite succeeded, however. The case of the navy is revealing. Efforts at modernizing it were repeatedly resumed, and under Selim III brought results described by both contemporary observers and current historiography as remarkably successful. Yet the navy failed all major tests that ensued until the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The cause may reside in the psychological climate that resisted unhindered absorption of the dynamism fuelling the constant rise on the other side of the religious divide. Daniel Panzac proposes an explanation of this phenomenon in his latest book:

The disasters incurred by the Ottoman navy were not due only to the insufficient number of officers who had benefited from modern training. It derived chiefly from the existence of a patent cultural gap between European instructors and their students. The intellectual approach of the Europeans, primarily the French, was methodical, rational and scientific, hard to follow and assimilate for their interlocutors whose education, formation and reasoning were profoundly different

from theirs. This incomprehension was made worse by an ingrained distrust of what was brought by the Westerners coming from the Dar al-Harb, land of war, the centuries-old adversary of the Dar al-Islam.¹³

Panzac's analysis comes remarkably close to Enver Ziya Karal's:

Mahmut II devrinde harp ve tıb okullarının Avrupa usulünde kurulması, derslerin yabancı öğretmenler tarafından verilmesi, Avrupa'ya, askeri maksatlarla da olsa, öğrenci gönderilmesi, milli eğitimde bazı yeni prensiplerin kabul edilmesi, Batının teknik araçlarıyla teknik usullerinin alınmasında köklü hareketler gibi görünürse de, bu hareketler de Batının düşünce sisteminin bütünü ile temasa geldiğini anlatmaz... Avrupa düşünce sistemiyle sağlanan bu köklü temasın satıhta kaldığını açıkça söylemek lazımdır. Avrupa düşünce sisteminin kökü Grek ve Latin medeniyetinin ölmez kaynaklarına dayanmakta idi. Halbuki, bu sistem ile temasa gelen Osmanlı aydınları, İran ve Arap bilim kaynaklarıyla beslenmişlerdi. Onlar Batı medeniyeti ile temasa geldikleri vakit kendilerinde mevcut bir bilgi sistemini yıkıp yerine yenisini almadılar. Fakat var olan bu eski sisteme Batının düşüncesini işlediler. Bu sebeptendir ki Tanzimat bilgini de tam manasıyla Batılı bilgin olamadı.¹⁴

Although, in the time of Mahmut II, founding European-type military and medical schools, having foreign teachers give lessons, sending students to Europe for military training, accepting certain new principles in national education, and adopting technical methods with the West's technological tools, may appear as ground-breaking measures, these activities do not mean that contact had been made with the Western thought system as a whole. One must admit that this "fundamental" contact with Western thought system remained superficial. The European thought system was based on the immortal sources of Greek and Roman civilization, whereas Ottoman intellectuals, who came to know this system, had been nurtured with Iranian and Arab cultural sources. When they came into contact with Western civilization, they did not replace their dominant mental system with a new one. Instead, they tried to integrate Western thought system into this old system. This is why a Tanzimat intellectual could not become a Western intellectual in the full sense of the word.

The Ottoman Empire stood a good chance of closing this cultural gap in the sixteenth century when Piri Reis demonstrated with his works that it was possible, just as Taqi al-Din and his team did with the observatory built at

13 *La marine ottomane: De l'apogée à la chute de l'Empire (1572-1923)* (Paris, 2008), pp. 264-5.

14 *Osmanlı Tarihi* (Ankara, 1988), vol. 5, pp. 194-5.

Tophane. Both attempts ran into dead ends, as we have seen, and Turkey had to wait for the era of Atatürk to become a full-fledged member of the modern world.

These conclusions of course run against the above-mentioned revisionist views now prevalent in Anglophone academe. I expect the majority of contributions appearing in this volume to reflect and emphasize the new trends.¹⁵ Yet it was partly the work published by Thomas Goodrich that deflected me from sharing the revisionist views toward forming my present ones. Let me end this article with a quotation from the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*:

They (the Europeans) set out into the Atlantic and, coasting western Africa, they head south; subsequently they turn east and face all the adversities involved in passing by the sources of the Nile and beyond the Mountains of the Moon. Then they sail by the shores of the Red Sea and cross over to those of India. [The newcomers,] by means of good alliances and clever measures, have subjugated most ports of India, and for a number of years they have been barring the route to Muslim merchants from those countries... It is indeed a strange fact and an odd affair that a group of unclean unbelievers have become strong to the point of voyaging from the west to the east, braving the violence of the wind and calamities of the sea, whereas the Ottoman Empire, which is situated at half the distance in comparison with them, has not made any attempt to conquer [India]: this despite the fact that voyages there yield countless benefits, bringing back desirable objects and articles of luxury whose description exceeds the bounds of the describable and explicable...¹⁶

Five Famous Ottoman Turks of the Sixteenth Century

Abstract ■ The significance of Selman Reis, Piri Reis, Hayreddin Barbarossa, Seydi Ali Reis, and the anonymous author of the *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi* in the field of seafaring and naval warfare, exploration, discovery, and their literary as well as cartographic achievements are discussed.

Keywords: Selman, Piri Reis, Hayreddin Barbarossa, Seydi Ali Reis, *Tarih-i Hind-i Garbi*, Tophane, Venus, Tanzimat

¹⁵ The most illustrative example of these views is Giancarlo Casale's book *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford, 2010). See my comments in "About the Ottoman Age of Exploration," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 27 (2010): 313-42. Several articles in my *Studies in Ottoman Naval History and Maritime Geography* (Istanbul, 2008), also address this range of issues.

¹⁶ Trans. Goodrich, *The Ottoman Turks and the New World*, pp. 84-6.