

## TRACES OF OTTOMAN TURKISH IN THE CHAGATAI POEMS OF SEYDİ ALİ REİS

### SEYDİ ALİ REİS'İN ÇAĞATAYCA ŞİİRLERİNDE OSMANLI TÜRKÇESİNİN İZLERİ

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Sorumlu Yazar

#### Abstract

Ottoman poets, inspired by the profound influence of Ali Şir Nevâî, composed numerous poems in Chagatai Turkish. However, despite these poems reflecting characteristics of Eastern Turkic, the poets could not completely detach themselves from the influence of their own literary language, Ottoman Turkish. As a result, elements unique to Ottoman Turkish found their way into their works. It is evident that Ottoman poets, even while crafting poems that adhered to the features of Chagatai Turkish, were significantly influenced by their native literary tradition. This influence manifested in the incorporation of distinct elements of Oghuz Turkish, the linguistic foundation of Ottoman Turkish, into their Chagatai poems. These poets, whether consciously or unconsciously, blended the stylistic and grammatical traits of their familiar linguistic framework with those of Chagatai Turkish, resulting in a unique and hybrid literary expression. One notable example of such poets is Seydi Ali Reis, whose works exemplify the profound interplay between Chagatai Turkish and Ottoman Turkish. As an Ottoman poet and naval officer, Seydi Ali Reis composed numerous poems in Chagatai Turkish. However, his poems are heavily influenced by the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of Ottoman Turkish, reflecting the pervasive impact of his native literary tradition. This article delves into the Ottoman Turkish elements present in Seydi Ali Reis' Chagatai poems, providing a detailed analysis of the ways in which his works diverge from traditional Chagatai norms. By examining these features, the article highlights the dynamic interaction between the two Turkic languages and sheds light on the unique literary identity shaped by Seydi Ali Reis.

**Key Words:** Ottoman poets, Chagatai poetry, Ottoman poetry, Seydi Ali Reis, Literary tradition.

#### Öz

Osmanlı şairleri, Ali Şir Nevâî'nin muazzam etkisi neticesinde çok sayıda Çağatayca şiir kaleme almışlardır. Ancak Çağatayca yazılan bu şiirlerde şairler kendi edebî dilleri olan Osmanlı Türkçesinin etkisinden kendilerini tamamen kurtaramamışlardır. Dolayısıyla Osmanlı Türkçesine özgü unsurlar eserlerinde yer bulmuştur. Osmanlı şairlerinin Çağatayca özelliklere uygun şiirler yazdıklarında bile kendi edebî geleneklerinden önemli ölçüde etkilendikleri açıktır. Bu etki, Osmanlı Türkçesinin temelini oluşturan Oğuz Türkçesinin farklı unsurlarının Çağatay şiirlerine dâhil edilmesinde kendini göstermiştir. Bu şairler, bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz bir şekilde, aşına oldukları dilsel çerçevenin üslûp ve gramer özelliklerini Çağatayca ile harmanlayarak özgün ve melez bir edebî dil ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu tür şairlerin dikkate değer örneklerinden

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biri, eserleri Çağatayca ile Osmanlı Türkçesi arasındaki derin etkileşimi örnekleyen Seydi Ali Reis'tir. Osmanlı şairi ve deniz subayı olan Seydi Ali Reis, çok sayıda Çağatayca şiir yazmıştır. Ancak şiirleri, yerel edebî geleneğinin etkisini yansıtan Osmanlı Türkçesinin dil ve üslûp özelliklerinden büyük ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Bu makale, Seydi Ali Reis'in Çağatayca şiirlerinde bulunan Osmanlı Türkçesi unsurlarını araştırarak, eserlerinin geleneksel Çağatay normlarından nasıl farklılaştığına dair ayrıntılı bir analiz sunmaktadır. Makale, bu özellikleri inceleyerek iki Türk dili arasındaki dinamik etkileşimi vurgular ve Seydi Ali Reis'in şekillendirdiği eşsiz edebî kimliğe ışık tutmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Osmanlı şairleri, Çağatay şiiri, Osmanlı şiiri, Seydi Ali Reis, edebî gelenek.

## Introduction

Seydi Ali Reis (1498-1562) was a prominent Ottoman naval commander, geographer, astronomer and poet. Born in Galata, Istanbul, he came from a family with a strong maritime heritage; his grandfather and father held important positions in the Ottoman shipyards (Akbaş, 2024: 103). His family came from Sinop, an important maritime centre, and this legacy shaped Seydi Ali Reis's life and career (Vambery, 1877: 25).

From a young age, Seydi Ali immersed himself in maritime studies, acquiring expertise in navigation, astronomy and mathematics. Alongside his technical training, he mastered Arabic and Persian and developed a strong literary and poetic sensibility. His travels later enabled him to learn Chagatai and Azerbaijani Turkish and to compose poetry in these dialects (Kızıltan, 1999: 286).

Seydi Ali served under renowned Ottoman naval leaders, including Barbaros Hayreddin Pasha and Sinan Pasha. He participated in major campaigns such as the conquest of Rhodes and the decisive Battle of Preveza (1538), where he commanded the left flank of the Ottoman fleet. His tactical brilliance in these battles cemented his reputation as a skilled naval leader (Casale, 2006: 182).

In 1551, Seydi Ali joined the campaign that led to the conquest of Tripoli under Sinan Pasha and Turgut Reis. A year later, he was appointed Admiral of the Indian Ocean Fleet, charged with protecting Ottoman interests and countering Portuguese expansion (Önalp, 2010: 45-46).

Seydi Ali Reis's mission in the Indian Ocean faced considerable challenges. In 1554, while sailing from Basra to Suez with a fleet of 15 galleys, he encountered Portuguese forces. Despite his strategic manoeuvres and initial successes, severe storms and battles crippled his fleet. Unable to return by sea, he embarked on a remarkable overland journey through Gujarat, Sindh, Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia (Telliöglü, 2021: 49-66).

During this journey, Seydi Ali interacted with rulers such as the Mughal Emperor Humayun and the Sultan of Gujarat, Ahmed Shah. These encounters enriched his knowledge and inspired his travelogue *Mir'at-al-Mamalik* (The Mirror of Lands), completed in 1557. This work provides detailed accounts of the cultures, landscapes and political systems of the regions he passed through (Eraslan, 1968: 44).

Seydi Ali was not only a naval commander but also a prolific writer and scholar. His major works include (Kaplan & Efe 2020: 232-233):

1. *Mir'at-al-Mamalik* (The Mirror of Lands): A mixture of travel narrative and poetry, it provides insights into his adventurous journey and the places he visited.

2. *Kitab al-Muhit* (The Book of the Sea): A seminal work on navigation, discussing

star charts, compass use and sailing techniques in the Indian Ocean.

3. *Mir'at-al-Kainat* (The Mirror of the Universe): A treatise on astronomy and mathematics.

4. *Hulasat al-Hay'a*: A translation and expansion of Ali Kuşçu's astronomical work, incorporating Seydi Ali's original findings.

Seydi Ali Reis's works bridged the fields of science, literature and exploration. His travelogues, translated into Western languages, influenced European knowledge of the East, while his scientific treatises contributed to Ottoman cartography and navigation. Recognised as both a warrior and a scholar, Seydi Ali Reis exemplifies the intellectual and martial prowess of the Ottoman elite in the 16th century (Turan, 1965: 530).

### 1. Ottoman Poets and Chagatai Poems

The interaction between Ottoman Turkish and other regional languages during the vast territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire led to the creation of a diverse and multifaceted literary tradition. One of the most prominent of these linguistic exchanges was the incorporation of Chagatai Turkic into the poetry of several Ottoman poets. Chagatai, which was spoken in Central Asia and influenced by Persian and Arabic, found its way into the literary practices of Ottoman poets, especially those with connections to regions such as Iran, Central Asia and the Safavid Empire (Kızıltan, 1999: 286).

A key figure in this tradition was Seydi Ali Reis (1498-1562), an Ottoman admiral, geographer and poet known for his use of Chagatai Turkish. Despite his primary role in naval and military affairs, Seydi Ali Reis's literary contributions to Chagatai poetry are remarkable for their stylistic complexity and cultural fusion. His works, including his famous travelogue *Mir'at al-Memalik* (Soucek, 2001: 104), provide a fascinating window into the cross-cultural exchanges of the 16th century. His poems in Chagatai show the influences of Persian poetic forms, yet retain a distinct Central Asian identity (Eraslan, 1968: 43-48).

Ottoman poets writing in Chagatai Turkish were often influenced by the Persian literary tradition that dominated the elite circles of the empire. They adopted the stylistic elements of Persian poetry, such as ghazals and qasidas, but infused them with local and regional dialects, creating a hybrid linguistic and poetic form. In many cases, Ottoman poets were bilingual or multilingual, enabling them to draw on a rich pool of literary influences from Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Chagatai.

Ottoman poets who studied Chagatai poetry often came from the ranks of military leaders, administrators and scholars – figures like Seydi Ali Reis (Orhonlu, 1970: 42) who had extensive experience of the Central Asian cultural sphere. Their exposure to Chagatai Turkish, both as a spoken and written language, allowed them to integrate its stylistic and linguistic features into their poetry. This practice highlighted a cultural synergy between the Ottoman Empire and its eastern neighbours, and underlined the fluidity and diversity of literary traditions that shaped the region.

The use of Chagatai in Ottoman poetry is indicative of a wider cultural exchange between the empires and regions of the time. Poets such as Seydi Ali Reis were able to navigate and fuse different poetic traditions, elevating Chagatai as an important literary medium. This not only contributed to the expansion of Ottoman literary forms, but also cemented Chagatai's place in the literary history of Central Asia and the wider Turkic-speaking world (Sertkaya, 2012: 178).

Moreover, the presence of Chagatai in Ottoman poetry reflects the political, cultural and religious exchanges that shaped the empire. The poets' linguistic versatility enabled them to communicate across borders, creating a shared cultural space that transcended regional and linguistic divides. The study of Chagatai poetry within Ottoman literary culture offers a unique perspective on the multicultural and polyglot nature of the Ottoman Empire. Poets such as Seydi Ali Reis, who wrote in Chagatai, serve as examples of the empire's cosmopolitan identity, blending local and regional traditions to create a rich and diverse poetic corpus. Their works are valuable not only for their artistic merit, but also for the cultural and historical insights they provide into the ways in which language and literature functioned as instruments of empire and cultural diplomacy.

## 2. The Ottoman Turkish Effect in the Chagatai Poems of Seydi Ali Reis

In fact, some Oghuz Turkic features can be seen organically in Chagatai. For example, -mAn or -mAnAm suffixes instead of mAs + personal pronoun; Oghuz elements such as -AsI, -IsAr, -UbAn can be seen in Chagatai (Kaymaz, 2004: 204-2010). However, these Oghuz elements found in the works of Central Asian poets are themselves the result of a natural process of interaction. Again, some Oghuz elements from the copyists can be seen in the works of Chagatai poets copied in Oghuz areas. For example, such copyist-derived Oghuz elements are often found in the Nevai Divan, which was copied in the Ak Koyunlu area (Sultanov, et al., 2024: 4-5). This study will not focus on these elements, but on the inorganic Oghuz elements from the mother tongue of Seydi Ali Reis.

As is well known, the genitive suffix after words ending in a consonant is +nIng in Chagatai and +In, +Un in Ottoman (Eckmann, 1988: 57). In the Chagatai poems of Seydi Ali Reis, the Ottoman version of this suffix is often found:

közümüñg yaşınıñ (I/3), cihānıñg şāhı (XII/1), Şeh-i Rümünğ işığı (XIII/2), ḥabībıñg kuyı (XIII/3), āteşıñg şu 'lesi (XX/3), 'āşıklarıñg kıanını (XXI/4)

It is also known that the accusative suffix in Chagatai is +nI (Eckmann, 1988: 63). Seydi Ali Reis often used the Ottoman version +I instead of this suffix in his Chagatai poems:

nazmıñgı (XVII/7), sīnemi (XXIII/4), 'aqlımı (XIX/2; XXII/4)

In Chagatai, the narration of the present tense is marked by the indefinite past tense conjugation of the auxiliary verb er- (Eckmann, 1988: 128). In the Chagatai poems of Seydi Ali Reis, we see the Ottoman version of the suffix:

ayturmış (II/3)

The postposition seen in Chagatai in the forms bile, birle, bilen, birlen has been affixed in Ottoman (Eckmann, 1988: 90). This postposition is affixed in Ottoman Turkish but not in Chagatai. In the Chagatai poems of Seydi Ali Reis, we see the Ottoman version of the suffix:

itleriñgle (II/5), itleriyle (VIII/4)

The participle suffix, which was in the form of -GAn in Old Turkic, continued as it was in Chagatai Turkic, and in Western Turkic it took the form of -An with the dissolution of the -G sound. Seydi Ali Reis added the participle suffix -An, which is used in the Oghuz field, to the verb kıl-. The -An form of the suffix does not occur in Chagatai (Mert 2017: 113):

kılan (XXII/4)

The gerund suffix -GAndA, formed by the combination of the participle suffix -GAn and the locative suffix +dA, retained the syllable-initial G- sound in Chagatai. In the Oghuz field, this gerund suffix took the form -AndA as a result of the fall of the G- sound at the beginning of the syllable (Mert, 2017: 113). Seydi Ali Reis used the Ottoman version of the suffix:

olanda (III/3)

In Classical Chagatai, the negative simple present tense is marked with the structure '-mAs + personal pronoun' (Eckmann, 1988: 126). Seydi Ali Reis used the Ottoman form kılmam instead of kılmam-men:

kılmam (IV/I)

The suffix -DUK has largely fallen out of use in Chagatai under the influence of the suffix -GAn, while in Oghuz it has been a frequently used suffix in every period starting from the Old Oghuz Turkic period (Gökdağ 1993: 106). Seydi Ali Reis used the suffix -DIK in his Chagatai poems under the influence of his dialect:

yıgıladıgım (XVIII/5)

-DUKÇA is a gerund suffix specific to the Oghuz group (Korkmaz, 2007: 872-874). This Oghuz element is also seen in Seydi Ali Reis' poems in Chagatai:

kördükçe (IX/4)

The gerund suffix, which was in the form of -GUŋÇA in Chagatai, took the form of -InÇA, -UnÇA as a result of the fall of the G- sound in Oghuz (Mert, 2017: 112). Seydi Ali Reis used the form -InÇA, which does not occur in Chagatai:

bolmayınça (IX/4)

In Chagatai, the structure '-GAY irdi' is used for future in past time (Eckmann, 1988: 125). When Seydi Ali Reis used this construction, he suffixed the additional verb ir- as in Ottoman:

bolmağaydı (XII/2)

Seydi Ali Reis adapted the Oghuz expression şimden-girü 'hereinafter' into Chagatai as 'şimdin-kirü' (Boz 2021: 251). However, this expression is foreign to Chagatai:

şimdin-kirü (XV/3)

In Classical Chagatai, ‘-r irdi’ structure is used for the simple present tense in the past. In the Chagatai poems of Seydi Ali Reis, ‘-rdi’ is seen as in Ottoman:

irürdi (IX/2), dirdi (XVII/7), tuyırdı (XX/3)

In Chagatai, the vowel of the past tense suffix -DI after a verb with a unrounded vowel is not rounded (Eckmann, 1988: 120). In Historic Oghuz Turkic, the form -DUM with rounded vowels is common. Seydi Ali Reis preferred the -DUM form under the influence of his dialect:

aldum (XXII/4).

### Conclusion

The Chagatai poems of Seydi Ali Reis serve as a vivid illustration of the interplay between linguistic traditions, showing how an Ottoman poet’s native linguistic and cultural background influenced his engagement with the Chagatai literary tradition. Although Seydi Ali Reis adhered to many of the formal and stylistic conventions of Chagatai Turkish, he also incorporated many elements characteristic of Ottoman Turkish, particularly those rooted in Oghuz Turkish.

Through detailed linguistic analysis, this study highlights several Ottoman influences in Seydi Ali Reis’s Chagatai poetry, including morphological structures, verb forms, and suffix variations. These features reveal how Seydi Ali Reis’s linguistic identity as an Ottoman poet permeated his works, often creating a hybridised poetic form that departed from the norms of classical Chagatai poetry. For example, the use of Ottoman variants of genitive, accusative and gerund suffixes, as well as specific phonological shifts such as the rounded vowels in past tense suffixes, underscore the pervasive influence of Seydi Ali Reis’s dialect and literary upbringing.

This blend of Chagatai and Ottoman elements demonstrates Seydi Ali Reis’s unique role as a cultural mediator. His works reflect not only the dynamic cultural exchanges of the 16th-century Turkic-speaking world, but also the flexibility and adaptability of literary traditions to transcend regional boundaries. By incorporating Ottoman linguistic features into his Chagatai poems, Seydi Ali Reis both preserved and transformed the Chagatai literary tradition, creating a distinctive poetic voice that bridged Eastern and Western Turkic cultures.

Ultimately, this study reveals Seydi Ali Reis not only as a participant in the Chagatai tradition, but as a distinctly Ottoman voice within it, whose works reflect a fascinating interplay of linguistic and cultural elements. By incorporating features of Ottoman Turkish into his Chagatai poetry, Seydi Ali Reis created a hybrid linguistic expression that bridges the stylistic and grammatical conventions of these two Turkic traditions. This blending of linguistic forms is emblematic of the cultural fluidity that characterised the Ottoman literary world, where poets could navigate multiple traditions to create a unique and multifaceted poetic identity.

Through his Chagatai poetry, Seydi Ali Reis exemplifies the interconnectedness of the Turkic world, where diverse linguistic and literary traditions converged and evolved. His contributions have left a lasting mark on Turkic literary heritage, vividly illustrating how the boundaries of language and culture could be navigated and reshaped to create new, hybrid forms of artistic expression. This study reaffirms his position as a poet who not only participated in the Chagatai tradition, but also enriched it with the distinct imprint of Ottoman literary creativity.

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