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A STUDY OF THE "ÇİN DENİZ" IN THE "KİTAB-I BAHRİYE" COMPILED BY PÎRÎ REİS

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(1)

In the 16th century when the Ottoman Empire was at the height of her prosperity in world history, the development of navigation brought remarkably rich information and knowledge abou tthe oceans.

After the conquest of İstanbul in 1453, the Empire had to make occasional struggles against Venetians, Genoese and the Knights of Hospitalers in Rhodes, who were eager to hold sway over Mediterranean Sea, Aegean Sea, Black Sea and Ionian Sea. And sometimes her enemy was Pope or the Fleets of the Hapsburg Dynasty of Spain. Still more, after invading upon the Mamuluk Dynasty of Egypt, the Empire was destined to be involved in the violent troubles with ambitious Portugal pushing into the directions such as Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Thus, her overseas expansion may well be considered as a historic background providing wider information and knowledge of the Asiatic, African and American Continents.

Mustafa bin Abdullah Hadji Khalifa, a profound scholar in the Ottoman Empire of the 17th century, gave a careful description, which was called *Tuhfat Al-Kibar fi Asfar al-Bihār*, explaining good results of the overseas expansion.

It was with such a firm historic background that great works – Pîrî Reis's *Kitab-ı Bahriye*, the main theme of this essay, and Galatalı Seid Ali Reis's *Muhit* (a manuscript which seemed written in his own handwriting at Gujarat, India) – were created.

During the reign of Bayezid II, Yavuz Selim I and Kanunî Süleyman, Pîrî Reis was called one of the most distinguished Kaptan Pashas in the Empire. He must have had no superior in the wide knowledge of the oceans.

Now then, "Admiral Geography" was established by the colleagues who had Pîrî Reis at the head. His birth, career and achievements have been published in the *Orient, Vol IX. No. 2 - 3. 1966* (Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan) and will not be referred in this essay.

The term "Admiral Geography", meaning a practical geography, of course, founds not only on the informations painstakingly collected by the conventional Islam-Orient navigators and topographers, but also on *Portulan* drawn by Portuguese and Venetians, and it is further reinforced by the actual fightings fought by sea-explorers and "pashas", and by their own actual and exact observations and experiences through the cruise on the sea of which they had had command. All these available data were compiled into the very book *Kitab-ı Bahriye*.

The great book may fundamentally belong to the category of the so-called *Deniz Kılavuzu*, by nature, however, not a mere tourist guide, but the greatest one to which all the techniques of the most advanced cartography in those days were energetically applied. In other words, it may be said the very book that Pîrî Reis compiled records of the forerunners' travel by sea as possible as he could, into which he weaved all the information and knowledge about the most principal sea routes in those days which were considered for sailors as most indispensable.

After participating in the war, in which Egypt fell into the Empire's hands, Pîrî Reis gained leave of absence, which he spent at Gallipoli overlooking Sea of Marmara. And there he arranged research materials he had collected in places. Thus they were compiled in a single volume. Some of the manuscripts are dated 1520, and others 1525.

But the manuscripts were probably published in book form as early as 1521 and distributed to the Fleet of Ottoman based on Gallipoli, before presented to Sultan Kanunî Süleyman.

Damat Ibrahim Pasha, Sadrazam who had recognized its importance, recommanded him to make both the text and its copies. Before long, one of the copies was presented to Sultan by Pasha. The manuscript used for this study is one owned by the Library attached to St. Sophia (Ayasofya Kütüphanesi) in İstanbul, which is dated 932 in

the Heijira Era (A.D. 1525). This essay will go on researching on the basis of the book reprinted by Türk Tarih Kurumu. The manuscript is a bulky volume, containing 858 pages, written pretty clearly. Except 78 pages of the preface, all the rest of it is covered with maps. The most essential part of this book consists of 209 *Fasıl* containing 215 leaves of maps and charts, and this part may be said to be original information and knowledge based on his unique, exact and actual observations. His exploration is set about in Strait of Dardanelles, and further it goes on from the districts along the shore of Aegean Sea and its islands, Adriatic Sea, the west part of Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Southern France, Eastern Spain to Strait of Gibraltar. At the other end of Mediterranean Sea he turns round to go up east along the shore of North Africa, and his voyage of exploration covers the western part of Anatolia, via Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Cyprus.

And now, he also refers to Caspian Sea, which he calls "a closed sea", but strangely enough, the fact is that not a single paragraph was given to describe Black Sea which must have been Ottoman Navy's sphere of influence. Now, I have something to allude. It is not the principal part of the book, but a sort of the prologue or the introduction, which is called "Nazım", taking the form of epic, covering 78 pages and containing 23 *Fasıl* with 1107 rhymed couplets. These couplets may be called a sort of a magnificent panorama of world oceans seen from his eye. Some materials for this Nazım, of course, are not directly experienced by him. But the author seems to have taken great pains to make rhymed Nazım so that sailors may learn by heart or remember easily all the things about the seas. It is characteristic of expression in the Nazım that we find rhythmical tunes which duplication and antithesis bring about and we feel sweet to the ear because of rhyming lines. On the contrary, we often find it most difficult to translate the epic into Japanese because of the tediousness of expression, duplication of meaning — so to say, repeat of ineffective terms is so conspicuous and there are words and phrases too difficult to understand.

In conclusion of this chapter I should say a few more words. Scholarly and exhaustive investigations of Pîrî Reis's achievements have been already made by historians in his own country and it

should be omitted to make a full discussion here. It is necessary, however, for me to give a general introduction, containing my commentary, of his achievements.

(2)

Now, here in this chapter, let me discuss the thirteenth stanza of the Nazım describing China Sea. The stanza goes like this :

Bahr-ı Çinden Başlayalum evvelâ
Nice imiş ol deniz malum ola

Zira evvel Bahr-ı Çin bulalum
Tertibince berisine gelelüm

.....

Traslated in metaphrastic style, as follows; —

Now, let me start from China Sea.
I'll tell you about what the sea is.
Let's find China Sea first.
And then let me tell the land.
Of the Mediteranean I'll tell you afterwards.
Let me talk in seafarer slang.
Listen to the proud men telling China Sea.
Because there are a lot of things to tell about it.
Many a thing of China was written in the ancient history.

Some were described on sheets of paper,
others engraved on marble monuments.

And now I'll tell you of novel matters which have been unfamiliar to you.

Will you hear me tell about what China is like?
The sea is called Bahr-ı Çin.
The country lies at the farthest end of the east.
Nothing can compare with the sea in size.
It is so large and boundless that nobody can sail southward farther.

The country of Hitay lies to the north of the sea,
which is shaped like a gulf.

The capital of the country is Çin Ma Çin,
and the natives are called Çiçi Çano Ma Çiçan.

Let me talk about the native.
They all worship their own idol (Buddhist image).
Everyman has his own idol made of clay.
Each carries his own on his breast.

When he bends himself forward, therefore,
it hangs away from the breast of itself.

Making a bow thus means that he is ready to devote
himself.

He always carries it with him.

I hear that they feel very nice when they smell good
incense, (for they burn incense for a mass for the dead).

Well, then, I'll tell you about the manners of worship
they have beside this.

In worshipping in this country, they never give a word.

And they lock both their hands together like an iron
key to the lock, — men, women or children.

All of them wear an ornament on hands,
and also wear a long cloth reaching the knee.

They wash their hands with pure water before worship.
I think you realized the Portuguese's story about China.
This is another story from the Portuguese.

I'll tell you about clay, material for dish (china)
made in China.

I hear they generally use the same dish no fewer than
forty years, but, can it be true at all?

(The Portuguese says) There is a certain kind of stone.
I hear that it is originally a small clod of stone
and as blue as sapphire.

They crush it elaborately spending so many days.
It is mixed with water by stirring into something
claylike.

Any kind of china would stand long use.

(It is customary that) The secret is handed down
from father to son.

It is reported that "Kadi" (a judicial officer) makes
it a rule to impose an inheritance tax.

You could know what China is like, as stated above.
Now, let me talk about the islands next.
I'll tell you what the islands are like.

A Portuguese sailor said that "muhalif ruzgar" (an unlucky
wind) blew and worried the crew.

Consequently the wind set forth a storm and drifted them
far out to sea.

They were drifted, that is to say, out to a boundless
ocean.

Nothing could be seen for no less than twenty-four days.
No one could tell where the drift was going ahead.

They only perceived that the current was drifting them
along faster and faster in the offing.

They are forced to keep on drifting with no particular
destination.

They solely go on drifting without rest, bearing hard-
ship, having not the faintest idea about their
destination.

No one can tell where they will reach.
This voyage seems unbearable for the very pilots.
This is not a hackneyed story but a brand-new one.

At last on the twenty-fifth day they found a land
unexpectedly.

At once they made their way to the land, which was
crowded with people.

They were all naked, — men, women or children.
They are naked but lost to shame.
They are dead to all sense of shame.
Both men and women use a bow.
They are good at shooting.

The arrow never hits a stone without sticking
even in the stone.

It is made of "Kamiş" (reed or some other plant).
The arrowheads are made of fish-bone, the top of which
is as sharp as diamond.

The arrow looks like a harpoon, like Nuvister's in the
folklore.

They shoot arrows at our ship.
They are a kind of men whom no one has seen.
Of all the human beings, they are the oddest.
How many kinds of men God has created!
Some of the natives have horns like a serow's.
Others have only one eye on the face.

Some of the natives are one-legged, others speak like
whimsical birds.

Some have bull necks connecting directly with breasts,
others look like dogs and have tails.

If they were dogs, they would bite.
But they are men, therefore, they don't such a thing.
Strange to say, they are probably men.
Their mouths and noses only become like a dog's.
Some faces look like a shield.
The Portuguese came to our ship and told us as stated above.

There is another land on the other side of the island,
where there live men having ears of an elephant.

Listen to me! What are the men having ears of an elephant?
Two ear-lobes are so long that they can be knotted
at the hinder part of the neck.

And according to circumstances they will serve
for a lap robe.

If a knot is done, they help cover the knees.
The natives, however, are men, never elephants at all.

Thus, those sailors who have been to China Sea told us
their experiences and informations.

(3)

As mentioned above, I tried to translate the articles of China and China Sea out of the epic. Generally speaking, this is not a record of the Turkish admiral's direct experiences, but indirect information gained from Portuguese sailors. Perhaps for that reason, its description seems to be rough except for the explanation of products, manners and customs in the region concerned. Of course, I'd like to obviate the tedium of comparing and contrasting item by item regarding China Sea.

Strange to say, however, each item bears close resemblances to the following parts of the books; "Hai-nei-ching" of an old Chinese classic geography book *Shan-hai-ching;* both the countries of long-armed monsters and single-handed, single-legged monsters of *Hai-wai-hsi-ching;* the country of long-legged monsters of *Ta-huang-hsi-ching*. Can I call these resemblances a chance coincidence?

We may at least assert that this epic is something fantastic, disconnected with reality, in respect of making us have such an illusion as if such scenes reappeared from the end of the 15th century to the beginning of the 16th century.

And now, from the ethonological point of view, the prologue may give us some clue. As for the historical materials, however, each item can only be called hearsay transmitted from Portuguese sailors to a Turkish admiral.

Kitab-ı Bahriye was perhaps written between the two periods : the year 1498 when Vasco Da Gama visited Culicut (Malabar Coast), India, by the San Gabriel, according to the order of King Manoel (1495-1521), who tried to gain all the commercial concessions of which the Portuguese, the Jewish and the Moors in particular had been possessed; and the year 1517, overlapping with the Age of Great Navigation, when Tomé Pires (an apothecary and pharmacist), the author of *Suma Oriental*, paid a visit to Peking via Kuang-chou (Canton).

In those days the Portuguese aiming at all the commercial domination over Arabian Sea and its surrounding areas, was searching desperately for a solid base on the west coast of India, for the purpose. Therefore, it goes without saying that they never revealed various

informations of worldwide products —spices and drugs— in Southeast Asia.

When I come to think of it, in those days the Ottoman Empire was the leader of the West Asia-Islam in the place of the Arabians and the Iranians and a powerful enemy for the Portuguese after the ruin of the Mamuluk Dynasty in Egypt.

Judging from the fact that the article of China in *Kitab-ı Bahriye* was compiled by Portuguese sailors' hearsay, and that the writer was informed only of strange and unenlightened people in China, the Portuguese must certainly have had the intention to keep stoutly secret the geographical knowledge gained by their voyage of exploration, the details and the system in their foreign trade. Further, it is certain that their exclusive and monopolistic foresight prevented the Ottoman Empire from trying to rebuild the Islamite trade net. In those days the Court of Portugal had doubtless tightened the control of keeping secret the informations — geographical discoveries in Asia, Africa or America. Of such indication of affairs Donald F. Lack's *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Vol. I, pp. 151-154, 1965, Chicago.) contains more concrete mention. The fact of the matter is that Tomé Pires was little known even among the Portuguese yet before 1550 or so. These facts should be taken into consideration.

Presumely, Pîrî Reis reported faithfully what the Portuguese told Ottoman sailors the matters without any concern with the Portuguese spice trade, regarding China, — such as idol worship, salute and the manufacturing process of china well-known as eastern products.

And now, let's turn our attention to part of Southeast Asia, east of Malacca, where there are a lot of strange and mysterious legends. For example, Fei Hsin, an attendant of Chêng Ho, who went on the expeditions to Southeast Asia (1405-1432), tells, as if it were true, of the following story in one chapter of "Champa" (South Annam or Cochin China) of his work *Hsing-Chà-Sheng-Lan* (1436): that there once lived a no-eyed man, whose head flew out to prowl about for food at midnight, seperated from his body; and that after gratifying his hunger, he flew back home and connected with his body again.

Such being the case, various legends must have been handed among those sailors who were apt to be superstitious. Compare this

work with "China to Borneo", a narrative in Tomé Pires's *Suma Oriental*, and you will find the former visionary.

Thus, the above-mentioned were referred by way of telling a part of knowledge of maritime affairs regarding the Oriental water basin gained by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century in the history of relation between Orient and Occident. The Arab forerunner such as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa made a voyage to Far East for himself and observed the actual conditions in detail. However, his description about China and its neighbours was not always reliable. When we consider the Ottoman admirals or sea-adventurers in the 15-16th centuries, sorry to say they had no experience, especially as far as China Sea concerns. As amatter of course, it can't be helped that they had the limitation in knowledge and information.

[1] For a detailed study of Seydî Ali Reis, see Prof. Dr. Cengiz Orhonlu "Seydî Ali Reis". İ. Ü. E. F. *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*. 1. İstanbul. s. 39-54.

[2] For a study of Pîrî Reis, see the work of Prof. Dr. Afet İnan.

[3] The used text is so-called "Ayasofya Kitapsarayında 2612 sayıda kayıtlı nüsha".

[4] As for the Nazım of Pîrî Reis, it takes the style of literal translation.

[5] At that time, the Capital of China was Peking, in the another name, Suntien or Hanbaliq.

Compare with "*L'ouvrage de Sefi Çelebi. Historien Ottoman du XVIe siecle*", par Joseph Matuz. Paris. 1968. p. 56.