

ATATÜRK KÜLTÜR, DİL VE TARİH YÜKSEK KURUMU
T Ü R K T A R İ H K U R U M U Y A Y I N L A R I
IX. Dizi — Sa. 10°

X. TÜRK TARİH KONGRESİ

ANKARA : 22-26 Eylül 1986

KONGREYE SUNULAN BİLDİRİLER

IV. Cilt

T Ü R K T A R İ H K U R U M U B A S I M E V İ — A N K A R A

1 9 9 3

OTTOMAN NAVAL POLICY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

SVAT SOUCEK

When the Turkish fleet under Hadım Süleyman Paşa seized Aden in July 1538, it did so in the course of an expedition whose goal was to help the Muslims of western India resist the Portuguese. If successful, this expedition could have been an important step toward a potential substitution, in the Indian ocean, of Ottoman naval supremacy for the European one. Hadım Süleyman Paşa, however, failed to take the Portuguese fort at Diu, and worsening problems of logistics as well as rumors about the imminent arrival of a Portuguese war fleet led to the Turkish commander's hasty retreat in November of the same year.

Despite this retreat, the Ottoman expedition could have been viewed as a partial and perhaps even significant success, for while the Portuguese kept Diu, the Ottomans now possessed Aden; and Aden, even more than Diu, was a great emporium that had proved its worth ever since antiquity. In the subsequent struggle between the Turks and the Portuguese for the control of the maritime Spice route trade, Aden had the potential of a first-rate Ottoman base as well as that of a lucrative possession.

Ottoman Aden, however, does not appear to have played that role. Suez remained the empire's principal naval base for expeditions to the Indian ocean; Aden declined as an emporium to the point where by the end of the 16th century Mocha surpassed it as the favorite port of traffic between India and the Red sea. When finally in 1630 Aden slipped out of Turkish control, the event was barely noticed by Ottoman statesmen and chroniclers.

Yet logistically and strategically, the Ottomans were in a better position than any other power, throughout much of the 16th century, to embark on a maritime expansion in the Indian ocean. Their seizure of Aden was followed in 1546 by the establishment of the *eyalet* of Basra (S. Özbaran, "XVI. yüzyılda Basra Körfezi sahillerinde Osmanlılar: Basra Beylerbeyliğinin kuruluşu", *Tarih Dergisi*, sayı 25, Mart 1971); the acquisition of Katif in 1550 led to the establishment of the *eyalet* of Lah-

sa (J. S. Mandaville, "The Ottoman province of al-Hassa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", *JOAS Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90:3 [1970]), thus extending the Ottoman maritime frontier on the Persian gulf; in 1555 the establishment of the *eyalet of Habeş* (C. Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun güney siyaseti: Habeş eyaleti*, İstanbul 1974, p. 44), pushing the Ottoman maritime frontier further south along the coasts of the Sudan, Ethiopia and Somaliland, included the important ports of Sawakin, Masawa, Baylul and Zayla': especially the last-named had the potential of a base, in tandem with Aden, for naval activities in the Indian ocean. When we scan the events of the period, however, we find no evidence of such activities. After Hadım Süleyman Paşa's expedition, only one isolated and half-hearted naval campaign took place: the attempt to seize Portuguese-held Hormuz. In November/December 1552 an Ottoman fleet composed of 28 ships (24 galleys and 4 *barças*) arrived from Suez and, after having wrested Maskat from the Portuguese, besieged the island fortress (C. Orhonlu, "Hint kaptanlığı ve Piri Reis", *Bellekten* 34 [1970]). The course and fate of the siege presented remarkable analogies to that of Diu 14 years earlier. The Portuguese defenders withdrew to the inner fortress and held out until rumors about the imminent arrival of a Portuguese relief fleet persuaded the Ottoman commander, Piri Reis, to lift the siege and withdraw to an Ottoman base-this time to Basra.

After the failure before Hurmuz in 1552, the Ottomans made no further attempt to assume a major role in the Indian ocean. The expedition of the Turkish fleet under Seydi Ali Çelebi from Basra in July 1554 had the purpose of returning to Suez rather than advancing toward India (C. Orhonlu, "Seydi Ali Reis", *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 1 1970; Seydi Ali Reis, *Miratu'l-Memalik*, ed. Ahmet Cevdet, İstanbul 1313).

The Ottoman "Indian Ocean policy" thus resulted in a virtual withdrawal from that ocean, after a series of dramatic but in the last analysis minor campaigns that could be bracketed between 1517 and 1554. What was the cause of this withdrawal? Most historians have pointed to the inability of the Turkish navy, which was of the Mediterranean type, to compete with that of the Portuguese, whose Atlantic fleet was equally at home in the Indian ocean: In other words, the Ottomans had to give up because their galleys lost the battle to Portuguese sailing ships. I do not

find this explanation satisfactory. The Turks were not unfamiliar with sail-driven warships. Their corsairs as well as fleets up to a point used them in the Mediterranean. On the other side of the isthmus, preparations that were made in 1531-32 in view of an expedition - eventually postponed - against the Portuguese included the construction of both galleys and sailing ships: 20 large sailing ships in a fleet of 70 (S. Özbaran, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Hindistan Yolu", *Tarih Dergisi*, sayı 31 Mart 1977 p. 96, quoting a Portuguese source, besides Peçuylu, *Tarih*, 1.219 who simply states that out of the 80 vessels, some were galleys, *firkates* and *mavnas* (thus oar-ships), some *barças* (thus sailing ships)). It could be objected that the matter did not stop with just building such ships: the Turks needed able captains and seamen to sail them. Again, I would suggest that they did have at least a nucleus of such men: what they lacked was a determined policy to train and increase such personnel.

The main reason for the ultimate Ottoman withdrawal from the Indian ocean was, I think, the absence of such a determined policy -whether government-sponsored or private. It was this lack of determination that stood in the way of expanding the fleet of Ottoman sailing ships in Suez (or more appropriately -both for navigational and strategic reasons- in Aden), of developing Aden into a major naval base, of persisting and trying harder after the initial failures before Diu and Hurmuz.

This passivity in the waters beyond Suez is especially striking when we consider the energy that drove the contemporary Ottoman expansion in most other directions. To give an example that is the reverse of the coin: The expedition to India planned in 1532 was twice postponed: at first because the materiel assembled at Suez had to be transferred to the Mediterranean in order to become available for Süleyman the Magnificent's "Alman seferi" (Özbaran, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu," p. 98); and then because the commander himself was ordered to join the sultan, together with the "Mısır Hazinesi", in view of the imminent campaign in Irak (1534) that was to absorb the principal attention and resources of the empire. The eventual failure of 1538 before Diu was overshadowed by the coincidental victory of the Mediterranean fleet at Preveza. Likewise, the failure of 1552 to capture Hurmuz may have appeared to Ottoman statesmen as a minor setback in comparison with the triumphant campaigns of Süleyman the Magnificent against the Safavids in 1553-55.

And the 1571 reverse at Lepanto by no means induced the Turks to withdraw from Mediterranean waters: an effort was at once made to rebuild the fleet (A. Hess, "The battle of Lepanto and its place in Mediterranean history", *Past and Present* 57 1921), a determination that bore fruit a mere three years later with the recapture of Tunis.

Why did the Turks develop this order of priorities? Why did they turn down the opportunity, in 1532 and several subsequent decades, to build an ocean-borne empire of their own?

The explanation, I would propose, should be sought in the fundamental difference between the goals pursued by the Ottoman naval policy and those sought by the contemporary European powers. Whereas to the Turks, maritime expansion was an extension of the territorial one, to the Portuguese, and even more to their successors the British and other West Europeans, it represented a control of shipping routes that gave access to overseas sources and markets, with the prospect of lucrative long-distance trade functioning as an irresistible magnet. It was this trade that financed the creation, growth and constant modernization of their powerful fleets, that led to the foundation of sophisticated commercial companies, and ultimately to the establishment of their colonial empires (economic empires, in contrast to the traditional dynastic, political or religious ones such as the Holy Roman Empire or the Ottoman Empire).

This does not necessarily mean that the Ottoman empire had no long-distance trade, that there were no grand-scale Turkish merchants, that the sultans and their statesmen did not encourage, protect and even join commercial ventures. Two seminal studies deserve being mentioned in this context: H. İnalcık's "Bursa and the commerce of the Levant", *JESHO (Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient)* 3 (1960), and his "Capital formation in the Ottoman Empire", *The Journal of Economic History* 29: 1 (March 1969). In the Indian ocean, however, the absence of competitive Turkish merchant shipping sponsored by the Ottoman government and protected by its naval umbrella was undeniable, and the successful conquest and retention of the ports along the empire's Oriental fringe was no substitute for it. In conclusion, Ottoman-Turkish trade eastward of Suez, whether private or with the participation of the ruling stratum, was not significant enough to have a "clout" at the center of the state, to generate a naval and foreign policy that could have led to the birth of an Ottoman sea-borne and ultimately colonial empire.