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Experiencing the Experience: Seydi Ali Reis and the Indo-Muslim World

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From the early days of the Empire to the mid-17th Century, the Indian Subcontinent was mostly unknown territory to Ottoman Turks. This assumption is reiterated in the earlier works (especially the *Hind Edebiyatı*) of Cemil Meriç, who posited that the Ottoman intellectuals were not only indifferent to the Hindu tradition itself, but also to the greater Indo-Muslim world that flourished in the Moghul subcontinent. However, there are other accounts of Muslim India dating from this historical period, such as Seydi Ali Reis' powerful memoir *Mir'atü'l-Memâlik* (The Mirror of Countries), which gives a completely different picture from that which Cemil Meriç would expect from an Ottoman intellectual. In *Mir'atü'l-Memâlik*, we do not see an ordinary admiral merely attempting to find his way out of northern India back to Istanbul, but rather a poet who participates in numerous poetry contests in Humayun's Mughal court and wins them all. He pays homage to the great Indian and Chagatai masters of poetry and wins the heart of the Sultan himself with his charming and outspoken ghazals. Not only as a historical account but also as a literary text, Seydi Ali Reis' book offers us something totally different from the cerebral approach to cultural learning taken by Cemil Meriç: rather than dealing with the experience as a separate and isolated phenomenon, Seydi Ali Reis chooses to live the experience by participating in it firsthand.

Even though the Indian subcontinent was not geographically far from the land of the Ottomans, Indian culture was mostly perceived as foreign to Ottoman Turks. One interesting observation concerning this poor communication between the Ottoman Muslims and the Indians was made by the conservative Turkish thinker Cemil Meriç, in his seminal work on the Indian philosophical and literary traditions, *Hind Edebiyatı*

("Indian Literature"). According to Meriç, Ottoman thinking had always been "monogamous" (*monogam*), because, for centuries, Islamic culture acted as the single most influential pillar for much of Ottoman culture and society (8). Specifically, many late- 19th-century Ottoman intellectuals—from Abdülhak Hamid to Süleyman Nazif—who developed a keen interest in the ancient wisdom of the Indians were only *partially* successful in arriving at a full picture of its culture. For instance, coconut trees were Abdülhak Hamid's only great interest, rather than the teachings of the Vedas or later Hinduism. Similarly, Meriç claims that Rıza Tevfik's knowledge of Islamic mysticism was limited only to Iran, and that Süleyman Nazif only regarded Indian thinking as a lodge of the wretched or indolent (*miskinler tekkesi*) (*ibid.*).

Of course, one cannot fully apply Cemil Meriç's narrow remarks about the Ottoman perception of the Indian subcontinent to the whole of Ottoman history. This is because there are numerous historical accounts and literary monographs on India from as early as the 16th century and continuing on to later periods in which we observe that the Ottoman intellectuals who had been in touch with the Indian world did not, in fact, have a particularly narrow view of Indian culture. Similarly, one should also not forget that Cemil Meriç belongs to a different generation of writers for whom having a consummate reading knowledge of a particular topic was much more important than having a direct engagement with the subject matter itself. For instance, in the case of the post-Tanzimat intellectuals mentioned above, Cemil Meriç accuses these individuals of having a superficial knowledge of India without having been fully infused with its unique religious and literary traditions.

As opposed to the more cerebral and bookish approach of Cemil Meriç, I would argue that Seydi Ali Reis' well-written, poetic, and entertaining short memoir, *Mir'atü'l-Memâlik* ("The Mirror of Countries"), an unprecedented literary work of historical non-fiction intermingled with beautiful ghazals composed by the author himself in 1557, has something totally different to offer us in terms of the short glimpses that it gives of 16th-century northern India. Of course, we should not forget that the primary aim of Seydi Ali Reis in writing this book was not to introduce India to the Ottoman audience, but instead to give a detailed account for Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent of what had happened during the four years that he had been away from Istanbul and how he had particularly well represented Ottoman pride during his contact with the Mughal Emperor Humayun. Furthermore, we should not forget that Seydi Ali Reis' book is simply teleological in nature, because, throughout the book, the author's only real concern is to depart from the Indian subcontinent as quickly as possible, arriving safely back in his beloved city of Istanbul.

One interesting aspect of Seydi Ali Reis' book is that it draws inspiration from many different literary genres. For instance, in his *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* ("History of Turkish Literature"), Ağâh Sırrı Levend not only regards *Mir'âtü'l-Memâlik* as one of the early examples of the *seyahatname* or travel genre in Ottoman literature, but also includes it among other miscellaneous interdisciplinary tracts or corpuses (*risaleler*, *mecmualar*), along with Fuzulî's *Subhat u Maraz*, Veysi's *Hâbname*, and Ebussuud's *Risale* (157, 170). We should also not forget that Seydi Ali Reis was one of the greatest Chagatai language poets of his time—in *Mir'âtü'l-Memâlik*, Sultan Humayun praises him by giving the title of *Ali Şîr-i Sâni* ("the Second Ali-Shir") after the great Uyghur poet Ali-Shir Nava'i of Herat—and that, whenever he looks at the Indian world, he does not see it through the eyes of an ordinary admiral, but through those of a poet who has the vision of recreating this memory in words and poetic imagery.

It is true that Seydi Ali Reis makes subtle daily observations concerning life in both the Gujarati Sultanate and the Mughal Empire of the time. However, when it comes to arts, culture, and etiquette, for instance, not only does he spare us any detailed accounts of the artistic, religious, and moral practices that he has encountered at Humayun's court and other places that he has been to in northern India, but also presents the many challenges that he has encountered along the way exclusively from the Ottoman perspective, without paying much attention to the local perception.

In that regard, allowing for the fact that Seydi Ali Reis never had the intention of giving a clear and profound picture of India, my take on his Indian accounts is that, even though we come across some interesting observations about the local Indian culture, Seydi Ali Reis pays little attention to India as it is, in all its diverse traditions, but rather often insists on reading its complex structure from a Muslim perspective. Therefore, whenever he looks at the local practices of Indian culture, not only does Seydi Ali Reis regard its many different customs as exotic and strange, but also those customs that he does find worthy of mention are always those more akin to the Islamic customs that both communities shared, namely the Indo-Muslim legacy. However, it still cannot be said that Seydi Ali Reis' work lacks any perceptive observations about the world that he has encountered in India: as opposed to Cemil Meriç's more cerebral expectation, his experience is not all about the written historical perspective of the Indian subcontinent, but more particularly about "experiencing the experience" by participating in it, with all his own merits and demerits.

In this paper, after discussing the real nature of Seydi Ali Reis' trip to the subcontinent, I will comment on the literary observations that he made concerning Indian flora and fauna, as well as on different anecdotal events that occurred during the

long and tiring journey back to his own homeland. To provide a comparison with Seydi Ali Reis' observations, there will also be a brief section on Seyfi Çelebi's accounts of India, which he probably wrote for the sultan without having gone to the actual places that he claimed to have visited.

THE QUESTION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN FACTION AND SEYDİ ALİ REİS

In his book *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, Giancarlo Casale argues that, at the time of Rüstem Pasha, there were two main factions within the Ottoman administration. One of these factions was headed by the governor and other leading dignitaries of Egypt, such as Davud Pasha and Semiz Ali Pasha, who strongly supported expeditions in the Indian Ocean, claiming that the Ottomans should expand their commercial routes if they were to wrest hegemony over the Indian Ocean from the hands of the Portuguese (Casale 85). The other faction was centered around the grand vizier, Rüstem Pasha, who had more Mediterranean-leaning policies and argued that, in practical terms, uncontrolled expansion of the Ottomans into the Indian Ocean would bring more disasters than benefits. After the numerous successful sieges of Davud Pasha's captains in the Indian Ocean, Rüstem Pasha wanted to take control of the situation there, and therefore sent his own reliable men, Piri Reis being one of them (Casale 92). After Piri Reis' failed expedition and his later tragic execution, the successful sieges of Davud Pasha's reliable protégé Murad Beg alarmed Rüstem Pasha again and, after Murad's subsequent return to Basra, Rüstem Pasha nominated Seydi Ali Reis as a new admiral to replace Piri Reis, so that the Porte could retake direct control of the events in the Indian Ocean from the monopoly of the Egyptian faction headed by Davud and Semiz Ali Pasha (Casale 100). The main mission of Seydi Ali Reis was to take the Ottoman naval forces (a total of fifteen ships) from Basra on the Persian Gulf to Suez on the Red Sea. Even though Seydi Ali Reis made good progress during the first leg of the journey, in the end he was unable to cope with the fierce weather conditions on the ocean or the Portuguese ships that followed him throughout his journey (*ibid.*). He finally gave up on his attempt to return to the Red Sea and made instead for India, seeking a safe haven on the coastline for refuge (Casale 101). It was only four years later that Seydi Ali Reis managed to return overland to Istanbul and, upon his return, he wrote a book about his adventures during this long and difficult journey.

SEYDİ ALİ REİS ON INDIAN CUSTOMS AND CONVENTIONS

Seydi Ali Reis does not put much emphasis on the customs and conventions of the non-Muslim populations of India. Only in a few cases, to distinguish the religions of the

locals that he is dealing with, does he refer to these local inhabitants as infidels (*kefere*), showing his distrust of them by clearly making distinctions between the customs of the people of the book and those of infidels. For instance, at the very beginning of *Mir'atü'l-Memalik*, Seydi Ali Reis and his men receive word from Melik Esed, the governor of Daman, that the Portuguese will soon be coming to scout out their hiding place after coming ashore in the vicinity of Daman Castle (Seydi Ali Reis 89). Hence, Melik Esed advises them to take shelter in the castle of Surat, at which they manage to arrive after a journey of three months. After their arrival, they become the guests of Hüdâvend Han, to whom the Portuguese had sent a messenger asking him to collaborate with the Portuguese in their pursuit of Seydi Ali Reis and his men (91). At this point, Seydi Ali Reis talks about his distrust towards not only his fellow Muslims, from whom he sought refuge, but also towards the non-Muslim guides and sailors among his men that he had recruited previously, during his short stay in Daman.

In fact, when Seydi Ali Reis talks about how they survived a night attack by the Portuguese by the skin of their teeth because one of his trustworthy men happened to be on night watch, it is apparent that this sudden attack occurred at the same time as the unexpected visit of a Portuguese messenger to ask for Seydi Ali Reis' surrender (92). After this unexpected incident, Seydi Ali Reis and his confidants discover that one of the non-Muslim locals—he refers to him as an infidel, *kāfir*—among his sailors had already reported on their current situation as well as their exact location to the Portuguese. To intimidate the messenger, and particularly to inflict punishment on the traitor, Seydi Ali Reis' soldiers hang the infidel in front of Sumat Castle (*ibid.*).

Similarly, as a follow-up story to that of the infidel traitor, Seydi Ali Reis makes mention of a strange exotic tree that is unique to the Indian subcontinent and called the “tree of Tārī”. According to Seydi Ali Reis' description, this particular tree is famous for the tasty liquid coming out of its knotholes. That is to say, the locals of the area cut the knobs of the Tārī tree and placed small pitchers at the edges of its knotholes, expecting a liquorish fluid to come out. Under the heat of the sun, this liquid becomes fermented and starts to taste like wine (*ibid.*). Therefore, at nights, as Seydi Ali Reis observes, men gather around these Tārī trees and offer each other draughts of this liquid, getting drunk while eating and talking (*ibid.*). On one of these nights, an infidel soldier within his extended group got drunk and flung himself at Hüseyin Agha of the Çerakese Sirdar in order to kill him. During the confusion of the attack, this drunken soldier killed one of Seydi Ali Reis' favorite men, Hajji Memi, and injured two of his other men. Upon these unexpected incidents, his men asked Seydi Ali Reis what would be the best way to punish this infidel according to the rules of sharia (*emr-i şer'*) and, as a reply, Seydi Ali

Reis recited a line from verse 45 of the al-Ma'ida chapter of the Qur'an (93). Being one of the early Medinan verses, this verse discusses the religious missions of Moses and Jesus and explicates how the views of these two holy men have been distorted by the deeds of non-believing Jews and Christians. According to verse 45, God orders man to take “life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal” for retaliation, and so Seydi Ali Reis asks his man to kill this rogue as retribution for the life of Hajji Memi (*ibid.*). At the end of the episode, Seydi Ali Reis announces that, after the death of this traitor, all other infidels have learned a lesson (*ibret*) from the just solution of the Qur'an and cites verse 179 from the al-Baqarah chapter to support this cause: according to this verse, “in the Law of Equality, there is Life to you”, meaning that Seydi Ali Reis assures his men that what they have done by killing the vagabond soldier was to bring peace (*huzûr eyledi*) and life to the others (*ibid.*).

The only section in which there is a clear exposition of Indian culture is where Seydi Ali Reis talks about the *'ajā'ib wa-gharā'ib*—i.e., the marvels and wonders—that he has observed among Indian people. For example, after labelling the locals as *kefere* (“infidel”) again, he then cites the so-called local names for these people: according to his description, the Gujaratis call these indigenous people Banyan (*Bāniyān*), whereas the general name in Hindi is *Hindū*. However, we see no specific references to religion, and I am not even sure whether Seydi Ali Reis uses these expressions to refer to a specific religion that is prevalent among the indigenous people or just as a general misnomer for anything that is non-Muslim. It is interesting to note, of course, that he does not put these ancient people among the people of the book, but emphasizes that, although these so-called Hindus believe in the antiquity of the world (probably meaning that they might have some ancient Gnostic sources), they do not own a single source or a book; of course, what Seydi Ali Reis has in mind is a rigid distinction between the three holy books of monotheism versus other non-monotheistic religious traditions.

The highlight of the section is perhaps the one about the process of cremation among the so-called *kefere*. Seydi Ali Reis cites how they bring the dead to the waterfront for cremation. He seems to be astonished by another practice in which, if the person who has died is a male, then the wife should either be burnt along with the husband (*cem' olup yanmak*) or, if she is old enough, then she may be permitted to survive (123). Another practice is that if the wife accepts her own immolation voluntarily, without the enforcement of the community, then a huge banquet is given for the widow. The practice that Seydi Ali Reis refers to is to the then-already outlawed religious ceremony of *sati*, the burning of the Hindu widow to ashes on the dead husband's pyre. One intriguing remark that he makes is that someone belonging to the house of Islam has the

right to take possession of a Hindu wife by force during the ceremony of her immolation. Therefore, Seydi Ali Reis cites that there are keepers around the pyres, ordered there by the sultan, so that the widow to be burnt would not be taken possession of by a Muslim (*ibid.*).

This place is virtually the only one in which Seydi Ali Reis discusses the customs of the Hindus. One other intriguing commentary on local culture comes at an earlier point, when he makes a reference to a group of travelling bandits called *Bāts* (97). These people are also referred as *Bāniyān keferesi*, and Seydi Ali Reis, in my opinion, chooses to refer to them thus, not because he wants to distinguish a Hindu from other infidels, but rather because he is using it as a generic name for all local Indian people. These infidel Banyan people, as Seydi Ali Reis puts it, help foreigners and merchants find their way in jungles and deserts in exchange for money. These *Bāts* also help their companions to pass by the famous armed robbers called *Rāspūts* or Hindu horsemen (*Hindū'nun atlusi*) by threatening to kill themselves on a possible *Rāspūt* assault when these people appear (*ibid.*). If a *Bāt* kills himself, then the leaders of the *Rāspūts* have the right to kill all the families of the *Rāspūts* who caused the *Bāt's* demise; here, Seydi Ali Reis does not much elaborate on this, but tells only of what he has heard (*ibid.*). It is not certain whether or not Seydi Ali Reis conveyed this story accurately, but we are still not told of the exact tribal relationship between the *Bāts* and the *Rāspūts*, and therefore it is not easy to make sense out of this interesting incident.

STRANGE ANIMALS, PLANTS, AND NATURAL PHENOMENA

Rather than discussing the intricacies of the Indian customs and religions that he has encountered, Seydi Ali Reis mostly prefers to give exotic and often unheard-of glimpses of the nature of the Indian subcontinent. For instance, as in the example given above, rather than revealing *how* the religions of these so-called infidels differ from the religion of the Qur'an, Seydi Ali Reis only prefers to talk about *in what sense* Islam finds a solution to the daily matters that they have encountered on the subcontinent, and thus, additionally, gives valuable lessons to those local infidels (and, by implication, to the Catholic Portuguese as well). In line with the long tradition of *Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Manjūdāt* ("Marvelous Creatures and Strange Beings") of the famous Persian physician and geographer Zakariya al-Qazwini, Seydi Ali Reis gives pride of place to mentioning interesting flora and fauna that are neither seen nor known of in the Ottoman lands. The genre of so-called *ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* lies at the intersection of cosmology, geography, and astrology, and when Muslim scholars deal with exotic flora

and fauna, they always try to refer to the Islamic interpretations of common cosmological and astrological knowledge.

However, unlike other Muslim authors, Seydi Ali Reis generally does not refer to common religious myths that are associated with these different forms of plants and creatures. However, when he is describing the monkeys (*maymūn*) that he and his men encountered on the way to Ahmadabad, he starts to discuss the interesting variety of animals that are not common within Ottoman territory. For instance, one of the first animals that he claims is abundant in the area of the Gujarat Sultanate is the parrot (*tūtī*) (95). However, as he makes mention of this exotic bird in only one place, it is impossible to further elaborate on Seydi Ali Reis' take on this animal, but when he makes a remark on monkeys, he interestingly makes a reference to the story of Jahan Shah and mentions how monkeys are free from any rulership or hegemonic power, as this particular story conveys (*ibid.*). An interesting note is that monkeys are also cited, in Hindu teachings, as independent animals that fight against evil spirits. For instance, the famous monkey god Hanuman is often represented as the incarnation of a "free soul", as it was only Hanuman, according to the story of the ancient Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyana*, who accepted the call to fight along with Rama in order to save his wife Sita from the bad deeds of Ravana. Of course, Seydi Ali Reis does not refer to this celebrated Indian myth; he only mentions how thousands of monkeys have followed them on their journey, first to Mahmudabad and then to Ahmadabad, and how these animals encircled them whenever they took a break from their journey. Furthermore, he specifically observes how the monkeys along the way to Ahmadabad make bizarre hand gestures and how some carry their babies on their shoulders.

Seydi Ali Reis' depiction of strange animals is not only limited to parrots and monkeys: he also describes different kinds of ants, antelopes, elephants, and water buffalos. On their way to Lahore, Seydi Ali Reis and his men choose to take an alternative route through the desert rather than taking the most commonly used way through the jungle, which is full of armed robbers belonging to the *Cedd* tribe (105). When seeking a safe passageway through the windy and desolate desert, Seydi Ali Reis encounters huge ants (*karınca*), each being as big as a sparrow (*serçe*) (*ibid.*). Similarly, at the end of the chapter concerning his adventures in the Indian subcontinent, Seydi Ali Reis discusses the hunting techniques that he has observed in different regions in India. One thing that astonished him was the Indian people's use of tamed antelopes (referred to as *mu' allem ābūlar* in the text) to catch other wild antelopes (*vahşī ābūlar*) in forested areas (123). Seydi Ali Reis depicts the process as follows: the Indians place a very small noose (*kemend*) around the horns of a tamed antelope, and so, whenever a wild antelope

approaches the tamed one and collides with it in a head-on position, the horns of the wild one also catch on those of the tamed antelope, making the wild one immobile (*ibid.*). Seydi Ali Reis finds this technique particularly successful and argues that it is a better way to hunt these wild jungle antelopes, concluding that it would be easier to catch its attention by using an animal that is from the same genus (as opposed to a human being running after the animal) (*ibid.*).

One interesting point is that Seydi Ali Reis pays little attention to the elephant as one of the strange creatures worthy of discussion. This may well be because the elephant is one of the most frequently depicted exotic animals—as in the case of Seyfi Çelebi's notes from India—when the subject matter is the Indian subcontinent. Seydi Ali Reis does not give a detailed description of the animal, or at least, does not discuss its general traits and characteristics as he did with monkeys, but he does mention its name on two occasions: firstly, when he refers to certain wars, in addition to the number of soldiers or cannons involved in the war he also specifically gives an account of how many elephants were also used; and secondly, at the very end of the chapter concerning India, when he makes a reference to interesting hunting (*şikār*) techniques that he had encountered. Thus, in addition to the story of the tamed antelopes, Seydi Ali Reis chronicles how elephants are used in the hunting of wild buffalos: according to his description, the Indians make a small howdah on the saddle of the elephants and tame these animals so that they can press upon the heads of wild buffalos with their ivory tusks and trunk and the man waiting in the cabinet up on their back may come swiftly down to kill the animal (124). On the other hand, Seydi Ali Reis mentions the great strength of these wild buffalos (*kāvmīş* or *gāv-ı kuṭās*) and their counterparts in rivers and streams, namely water buffalos (*bahrī kuṭās*) (*ibid.*).

There are two other animals that are briefly mentioned in the sections concerning India. First, upon leaving the Khyber Pass and continuing north to Kabul, the capital of the historical Zabulistan region, Seydi Ali Reis encounters two rhinoceroses (*gergedān*) bathing in a nearby stream (*ibid.*). He compares them to elephants in terms of their size and the length of their tusks. Finally, one mythical depiction of *ajā'ib wa-gharā'ib* appears in his elegiac ghazal concerning the death of the second Mughal emperor Nasiruddin Muhammad Humayun, when he recited the poem to the newly elected emperor and Humayun's son Jalaluddin Muhammad Akhbar:

In India, Sultan Humayun was a Huma bird

Hind içinde bir hümây irdi, Hümâyün Pādīşāh (122)

Seydi Ali Reis represents Emperor Humayun as a Huma bird (*hümây*), a legendary bird mentioned in Persian Sufi literature. One reason why Seydi Ali Reis chooses the Huma as an image for the greatness of Humayun is doubtless because of the similarity in sound of their names. Another reason is likely related to the general characteristics of this phoenix-like mythical bird itself in that, as the Huma bird is the symbol of fertility, eternity, and virginity, the gracefulness and grandeur of Humayun can only be compared to this supernatural being in spirit. Later in the book, we also read that Seydi Ali Reis catches a glimpse of the Huma bird, a phenomenon which is often interpreted as a precursor to a fortunate event and which probably refers here to his arriving back in Istanbul safely.

In addition to the Tārī tree section, there is only one passage where Seydi Ali Reis makes mention of Indian flora, and this appears in the part where he talks about some bizarre (*ğarīb*) trees with enormous trunks and infinitely many branches that cover up the whole sky. These weird and exotic trees are called *Tūbā*, and they grow one upon the other, creating a gigantic mass of groups of ten to twenty trees all with common, intermingled roots (95). Seydi Ali Reis is astonished to see how the upper branches of these trees are covered with a huge number of bats (*yarasa*) and again how—with a bit of exaggeration—thousands of men can rest under the shade of these gigantic trees (*ibid.*).

In brief, it is very interesting to see how Seydi Ali Reis does not specifically talk about the centuries-long customs and conventions of the Hindu culture or, even more generally, common Indian tradition. Instead, he refers to its people simply as infidels without making any cultural, religious, or even social references to their forms of life. The sections on the hunting of particular animals can perhaps be regarded as interesting passages that give some information on the general characteristics of their daily social lives; however, these very short passages do not reveal any further information about the social context, or even why the hunting of these animals is significant for these people. That is to say, we never know in what contexts they use these animals or whether these particular animals have any mystical or religious significance according to their customs. Nevertheless, Seydi Ali Reis employs a deeper description of the natural habitat in the Indian subcontinent. For instance, when talking about his first encounter with the Indian Ocean, Seydi Ali Reis gives a very detailed account of general weather conditions according to different seasons, as well as of inner tidal movements and currents within the ocean itself. Moreover, when he refers to these subtle oceanic fluxes and currents, he also represents these phenomena within a context, namely by giving a nuanced account of the color of water or talking about different animals seen before a particular weather-related phenomenon.

After being chased by the Portuguese at the very beginning of the book, Seydi Ali Reis and his crew encounter a heavy storm at the mouth of the tidal creek between the districts of Diu and Daman by the southern coast of Gujarat's Kathiawar peninsula. At the time when Seydi Ali Reis' forces come to the coasts of Diu, a very intense storm—what Seydi Ali Reis calls an “elephant typhoon” (*tūfān-i fīl*)—breaks out, creating waves that are ten times stronger than those in the Mediterranean Sea (84). After a few moments, the sailors identify two huge fish, each as long as a galley, going deep under the water. The guides say that they will not attack, but they can be regarded as a precursor to the coming tidal flow. During the high tide, Seydi Ali Reis observes that the color of the ocean turns snow-white, and again identifies some uncommon sea creatures, such as seahorses, monstrous sea turtles, and some unidentified sea creatures named as *rişte-i bahir* and probably representing “sea cucumbers” (85). By observing this wide range of sea creatures, Seydi Ali Reis understands that his ship is located somewhere very close to the shore.

One of the main features of the Indian Ocean is its famous whirlpools, and Seydi Ali Reis talks about how he had previously read about these lethal phenomena in nautical almanacs concerning the Indian Ocean. According to his description, there are two places in this particular region that are famous for their sudden lethal whirlpools: one is the coast of Ethiopia, especially the vicinity of Cape Guardafui; and the second is the coastal line of Sindh province, especially the Gulf of Cekid (*ibid.*). When the storm breaks out again, Seydi Ali Reis understands that this is not a typical storm like the ones that he has encountered in the Mediterranean Sea, but something related to the monsoon, which he refers to as India's “rainy season” (*bārāni zamānī*) (88). When the heavy rain starts without ceasing for at least a week, he makes a simultaneously poetical and mystical reference to the phenomenon by saying that the earth has nothing more to do than accept what is to come from the sky (implying the supernatural deeds of God): “Whatever pours down from the sky, the earth accepts it” (*Gökden ne yağa ki yır anı kabûl kılmaya*) (*ibid.*).

NASIRUDDIN HUMAYUN VERSUS SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT

When he is asked by the Mughal Emperor Humayun to compare who is greater in terms of political power, Seydi Ali Reis calmly answers the Ottoman Emperor (*Vilâyet-i Rîm*) is far greater than his excellency (115). Of course, we cannot know for sure whether Seydi Ali Reis truly found the courage to give such an eloquent answer; however, the comparisons that he makes between the emperor of the Mughals and that of the Ottomans reveal interesting points to consider.

First, Seydi Ali Reis employs a rhetorical device and pretends not to fully understand what Humayun says, by asking whether his excellency asked if the Mughal Empire were greater than the center of *Rîm*, meaning the city of Sivas, or the political center of the whole land of *Rîm*, meaning Istanbul or the Ottoman Empire itself (*ibid.*). Seydi Ali Reis further recounts the fundamental reasons why the Ottomans are far greater than the Mughals: firstly, the Ottomans are the only Muslim Empire to rule anywhere from the first (Yemen) to the seventh (Buda and Pest) climes (*ıklîm*). Secondly, all of the local governors (*beglerbegi*) and judges (*kādî*) of the smaller Ottoman governorships recognize the greatness of the sultan, whereas there is always political instability among the local governors under Humayun (116). Thirdly, even the crazed bards (*sevdâ-ger*) in China receive permission to recite sermons (*hutbe*) and perform prayers (*namâz*) in the name of the Ottoman sultan, as China (*Vilâyet-i Çin*) is often associated with fierce rivalry with the Islamic civilizations. And lastly, the Ottoman sultan is greater because he rules over the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (*ibid.*).

Seydi Ali Reis' eloquent reply is also supplemented by the ghazal that he recited to Humayun upon his departure from the capital, Delhi. As he particularly emphasizes, this particular ghazal is written in the style of *Rîm*, meaning that it favors the Ottoman way (since the empire is located in the lands of *Rîm*) more than the Mughal one. The first lines of the ghazal read as follows:

Do not be mistaken, the place that you have landed is the Land of India.
Those who are affected by it and stay there, they are all astonished.
Those who have passed from this world said in agreement:
“The truth is this: the earthly paradise is the Land of the Ottomans.”

Ğâfil olma, düştüğüñ yir Mülk-i Hindüstan'dur.
Meyl idiüp anda kalanlar, cümle ser-gerdândur.
'Âlemi geşt eyleyenler, didiler bi'l-ittifâk:
Hak budur, dünyâda cennet Milket-i 'Osmândur. (119)

These first couplets of the ghazal praise the land of the Indians as a place suitable for crazed wanderers (*ser-gerdân*); however, the second couplet tells us that the real paradise (*cennet*) of the world is the lands of the Ottomans.

Though Seydi Ali Reis thus “proves” the greatness of the Ottoman sultan over Humayun on many occasions, we also see that he depicts the latter as a generous ruler who has the capacity to appreciate Seydi Ali Reis' eloquent words, inspired by the great Indian poet Amir Khusraw:

Whoever is satisfied with a loaf of bread is a greater man

His deed is a world better than those of all kings

Her ke kân' şod be yek nân-ı bäre merd-i mehter est
Kâr-ı ü ez cümle-i şâhân 'âlem bihter est (117)

According to Islamic tradition, it is expected that any great and mighty emperor must also be generous and tolerant. This characteristic of great rulers—from Alexander the Great to Saladin—is depicted in many sources. In this context, we here again see that, as Seydi Ali Reis implies in his couplet, someone who is satisfied with a loaf of bread is someone who is far greater than the greatest sultan himself. These words move Humayun so greatly that he confesses to Seydi Ali Reis that, in the name of God, these words are more beautiful than the enticing couplets that he had previously recited:

For God's sake, this is better.

V'a'llâhü'l-'azîm, in bihter est. (ibid.)

THE INDO-MUSLIMS MENTIONED BY SEYDİ ALİ REİS

Starting from the very beginning of his journey to Egypt, we see Seydi Ali Reis and his men also visiting the tombs of the most important sheikhs and mystics of the nearby regions. On his way from Istanbul to Aleppo, he first visits the tombs of the dervishes and Sufis of the city of Konya, such as Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi, Sadraddin al-Qunawi (Konyevi), and Shams Tabrizi; and later, they move to eastern Anatolia, to the city of Kayseri, where they visit the tombs of Sheikh Burhanuddin Muhakik and Davud-ı Kayseri (72). In Aleppo, they further pay a visit to the holy shrines of prophets such as David and Zechariah, as well as those of certain of the prophet Muhammad's companions, such as Said Ensari (73). The shrines and tombs that Seydi Ali Reis visits are generally related to great figures of Islamic theology and mysticism, such as the shrines of Mansur al-Hallaj, Imam Ghazali, and Shahabaddin Suhrawardi in Baghdad, the prophets Adam and Noah and Imam Ali in Najaf, and Imam Husayn in Karbala (75–76). Especially in Sindh, not only does he visit already deceased mystics and sheikhs such as Sheikh Cemali and Sheikh Celali, but he also pays a visit (*ziyâret*) to his contemporaries for benediction (*du'a*), such as Sheikh Ibrâhîm and, earlier in their journey, Sheikh Mirin (117). Before leaving Delhi, Seydi Ali Reis does not forget to visit the shrines of famous Islamic theologians and poets, such as Sheikh Qutbuddin Pir Delhi, Sheikh Nizam Wali, Sheikh Ferid Shukrenc, Mir Husayn Dahlawi, and, lastly, the great Indo-Muslim master of poetry Amir Khusraw (*ibid.*), whose poetic corpus inspired

the very short poem that tested Humayun's generosity concerning those who are easily satisfied with a loaf of bread (*ibid.*).

SEYFİ ÇELEBİ'S INDIA

Seyfi Çelebi's work concentrates more on the political history or, more precisely, the political lineages of India; therefore, in a way similar to the later chapters of Seydi Ali Reis on the monarchies within Afghanistan and Turan, Seyfi Çelebi is not interested in the cultural, religious, or social aspects of the Indian subcontinent. At the very beginning of the first chapter on India, Seyfi Çelebi gives a brief account of the Indian landscape: he particularly mentions that the subcontinent is not mountainous (*tağl az*), and its landscape is mostly flat (*düz yer*), forested (*ormanlı*) and devoid of deserts (*berriyesi az*) (Seyfi Çelebi 101). Similarly, its lands are so fertile that one can harvest crops not once, but twice a year. In terms of political lineage, Seyfi Çelebi mentions Afghan, and later, certain Uzbek lines, and, when talking about the sultans of the Mughal Empire, he mentions how people call the first three emperors of the Mughals—that is, Babur, Humayun, and Jalaluddin Akhbar—the descendants of the Chagatai Khanate in the lineage of Genghis Khan (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, in the second part on the Indian subcontinent, Seyfi Çelebi briefly makes some comparisons with the Turkish language; for instance, he conveys how the word *râca* in Hindi is equivalent to the concept of *beg*. Likewise, in terms of different mines and minerals, Seyfi Çelebi mentions rubies (*yâkūt*) and gold (*altun*) in the state of Pegu (119). When giving information on the Aceh Sultanate of Sumatra—which was not geographically connected to the Indian subcontinent, but had cultural parallels—Seyfi Çelebi gives a lengthy account of different kinds of elephants. Elephants are one of the most significant pillars of the military forces in those lands, and they are particularly beneficial because they place soldiers up on the back of the animal for fighting. Seydi Ali Reis also talks about the little wooden howdahs or carriages that they place on these animals, while Seyfi Çelebi specifically praises how this same technique is very useful and successful. These gargantuan animals, according to Seyfi Çelebi, live at least three or four hundred years, and all Indian dignitaries own their own elephant, an animal that is very common among respected Indian *begs* and *pashas* (121).

As I have already mentioned earlier in a previous section, Seydi Ali Reis does not talk much about the elephants among his depictions of the Indian *ajâ'ib wa-gharâ'ib*, with the exception of a few cases in which he highlights a number of martial occurrences. On the other hand, however, Seyfi Çelebi does not claim that he has been to India personally. Most of his depictions of the subcontinent's nature, as well as its

political genealogy, are probably taken from various Western and Eastern sources. Most of his information about Indian political lineage is quite accurate, though we cannot say the same about his information, for example, on the lifespan of elephants. Since Seyfi Çelebi does not cite the sources that he has made use of, we cannot fully determine whether he simply made up this piece of information or if he took it from another book on marvelous Indian creatures.

CONCLUSION

With Cemil Meriç's radical statement on the Ottoman perception of the Indian subcontinent in mind, I believe we would do Seydi Ali Reis a great injustice if we label his observations as merely insufficient or superficial. Even though Seydi Ali Reis' depiction of India is more about the Indo-Muslim tradition than the local religious and cultural practices, Seydi Ali Reis' text, not only as a historical account but also as a work of literature, offers us something totally different from that of Cemil Meriç's cerebral approach: Seydi Ali Reis' text is specifically more about a pure cultural engagement, about living the experience without having the contention of understanding a particular culture in a cerebral manner throughout.

Except for the few instances of observations on local practices, such as the immolation of Hindu widows or the burning of the dead, Seydi Ali Reis' remarks are more limited to the interesting flora and fauna of the subcontinent, along with expositions on complex hunting and fighting techniques. Similarly, we should not regard Seydi Ali Reis' observations as being completely accurate, because, for him, India was just the setting where his adventure happened to take place; therefore, apart from the teleological intention of the book—that is, his ultimate goal of arriving safely back in Istanbul—Seydi Ali Reis only offers us a modicum of sincere firsthand observations about the India that he experienced during his long journey, which nevertheless render his remarks worthy of reading and further exploration.

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