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The Long Road: An Analysis of the 1557 Book of Mirrors by Seydi Ali Reis

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Abstract

In 1552, Piri Reis was relieved from the Admiralty of the Ottoman Imperial Navy. Seydi Ali Reis was appointed to replace him and his assignment was to return fifteen galleys from Basra to Egypt. This should have been a relatively short journey. Seydi failed miserably, however. He lost most of the ships in battle with the Portuguese and bad weather, which he documents in his travelogue *The Mirror of Countries*. With nowhere left to turn, he sold the remaining ships in Surat on the west coast of India. To make matters worse, he took the long road home to Istanbul: a circuitous route which stretched his journey for two years. This path went as far north as Samarqand in modern Uzbekistan. The question which arises is why did Seydi take so long to return home?

Keywords

Ottoman history, Seydi Ali Reis, historic journey, historical journey, mapping, Indian-Ottoman relations, Ottoman navy

Disciplines

History | Islamic World and Near East History

Comments

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The Long Road

An Analysis of the 1557 *Book of Mirrors*
by Seydi Ali Reis

Julian Weiss
Ottoman History 330
6/27/2012

In 1552, Piri Reis was relieved from the Admiralty of the Ottoman Imperial Navy.¹ Seydi Ali Reis was appointed to replace him and his assignment was to return fifteen galleys from Basra to Egypt. This should have been a relatively short journey. Seydi failed miserably, however. He lost most of the ships in battle with the Portuguese and bad weather, which he documents in his travelogue *The Mirror of Countries*.² With nowhere left to turn, he sold the remaining ships in Surat on the west coast of India. To make matters worse, he took the long road home to Istanbul: a circuitous route which stretched his journey for two years. This path went as far north as Samarqand in modern Uzbekistan.³

The question which arises is why did Seydi take so long to return home? He was stranded in a foreign land nearby a fleet of enemies. It would have been rational for him to have gone back to Istanbul as promptly as was possible. Time and again the Admiral tries to make it seem that his “only aim and object was to reach home as soon as possible,” yet he spent much of his time writing poetry, visiting shrines, and communing with the Muslim Indian elite.⁴ With his book as the sole source, it would be a gamble to try and understand his true motives. Using mapmaking software in conjunction Seydi’s writings, a more developed study of his travels becomes possible than ever before. In addition to a customary examination of *The Mirror of Countries*, new maps provide concrete evidence of the Admiral’s true intentions.

Historiography

The Mirror of Countries, in Turkish *Mir'ât ül Memâlik*, was first finished in manuscript form in 1557 in Turkish. For the English historian, hence, it was useless until almost three and a

¹ Piri Reis, d. 1553, was a cartographer, admiral, writer, explorer, among a litany of distinctions. He is perhaps most well-known for creating the earliest depiction of America on his 1513 world map. Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), p. 183.

² Seydi Ali Reis, *Mirror of Countries*, (New York: Parke, Austin, and Lipscomb, 1917), p. 339, 342, 344.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 345, 372. Refer to maps 2 and 3 on pages 11 and 12.

⁴ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

half centuries later when, in 1899, Hungarian traveler and skilled linguist Ármin Vámbéry translated the book into English.⁵ Before 1899, there is no mention of the work in any publication in English. Although the work was available then, there is no evidence of it being used in historical analysis for almost a century. The study of the Ottoman Age of Exploration was outshone by that of the Europeans, and Western historians thus had little interest in the adventures of a 16th century Ottoman Admiral.

Included in Vámbéry's translation of *Mir'ât ül Memâlik* is an introduction and brief analysis of the work, the first on the book in English. Writing on Seydi's nationalism and militarism, Vámbéry glorifies the Admiral. Vámbéry's grandiose descriptions were intended to illustrate the Empire for which Seydi served. Vámbéry saw Seydi as a stranger in a strange land who wanted to return home as soon as possible, remarking that, "Wherever he goes and whatever he sees, Rum (Turkey) always remains in his eyes the most beautiful, the richest, and the most cultured land of the whole world."⁶ Additionally, he remarks that the Ottoman Empire under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, ruler during Seydi's travels, was at the "eminent height of culture."⁷ Vámbéry's analyses of Seydi Ali Reis's personality and motives are superficial at best. The way in which Vámbéry describes the Ottoman Empire indicates that he translated this account primarily for the propagation of orientalism and its relation to the Empire. The author spends more time describing Seydi's interactions with Muslims, how the people he met felt about the Sultan, and the Sultan's policies in India and Iran than examining the Admiral's actual intentions.

⁵ Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924*, (Leiden: Korinklijke Brill, 1997), footnote on p. 5.

⁶ Ármin Vámbéry, introduction to *The Mirror of Countries in Historical Books of the World*, (Primary Sources, Historical Collections, 2011), p. iii. A German translation was available in 1815, but Vámbéry had a newer Turkish publication and claims his work is superior, p. i.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

After Vámbéry's translation was released, the next major wave of Western interest in Ottoman history began. This wave focused on the Empire's decline and demise. In 1917, during the World War that finally dismantled the Empire, another publication of Vámbéry's translation was introduced. The editor, an American English professor, Charles F. Horne, saw the book as an example of Turkish Islamism. References to shrines and ritual fill almost every page of Seydi's book. Horne did not see Turkish writing as particularly worthy of study, so he begins the introduction to Turkish literature with the remark, "Of Turkish literature we need speak but briefly."⁸ He even calls the Ottoman Empire "semi-barbaric."⁹ In keeping with the American wartime spirit, Horne underemphasizes the Ottoman Empire in the global narrative.

Horne holds Seydi's narrative, however, in high esteem, and considers this work to be "the most valuable piece of early Turkish literature."¹⁰ He does not go into further detail, which emphasizes his inattention to Turkish works. What he does include in the compilation is the introduction that Vámbéry had written eighteen years prior, and Horne agrees with him that Seydi was patriotic and loyal to his Emperor. It would be another eight decades before the *Mir'ât ül Memâlik* reappeared in the English language.

The 1991 Gulf War and 1993 World Trade Center bombings, among other events, brought Islam to the forefront of Western study yet again. The need to understand Islamic diplomacy and its history were reinvigorated. In 1997, Azmi Özcan, a Turkish historian, published a book on Ottoman relations with India and Britain in English. While explaining their relations in the early modern era, Özcan mentions the *Mirror of Countries* as a source for the politics of the late 16th century between Eastern nations. Özcan also identifies the importance of

⁸ Charles F. Horne, introduction to *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, (New York: Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917), Vol. 6, p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Horne, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the travelogue's description of the conditions of Muslims living in India and other regions far away from the Arabian and Anatolian homelands. Seydi's narrative in Özcan's book becomes a tool for explaining Ottoman international affairs in the pre-modern period. In a footnote, he observes that it has been translated into many languages, but he still cites both a Turkish volume at Topkapı Sarayı and the 1899 English publication.¹¹ In Özcan's examination, Vámbéry's analysis still prevails. The only difference in their views of Seydi's work is Özcan's additional emphasis on the ways in which the narrative explains Ottoman interaction with India in the 16th century.

The work is referenced next in 2003, when then Harvard graduate student Giancarlo Casale mentions it at the end of an essay on Ottoman exploration in the Indian Ocean. This article highlights the Admiral's many valiant qualities, and notes that, "he determined to return to Istanbul by traveling overland, and... he finally reached his destination more than three years later, having traversed most of North India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Iran in the process."¹² Casale subtly proposes here that a sea route may have been available to Seydi, and also notes that his journey was an incredibly long one. This is the first time that a historian paid special attention to the Admiral's route. Additionally, Casale cast Seydi not in the light of a nationalist, but an intelligent leader who made the best use of his resources. This interpretation represents a break from the previous pattern of focusing on Seydi's patriotic character. This suggests that the Admiral returned home for the reward which awaited him, not because it was the place he loved best.

¹¹ Özcan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹² Giancarlo Casale, "Original Ottoman Travel Narratives from the Indian Ocean" in "The Ottoman 'Discovery' of the Indian Ocean in the Sixteenth Century: The Age of Exploration from an Islamic Perspective," (American Historical Association, 2003). Casale cites the 1899 translation by Ármin Vámbéry, indicating that it is still the primary publication in use.

To date, the most insightful examination of *The Mirror of Countries* was done in 2005 by Suraiya Faroqhi in her book *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*. In a chapter about information available to the Sultan from foreign lands, Faroqhi examines Seydi as a representative of the state. She identifies, like those before her, that he assumed this role after his ships were lost. Faroqhi's account differs from others in its analysis of Seydi's descriptions of hardship. She hypothesizes that these were part of a scheme to "save his own neck," because the Admiral who preceded Seydi in a similar predicament had been hanged.¹³ While describing Seydi's travels, Faroqhi points out that he wrote about a few of the oddities which he encountered in India, but that these did interest him strongly.¹⁴ Faroqhi claims that the Admiral never had a serious affection for the foreign lands and the only thing he wanted to do was return home. In short, according to Faroqhi, Seydi had failed his duties as Admiral, so he wanted to appear worthy to the Sultan as a statesman instead. He described his receptions in foreign courts as evidence of the Sultan's power abroad even though he primarily wished to escape. According to Faroqhi, this is why Seydi flaunts his loyalty to Sultan Suleiman by turning down the offers of governorates made to him by the Safavid Sultan and the Mughal Emperor.

Faroqhi takes a special interest in his route. She notes that he was "held up on the Indian subcontinent for a considerable length of time," and argues that Seydi overemphasized the efforts of the Indian Emperor Humayun in keeping him there. A section of *The Mirror of Countries* relates that, after Humayun died, Seydi played a key role in the safe accession of the Emperor's successor.¹⁵ Faroqhi claims that Seydi inflated his own influence in this passage in order to

¹³ Faroqhi, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁴ In talking about how Humayun went hunting, Seydi notes that the Emperor swore on an oath that he knows of a man who died from the tongue-flaying of an Ox. Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

¹⁵ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

appear craftier to Suleiman and explain why it took him so long to come home.¹⁶ From Faroqhi's analysis of the journey, we can read the Admiral's book as a tool to save himself and gain power.¹⁷

Five years later, Casale returned to *The Mirror of Countries* in his first book, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, published in 2010. It is clear that he read Faroqhi's book and cites it in his bibliography. In his work, he focuses on the information which Seydi presented in his travelogue as a resource for the Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. Casale does not go into as much detail as Faroqhi, nor does Casale understand the Admiral's true intentions, but he does reiterate the importance of Seydi's position as a diplomat and the many capitulations to Suleiman which he received from various rulers.¹⁸

Thus we can say that not much attention was paid to *The Mirror of Countries* before the Muslim World rose again to importance at the end of the 20th century. As it became clear that the book was uniquely useful for understanding the history of early Ottoman diplomacy, historians began to utilize it. The study of the work evolved into a study of Seydi's motives and role as a diplomat, culminating in Suraiya Faroqhi's *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*. Thus far, there have been no works solely examining Seydi's work in English, and the study of Ottoman exploration during the Age of Discovery remains largely underemphasized in the global narrative. Historians such as Giancarlo Casale and Suraiya Faroqhi have begun to assert the significance of his travels, but there is still much to be researched and discovered about Seydi's journey.

¹⁶ Faroqhi, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183-185. It should also be noted that Faroqhi refers to Seydi Ali Reis as "Seyyidü 'Ali Re'îs," and this is due to her use of the Turkish text of his travels. There is also a French version of the travels published in 1999 mentioned in her bibliography, another sign of increased interest in Ottoman polity. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁸ Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 120-122, 258.

Why the long way?

After the Admiral failed his mission and became stranded at Surat, he began to travel to Ahmedabad to decide what to do next. Seydi writes that it took him fifty days to make the trip from Surat north to Ahmedabad. Along the way, he stopped off at Burudj, Belodra, Champanir, and Mahmudabad.¹⁹ According to Google Maps, the 150 mile journey should have taken two and a half days of continuous walking. Vámbéry notes that Burudj is actually called Broatsh and is northwest of Surat on the right side of the Nerbudda River.²⁰ The Nerbudda is now known as the Narmada, and no part of it flows to the northwest of Surat, only to the north.²¹ Searching for both Burudj and Broatsh yielded no results. Whatever place Seydi visited, all we know for sure is that it was to the north of Surat in the direction of Ahmedabad.

From Burudj, the journey stops its logical progression. The Admiral traveled from Burudj to Belodra. Interestingly, the only two places in the area with any similarity in name to Belodra are Balotra, which Vámbéry points to, and Bilodra, which are both north of Ahmedabad.²² Ahmedabad is between Surat, to the south, and Bilodra or Balotra to the north. So, if the Admiral went from Surat to Ahmedabad this way, he actually had to go through Ahmedabad to continue his journey toward Ahmedabad.²³ Then, the Admiral took a side trip to

¹⁹ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 349. The current names of these places are, for Belodra, Bilotra or Balotra, for Champanir, Champaner, and for Mahmudabad, Mahemdavad. The places named are taken directly from Vámbéry's translation unless otherwise marked. There is a need for a revised translation of *The Book of Mirrors* or an edition with proper notes. When it comes to digging for the places which Seydi Ali Reis visited, Vámbéry provides very little assistance. Some places, such as Burudj, simply do not exist on modern maps. Some, such as Balotra, or Bilodra, make it impossible to determine which city Seydi is referencing. The limited quality of Vámbéry's cartographic sources is made clear when he cannot identify what place Seydi meant by Mahmudabad. A town lying on the path from Champaner to Ahmedabad, Mahemdavad, is a dozen miles to the southeast of the destination. Since Seydi mentions his stop there just before he marks of the completion of this trip, it is almost undoubtedly this place. Refer to Map 2 on page 11.

²⁰ Vámbéry, footnote in *The Book of Mirrors*, p. 348. Seydi was offered the command of the province of Burudj later on, but the area remains elusive. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

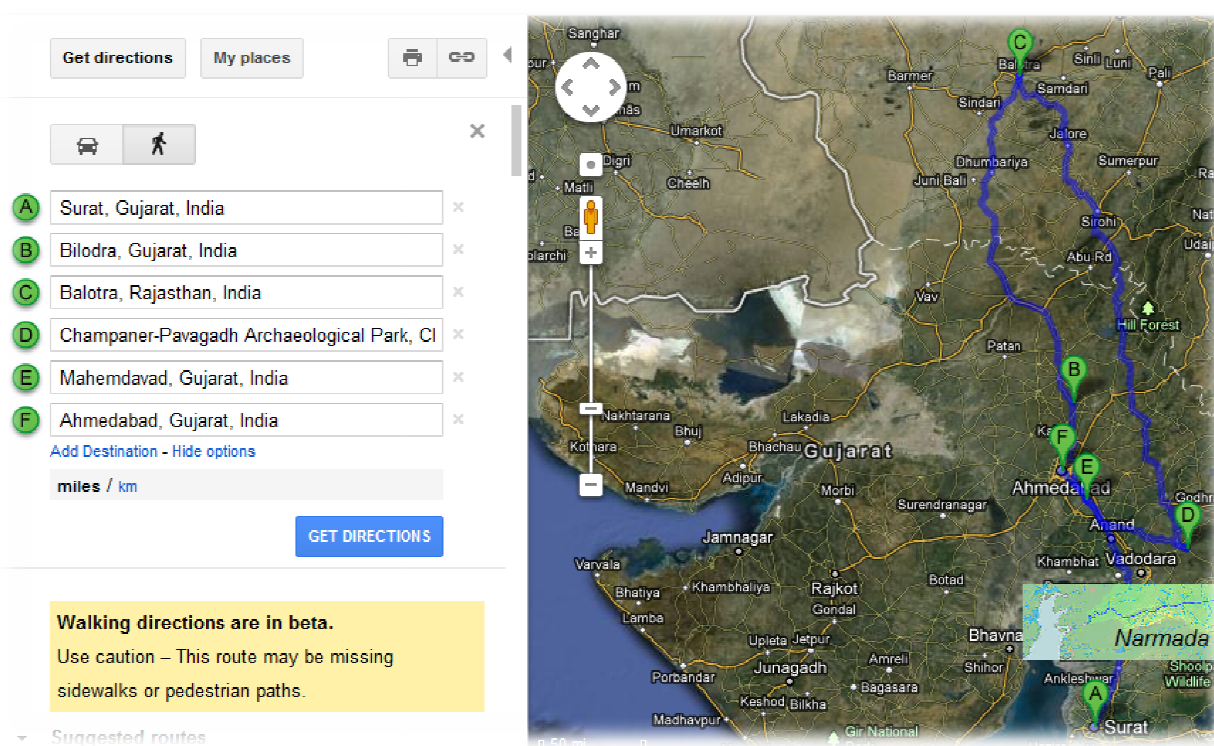
²¹ Refer to Map 1.

²² Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

²³ Refer to Map 1. Point F (Ahmedabad) is between A (Surat) and B/C (Belodra).

Champanir, today Champaner, the historical site of a fortress. This lies to the southeast of Ahmedabad by over fifty miles, meaning Seydi Ali Reis crossed the longitude of Ahmedabad twice on his journey to Ahmedabad. What should have been a 150 mile excursion becomes a 783 mile journey because Seydi visits different places along the way. The time this should have taken, on foot with no breaks, is over ten days, and if the Admiral traveled for five hours out of each day at walking pace he would have completed it in his claimed fifty days.

Map 1 – Seydi's Journey from Surat to Ahmedabad²⁴



1 – Note the distance from Ahmedabad to Balotra, more than doubling the distance of the trip alone.

Seydi remarks about the “many vicissitudes,” or changes and difficulties of his journey.²⁵

The most significant aspect of this route is his passage through Ahmedabad on the path to either

²⁴ The map was created using Google Maps. The process was rather simple. I would find the names which Seydi gave, and hopefully Vámbéry commented on as they were hard to find, and if I could find them I put them in the map and the directions were given. The path is by no means exact, but it is close enough for reference. The Narmada River is highlighted with part of a graphic from Wikipedia. The blue body is the Arabian Sea.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

Balotra or Bilodra. This strange occurrence could be explained by a mistranslation from Vámbéry, but even the side trip to Champaner could in no case have accounted for the fifty days of travel lacking breaks unless the Admiral took a leisurely pace. In either case, as long as it is correct that it took him fifty days to travel 150 or 783 miles, his primary intentions could not have been to immediately return to Istanbul to report his losses to Suleiman.

It is after leaving Ahmedabad that Seydi declares his intention to travel overland to Turkey. The previously mentioned encounter with a Portuguese envoy makes it clear that all ports were blocked, and he had no other engagements prior to his short stay in Ahmedabad. Therefore, he must have already been on the path home before he wrote down his intentions to do so.²⁶ Seydi marks this as the beginning of his journey home, and the rest of the path should have been hastily covered.

But the Admiral did not make haste. To the contrary, he took the long way home. There were two potential paths which Seydi could have taken. The most direct and shortest path would have taken him through the Iranian desert along the same path that Alexander the Great led his armies in the 4th century BC.²⁷ This path would have been perilous because of the desert climate and sparse population, making provisions and security a worry. The shorter path, however, would have cut more than a third of the length off his journey.

Instead, the path he decided to take is much more familiar. It goes directly along the Silk Road. He would have made the decision to travel west through the Iranian desert or North to Samarqand at Karachi. A significant military conflict persuaded him to take the boat which he received during a funeral procession and go up the Indus River along the safer route.²⁸ Fate plays

²⁶ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 349-351.

²⁷ Refer to map 3.

²⁸ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 354. The body of Shah Husein, father of Sultan Mahmud, was in a procession of 50 boats on the way to Tata. Seydi and his men had yet to leave port when some of the soldiers in town, without

a major part in the Admiral's narrative. The fastest way home is perpetually elusive. The way in which Seydi takes a boat in Karachi and goes North up the Indus without even considering another route indicates a lack of knowledge about the short cut. This is highly unlikely, however, because the Admiral was a master of cartography and navigation. He spent time collecting maps and even wrote a book on navigation called *The Ocean* which displays an interest in the subject that is mirrored in his rank and the account he writes.²⁹ Whether or not he made the conscious decision to take the long path, the rest of his actions indicate a lackadaisical attitude concerning the time it took to return home.

The Admiral was restricted in Delhi, India for a substantial length of time. He blames the delay on the Padishah of India for detaining him as an emissary of the Ottoman Empire and the various wars in the area which blocked most paths out of the country.³⁰ Seydi wrote that he begged the Padishah for the right to return home, but Humayun stood firm in his desire to keep the Ottoman official in his territory. Instead of letting Seydi leave, Humayun offered him 10,000,000 rupees, a governorate, and an envoy to go in his place. Seydi persistently repeated his desire until Humayun consented, but was told that because the roads were too muddy in the rainy season he would have to stay another three months. It seemed as if all the forces of the world were colluding to prevent Seydi's returning home when he writes, "I had no alternative, but to submit to my fate."³¹

proper leadership during the change of rulers, began rioting and plundering the ships in port. Seydi relinquished his weapons but was allowed to travel up the Indus.

²⁹ Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, p. 186-187. Thomas D. Goodrich, Introduction to *The Ottoman Turks and the New World*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1990), p. 11.

³⁰ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

Map 2 – The Full Travels of Seydi Ali Reis After Losing His Ships³²

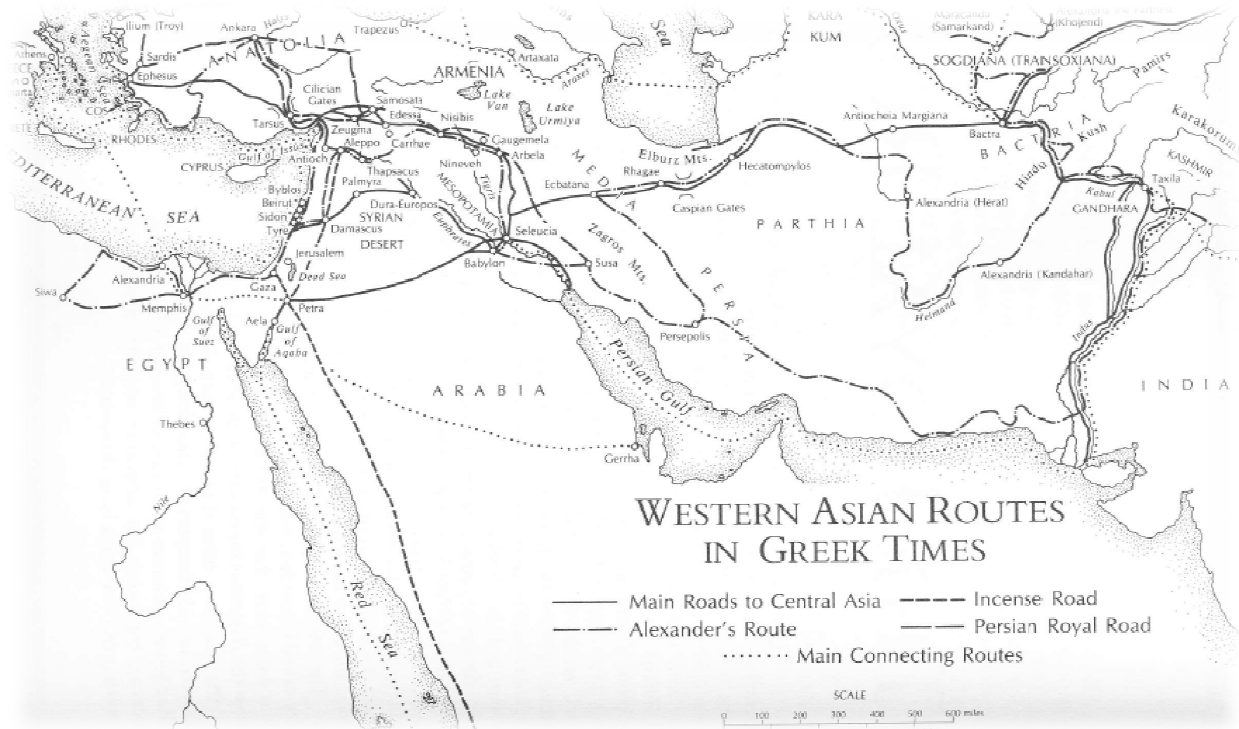
2 – A full study of his path would require dozens more pages and become rather repetitive, but here is the path of Seydi Ali Reis accurate to within two dozen miles (without certainty only between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) with sixty places which he mentions marked (refer to glossary for modern place names). The total distance of this journey is approximately 8200 miles.



Road (Western Asian Routes in Greek Times)³³

³² This map was made by the same process as the first, only it was a much larger endeavor. Nagarparkar could not be part of the directions, so I had to split the map between Ahmedabad and Karachi. Then, the program began to lag at destination Q (covered by P), so I split it again at Rostaq, Afghanistan. Since the program limits the user to 25 destinations, I had to make another split at Y, Nusaybin, Turkey. I put the four maps together in Microsoft Paint.

³³ Irene M. Franck, *The Silk Road: a History*, (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), p. 60.



3 – The quickest way home would have been by Alexander's Route along the Persian Gulf. If Seydi had taken this path, he would have cut thousands of miles off of his journey. Notice how the path in Map 2 aligns near perfectly with the Main Roads to Central Asia. Additionally, Samarqand is not on the primary path of the Silk Road. This indicates that there could have been yet another faster path for Seydi to take home.

There is a two month gap of time that Seydi does not account for. He notes that for two months during the rainy season he studied math and did other tasks for Humayun. He arrived in Lahore in the month of "Shawwal" and made his way out of the Empire in "Rebiul Evvel", five months later.³⁴ This means he had at least two months to leave had he so desired. Instead, he remained in the presence of the Indian Emperor.

One of the ways in which Seydi passed his time was by perfecting the craft of statesmanship. When the Padishah of India gained new territories, the Admiral devised a chronogram for him. The gift was fine enough to receive the imperial seal, so it must have taken

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 357-358, 367. The Arabic calendar consists of 12 months like the Julian calendar. Although it is lunar, a month is still about 30 days. Shawwal corresponds to February and Rebiul Evvel to July.

Seydi considerable time to prepare and finish it exquisitely.³⁵ Seydi held a conversation with the Emperor in which they discussed the greatness of their respective Empires, and of course the Admiral related that the Ottomans were proven superior.³⁶

The most significant example of Seydi's political aptitude is his handling of the death of Humayun. This event occurs, with an impeccable timing that could only be expected of a poorly written drama, immediately after the Admiral was given leave and letters of safe conduct by Humayun. As the last Friday prayers sounded before his departure, Humayun heard the muezzin while climbing a flight of stairs. As was common practice, he knelt where he was on the steep steps. He slipped, hitting his head on the way down, and died of his injuries three days later. The elite bickered about what to do. They feared political instability before the successor could rise to power. Seydi saved the day by suggesting they hide Humayun's death from the public until the next Emperor could be sworn in. This tale was completed with a parade of Janissaries who marched past a Humayun lookalike hiding behind a veil. This story, credible according to Vámbéry, has Seydi presenting himself as a wise official and a symbol of Ottoman power abroad.³⁷ Not just anyone decides how the succession of a foreign Empire should occur, and Suleiman would have been impressed by both his sway amongst these men of power and his reference to Ottoman succession history.³⁸ Seydi must have known that he was to lose his Admiralty upon his return home after losing a fleet. By writing a narrative which explores his abilities as a diplomat, he was effectively handing in a job application.

³⁵ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 358. Chronograms are a type of celebratory date marker.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

³⁷ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 363-365.

³⁸ After Ottoman Sultan Murad II's death (1451) a sealed envelope with the news was sent to his son and successor, Mehmed II. In this way, he was one of the first to know about his father's death. This was a common practice at the time. Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, New Jersey), p. 64-65.

In addition to his diplomacy, Seydi's knowledge and practice of poetry provided him significant popularity amongst the Indians in Delhi and Lahore. After his chronogram was given the Imperial mark, he composed a ghazel in celebration.³⁹ The Padishah hailed the work and compared Seydi to a legendary Turkish poet. The Admiral, being a proper gentleman, "modestly declined the epithet."⁴⁰ It would be interesting to know whether Vámbéry's translation overinflated the Admiral's abilities, but if the translation is true to its form than Seydi must have thought very highly of himself and his writing.⁴¹

Poetry continued to be a significant part of Seydi's residence in India after he had gained popularity in Delhi. He composed two ghazels for the Imperial Archer, and two more for a courtier. The way Seydi was granted leave before the Emperor's death was that he wrote two ghazels for an Imperial official to gain sway.⁴² He remarks, "Poetical discussions were the order of the day."⁴³ On an excursion with the Emperor to the tomb of a great poet, Seydi wished to test his prose against that of the deceased. Humayun excitedly forces the verse out of him:

*Truly great is only he who can be content with his daily bread.
For happier is he than all the kings of the earth.*⁴⁴

After describing the delight of the Emperor, Seydi softens his obvious display of talent by saying that he only described such things to demonstrate Humayun's love of poetry.

After Humayun initially told Seydi that he could not leave, the goal of returning home, if ever foremost in his mind, was thrown to the wind. Seydi saw an opportunity to gain status with ease due to the omnipresence of Suleiman's influence. The information that the Admiral

³⁹ This is a form of Arabian poetry.

⁴⁰ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

⁴¹ Seydi consistently exaggerates in *The Book of Mirrors*. After one of his encounters with the Portuguese Navy, he claims that "never before within the annals of history has such a battle ever been fought." Additionally, the Admiral mentions weather which prevented him from distinguishing night from day. *Ibid.*, p. 338, 341.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 360-361.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

presents alludes that this was his only option. Although the author points out time and again that his only goal was to return home, this claim is hard to believe when he writes of extensive poetical conversations and political discussion. Seydi enjoyed his time in India. In those sections which describe his poetry, Seydi's account takes on a lighter tone. Poetry may have thrilled Humayun, but it also was dear to the Admiral.

Near the border of Turkmenistan and Iran, a woman came running to the Admiral to tell him of a dream she had concerning him. This woman was the daughter of Makhdum Aazam, a Sheikh who had just recently died in Vezir. She said that in this dream, her father and another holy sage had journeyed to meet her in order to give their protection over the traveling Admiral.⁴⁵ Not too long before this, Seydi was riding when he heard of the death of a great holy man. Seydi had a special relationship with this man, for it was he who had instructed the Admiral in Sufism. It became Seydi's foremost duty to travel to this man's grave and recite the entire Qur'an so that his soul would enter paradise. The grave belonged to the same Makhdum Aazam who strolled through his daughter's dream, and this highly spiritual experience was the most poetic of Seydi's many visits to tombs and shrines along his travels.⁴⁶

In fact, the Admiral discovered his mentor's death while he was visiting other religious sites:

*I visited the graves of Sheikh Nedjmeddin Kubera, Sheikh Ali Rametin, Sheikh Khalweti Yan, Imam Mohammed Bari'i, Sahib Kuduri, Djar Ullah Ulama, Molla Husein Kharezmi (the expounder of the Koran), Seid Ata, and Hekim Ata. When it was brought to my knowledge that the holy Sheikh Abdullatif had died in the city of Vezir, I could not rest...*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 381-382.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 378. Sheikh Abdullatif must be another name for Sheikh Makhdum Aazam, since Seydi only writes of reading the Qur'an over his grave. This is the only passage where Seydi calls him Abdullatif.

The ritual practices of Muslims in India were not limited to prayers, holidays, and other common rites. Besides the hajj, pilgrimage to the tombs and shrines of holy men was another sign of devotion.⁴⁸ In the travelogue the Admiral notes the names of dozens of shrines. There is no province in which he fails to seek out a shrine at which he could pay homage, and Suleiman must have been impressed by his religious observance.

These rituals indicate that the Admiral was a superstitious man. Dreams are very important to him. Before he lost his ships, he had a premonition of his defeat at the hands of the Portuguese. Throughout the travelogue he writes down several visions and forewarnings.⁴⁹ He prayed to God often for safety on his journey, and his devotion to Islam is unquestioned. Visiting the shrines was a kind of divine reassurance for him. Being such a unique account, it is hard to determine whether this would be a common practice for an Ottoman abroad. What these visits display even without such knowledge is the Admiral shelving his ambition to return home in exchange for the fulfillment of his religious and exploratory inclinations.

Conclusion

The Mirror of Countries is one of the most unique travel accounts to ever come down from the Ottoman Empire. The first sections describe adventures on par with the fantasies of Jules Verne, but it had the plot of a tragedy. If Seydi's story of failure was all that he brought home to the Ottoman Emperor Suleiman, he would have not been long on this Earth. Piri Reis, Seydi's predecessor, was executed for not following orders. In order to prevent a similar fate, Seydi wrote an account which paints him as a hero in spite of his glaring failures. It provides a vast wealth of mostly untapped information, from the politics of 16th century India to the thoughts of a distinguished Ottoman official. It also has examples of early Ottoman poetry,

⁴⁸ Marc Gaboriau, Introduction to *Muslims Shrines in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. ixix.

⁴⁹ Seydi Ali Reis, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

statesmanship, and there is much it tells us about religious practices and superstition. Following the path of the Admiral from an Indian Port to the Ottoman capital provides details about cities, shrines, and the life of a dignitary in the Mughal Emperor Humayun's court. A map of Seydi's travels and the Silk Road show that he spent more time on the road than he had to. His poetry, status, and pilgrimages added months, if not more, to the length of his journey. He was playing a political game with his route. Seydi spent enough time with Humayun and other dignitaries to establish his name as a diplomat and glorify Suleiman. He minimized his initial failure in *The Book of Mirrors* to ensure the endurance of his life and career upon his return to Istanbul.

GLOSSARY

LIST OF PLACE NAMES AS FOUND ON MAP 2

There are four parts of this list, and hence the alphabetical markers have three breaks on Map 2. The first break is at Karachi, the second at the Tajikistan/Afghanistan border, and the third clearly noted in Eastern Turkey. This list is directly copied, in the same font and styling, from Google Maps. These are not all of the places which Seydi Ali Reis mentions – far from it – but the ones which I could find using Google Maps and a handful of maps from various sources.

A	Surat, Gujarat, India	A	Kulob, Khatlon, Tajikistan	A	Malatya, Turkey
B	Balotra, Rajasthan, India	B	Hisor, Districts of Republican Subordination, T	B	Sivas, Turkey
C	Champaner, Pavagadh, India (Champaner-Pav	C	Samarkand, Samarkand Province, Uzbekistan	C	Kırşehir, Turkey
D	Mahemdavad, Gujarat, India	D	Karmana District, Navoiy Province, Uzbekistan	D	Ankara, Turkey
E	Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India	E	Gijduvan, Bukhara Province, Uzbekistan	E	Beypazarı, Turkey
F	Patna, Gujarat, India	F	Bukhara, Bukhara Province, Uzbekistan	F	Bolu, Turkey
G	Radhanpur, Gujarat, India	G	Farab, Lebap, Turkmenistan	G	Murduzu, Türkiye
A	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	H	Khiva, Khorezm Province, Uzbekistan	H	Taraklı, Turkey
B	Nasirābād, Sindh, Pakistan	I	Ashgabat, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan	I	Iznik, Turkey
C	Multan, Punjab, Pakistan	J	Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi, Iran	J	Istanbul, Turkey
D	Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan	K	Nishapur, Khorasan Razavi, Iran		
E	Delhi, India	L	Bastām, Semnan, Iran		
F	Karnal, India	M	Dāmghān, Semnan, Iran		
G	Thanesar, Kurukshetra, Haryana, India	N	Semnan, Iran		
H	Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan	P	Qazvin, Iran		
I	Khushāb, Punjab, Pakistan	Q	Abhar, Zanjan, Iran		
J	Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan	R	Hamadān, Hamadan, Iran		
K	Khaiber Pass, Pakistan	S	Asadabad, Hamadan, Iran		
L	Laghman, Afghanistan	T	Bistoon, Kermanshah, Iran		
M	Kabul, Afghanistan	U	Qasr Shirin, Kermanshah, Iran		
N	Charikar, Parvan, Afghanistan	V	Baghdad, Baghdād, Iraq		
O	Andarab, Baghlan, Afghanistan	W	Tekrit, Salah ad-Din, Iraq		
P	Badakhshan, Afghanistan	X	Mosul, Ninawa, Iraq		
Q	Rostaq, Afghanistan	Y	Nusaybin, Turkey		

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I affirm that I will uphold the highest principles of honesty and integrity in all my endeavors at Gettysburg College and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect within and beyond the classroom

X

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