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## PIRI REIS IN VENETIAN DOCUMENTS\*

ABSTRACT: *Piri reis was a famous Ottoman seaman and geographer. In 1513 he had made a map of the world that is the most ancient extant one with the coasts of North America. In 1521 he completed the first copy of a pilot-book, the Kitab-ı Bahriye, and in 1528 he made another world map. On the base of Venetian documents this paper give us other information about Piri reis's life that is still wrapped in mystery: his involvement in the Ottoman fleet activity, his acts as a privateer, his relation with Venetian authorities, his relatives and, above all, the exact date of his death that happened in Cairo in 1553 (and not 1554 as many scholars have thought till now).*

KEYWORDS: *Piri Reis, Ottoman navy, Privateers, Venice, Cartography.*

### PIRI REIS NEI DOCUMENTI VENEZIANI

SOMMARIO: *Piri reis fu un famoso marinaio e geografo ottomano. Nel 1513 delineò una mappa del mondo che è oggi la più antica con le coste del nord-America. Nel 1521 completò un portolano, il Kitab-ı Bahriye, e nel 1528 realizzò un altro planisfero. Sulla base dei documenti veneziani questo saggio fornisce ulteriori informazioni su quella parte della vita di Piri reis che è ancora avvolta nel mistero: la sua attività nella flotta ottomana, le sue azioni da corsaro, le sue relazioni con le autorità veneziane, i suoi parenti e, soprattutto, l'anno esatto della sua morte che avvenne al Cairo nel 1553 (e non nel 1554 come molti studiosi hanno fino ad oggi ritenuto).*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Piri Reis, Marina ottomana, Corsari, Venezia, Cartografia.*

Before the re-organization of the Ottoman navy made by the *kapudan-ı derya* (great admiral) Hayreddin Barbarossa in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the sultans used to employ above all former pirates in their fleet<sup>1</sup>. This was the case of Kemal reis, called by Venetians *corsaro nefandissimo* (very wicked privateer). At the end of 1495 they hoped he was on the point of being punished for his crimes. He was imprisoned in Euboea (Eğriboz, Negroponte) by the Ottomans and Bayezid II sent fifty janissaries to accompany him to Constantinople. The Venetian *provveditore all'armata* (commander in chief of the navy) Bartolomeo Zorzi met them and their prisoner in Lemnos (Limni, Stalimine) on 6 December and tried to get the pirate in his hands to kill him, but the Ottoman soldiers did not agree and went away. When

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\* Abbreviations: Asve = Venetian State Archives; Apc = *Secreta*, Archivio Proprio Costantinopoli.

<sup>1</sup> E. Alberi (a cura di), *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, Tipografia all'insegna di Clio, Firenze, 1840, serie III, vol. 1, p. 18: Daniello de' Ludovici's report, 1534. According to Ottoman sources corsairs or privateers (*korsan*) were only the European ones; then, there were the pirates (*harami levend*) and the Ottoman subjects (*levend* or irregular soldiers), above all from Maghreb, whose task was to fight the *gaza* (border war) against the Christians. The same distinction is present in sources in Arabic (*qorşān/lişş al-bahr/gāzī al-bahr*). Cfr. M.P. Pedani, *Dalla frontiera al confine*, Herder, Roma, 2002, pp. 27-29.

Kemal reis arrived in the capital, the sultan gave him robes of honour, asked him to stop his raids as a pirate and sent letters to his officials to say that he was a good Muslim and under his protection<sup>2</sup>. His nephew Piri reis<sup>3</sup> was with him, as he wrote in the *Kitab-i Bahriyye*:

One day Bayezid Han deigned to send us his decree, commanding Kemal to enter his service and to devote to the Sultan's benefit all his naval exploits. It was in the year 900 [2 October 1494 – 21 September 1495] when we reached the homeland. Afterwards we went on expeditions upon the command of the Sultan and won naval victories<sup>4</sup>.

In the following years Kemal reis and another pirate, Herek reis, led the Ottoman fleet, the former with an appointment of 20 *akçe* per day and the latter with 15 *akçe*. Kemal received one of the two great round ships (*nave grosse*) the sultan had ordered, while Herek received a *galeaza grossa*<sup>5</sup>. In May-June 1498 Kemal reis was in Alexandria to give the Ottoman sultan's present to the Mamluk sultan and there he took the Portuguese pirate Saturnino's ships with 180 men and a galleon<sup>6</sup>. In this period the future geographer Piri reis sailed with his uncle. During the war with Venice (1499-1502) he took part to the battle of Zonchio (Burak Adası), where the Ottoman fleet overcame the Venetian one. In these years Kemal reis's pilot was a nobleman from Ibiza, George Andero, banished from Spain, France, Venice and Rhodes<sup>7</sup>. According to a Venetian letter from Edirne, dated 8 November 1510, Kemal reis was drown during a storm near the island of Samos (Sisam)<sup>8</sup>. In this way, Piri reis lost his first and most powerful patron.

It is not clear if Piri reis was the son of Kemal reis's sister or brother. In both the 1513 map and several copies of *Kitab-i bahriyye* there is written that he was the son of Kemal Reis's brother (*biraderzade*)<sup>9</sup>. On the contrary, the geographer Katib Çelebi states: *Piri reis Kemal reis'in hemşirezadesidir*, that is to say 'Piri Reis the son of Kemal Reis's sister'<sup>10</sup>. We may stress the fact that the calligraphy of the signature in the 1513 map does not look like the other *legendas*. It is different and it was clearly written by another hand, even if the assumption by most

<sup>2</sup> M. Sanuto, *I diarii*, 58 voll. (1879-1903), Deputazione, Venezia, vol. 1, col. 10; O. Koloğlu, *Türk Korsanları*, Tarihçi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2012, pp. 29-37.

<sup>3</sup> About Piri Reis's life, cfr. A. Afetinan, *Life and works of Piri reis*, Turkish Historical Society, Ankara, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Piri Reis, *Kitab-i Bahriyye*, 4 voll., İstanbul Research Center, İstanbul, 1988, vol 1, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 1, coll. 625, 640.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, coll. 1033, 1070-1071.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, coll. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 11, col. 663.

<sup>9</sup> Piri Reis, *Kitab-i bahriyye*, vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Kâtib Çelebi, *Tuhfetuu'l-Kibâr fî Esfâri'l-Bihâr*, İ. Bostan (haz.), T.C. Başbakanlık Denizcilik Müsteşarlığı, Ankara, 2008, p. 96.

scholars is that a professional calligrapher wrote the *legendas* and Piri wrote the one signature inscription or colophon<sup>11</sup>.

Venetian documents give us the name of a brother-in-law (*cognato*) of Kemal reis. He may, or may not, be Piri reis's father, since Kemal reis might have had more than one sister and, moreover, the Italian word *cognato* makes reference also to the brother of a wife and not only to the husband of a sister. It is interesting, however, to note that at the end of May 1502, during the Venetian war, an Ottoman subject from Naupactos (Lepanto, İnebahtı), Eustachio (*Stae* in Venetian) Sparcina, Kemal reis's brother-in-law, was arrested in Venice under the charge of being a spy. A Venetian sailor who had been a slave in Constantinople had recognized him. He was questioned and tortured but no proof that he was guilty was found. Lastly, on 6 June, he was released and could leave Venice<sup>12</sup>. Naupactos had been Venetian until 1499, when it was conquered by Bayezid II during the Ottoman-Venetian war of 1499-1502.

This is another proof that Piri reis had contacts with persons who knew the city of Venice very well. The description he makes of it in the *Kitab-i Bahriyye* is a proof of his knowledge of Venice. He mentions the small town of *Kavurlu* (Caorle) and its harbour *Santa Katalina* (Santa Margherita?), the river *Liyona* (Livenza), the islands of *Liyuma Zur* (Lio Mazor), *Nursalu* (Torcello), *Mazuzu* (Mazorbo) and *Muran* (Murano). He describes the lagoon, the fact that its houses are built on piles, that the patron saint is St. Mark, that to enter the city a ship had to hire a pilot from Piran (Pirano) and, lastly, the city lacks drinking water and that it was brought by boats from the rivers that run in the mainland<sup>13</sup>.

Venetian documents give us other information about Piri reis's life. According to Marino Sanudo, in February 1518, four Ottoman captains, named *Peri reis* (Piri reis), *Tachialis*, *Suliman* (Selman reis?) and *Bronzus*, were rebelling against the sultan. They had 24 *fuste* and 800 men, one of whom was Kurtoğlu Muslihiddin reis's brother-in-law and another his nephew. The Venetian ambassador Alvise Mocenigo, who was coming back from Constantinople on *Talaisman* reis's ship, ran the risk of been captured by Piri reis, but the Ottoman captain preferred to go against a storm, instead of against the pirates, and suc-

<sup>11</sup> *Piri Reis Haritası*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 4, col. 267, 27 June 1502: *Fo retenuto, per li capi di X, uno cognato di Chamali, corsaro, era a Venecia per spion, qual fo conosuto da uno mariner, fato prexon sopra la galia Mosta, fo presa combatendo con turchi, e stato longamente in ferri a Constantinopoli, et ultimate scapolalo; et fo colegiato, examinato etc. Quello seguirà, sapendo, scriverò*; Asve, *Consiglio di Dieci, Misti*, reg. 29, c. 62/244: 26 May 1502; c. 66v/253, 6 June 1502: *Quod iste Eustachus seu Stae Sparcina de Neopactto retentus pro suspitione exploratoris et qui est cognatus Camali turci examinatus per Collegium et non inventus culpabilis relaxetur pro nunc*; cfr. anche P. Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1994, p. 98 (this author mistakes Lepanto (Naupactos) with Negroponte (Euboea, Eğriboz) and writes *Stac* instead of *Stae*).

<sup>13</sup> Piri Reis, *Kitab-i Bahriye*, vol. 2, pp. 889-903.

ceeded in saving his guest and his ship<sup>14</sup>. The same source gives the news that in May 1518 Piri reis with seven *fuste* (small galleys) was despoiling Karystos on the Euboea island and the land near Athens<sup>15</sup>. This rebellion probably was appeased very soon, when in the same year Kurtoğlu (c. 1487-1535) was appointed again head of a large fleet<sup>16</sup>. In these years, Piri reis must have found another patron.

In the meanwhile, Piri reis was already interested in map making. In 1513 he had made a map of the world that he gave to the sultan Selim I in Egypt in 1517. In 1521 he completed the first copy of the *Kitab-i Bahriye* and in 1528 he made another world map. In the same period maps and map-makers left Italy for Constantinople. In 1520 Venetians sent to the interpreter Ali bey the globe of the world (*mapa-mondo tondo*) he had looked for: it was given to the sultan who ordered be written the names of places in Turkish on it<sup>17</sup>. In June 1529 the geographer Bernardo Silvano from Eboli near Naples, who had published in 1511 a new version of Ptolemy's *Geography* with the newly discovered lands, went to the Ottoman Empire to help the great vizier Pargalı İbrahim paşa to cut a channel to unite the Mediterranean to the Red Sea<sup>18</sup>. By 1531 the Venetians succeeded in convincing the map-maker Giovanni Domenico Zorzi from Modone to leave Constantinople and establish himself in Venice, on promising him a remuneration of 5 ducats every month<sup>19</sup>.

In the 1530s the name Piri appears again in Venetian documents. In August 1532 a Piri *kahya* (we do not know if he was Piri reis or not) was counsellor of the Ottoman fleet and he received a yellow caftan as a gift from the Venetians when they gave the payment, due for the possession of the island of Zakintos (Zante), to the admiral Ahmed paşa<sup>20</sup>. In September 1532 Piri reis was in the Adriatic with five galleys and three *fuste*

<sup>14</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 25, coll. 247, 265-266, 275. The Venetian word *talismano* means Muslim scholar.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 388.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, coll. 439-441; E. Alberi (a cura di), *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, Società Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze, 1855, serie III, vol. 3, pp. 56-68; Bartolomeo Contarini's report, 1519; about Kurtoğlu reis, cfr. S. Bono, *I corsari barbareschi*, Eri, Torino, 1964, pp. 138-139; S. Bono, *Corsari nel Mediterraneo. Cristiani e musulmani fra guerra, schiavitù e commercio*, A. Mondadori, Milano, 1993, pp. 141-142.

<sup>17</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 28, coll. 119, 680. It was probably that ordered by the great vizier Pir Mehmed in 1519, cfr. A. Fabris, *The Ottoman Mappa Mundi of Hajji Ahmed of Tunis*, in «Arab Historical Review For Ottoman Studies», 7-8 (October 1993), pp. 31-37.

<sup>18</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 50 cit., col. 581; M.P. Pedani, *Venice and Suez 1504-2012*, Port Authority, Venice, 2012; Ead., *Ottoman ships and Venetian craftsmen in the 16<sup>th</sup> century*, in D. Couto, F. Günergün, M.P. Pedani (eds), *Seapower, Technology and Trade. Studies in Turkish Maritime History*, Denizler Kitabevi / Kaptan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2014, pp. 460-464.

<sup>19</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 54, col. 479; M.P. Pedani, *Giovanni Domenico (Zorzi) da Modone, La vera descrizione del la gran cita del Caiero*, in E.M. Dal Pozzolo, R. Dorigo, M.P. Pedani (a cura di), *Venezia e l'Egitto*, Skira, Milano, 2011, pp. 290-291.

<sup>20</sup> Sanuto, *I diarii*, vol. 56, col. 857.

fighting Dalmatian pirates<sup>21</sup>. On 20 June 1533 he arrived in the Koroni (Koron) gulf with ten galleys and five *fuste* and bombarded the castle but did not damage it; the Venetians answered with about 10 or 15 cannon shots and one of them damaged Piri's galley<sup>22</sup>. In 1536, near Cyprus, he seized the Venetian galley *Contarina*, with a load of precious stones, and then refused to give back the booty saying that the ship had 37 Muslim prisoners on board<sup>23</sup>. From this period onwards Venetians began to consider Piri reis as a great enemy of their nation and their interests in the Levant. He began to chase every Venetian ship he met in the sea, while the Venetian diplomat, the *bailo*, began to plot against him at the Ottoman court.

In January 1546 he was sent to Alexandria in Egypt to take the place of Yahudi Sinan who had died. In this occasion he sold all his properties in Istanbul (a house, a garden and also a vineyard); then he left the city, taking with him all his money and his family. He probably did not want to come back. Venetians were happy for this fact<sup>24</sup>. In October 1546, however, in command of six ships he met the Venetian ship *Liona*, belonging to the Agazzi brothers, and notwithstanding the peace, tried to seize it. Even though he did not succeed, he did kill some Venetians and among them the nobleman Pietro Contarini. On this occasion the *bailo* asked the Senate if he had to make a petition (*arz*) to the sultan against Piri reis as they had made when Salah reis had fought against another ship also called *Liona*<sup>25</sup>.

In this period many times Piri reis took advantage of his encounters with Venetian ships without taking into consideration international sea law. In November 1546 he met a ship in the Archipelago. Venetians invited him on board and after the party offered to him, he took a precious scarlet dress for himself and decided to give the law prize of 7 ducats, only because he heard that it belonged to the *bailo*. At the same time rumours spread in Constantinople that he had taken cloths and money from two Venetian ships he had met in the Archipelago<sup>26</sup>. The *bailo* was very angry about these facts and in the same November he obtained an imperial order addressed to Piri reis to free the seamen he had taken on the *Liona* ship<sup>27</sup>. It was sent to Piri reis in Alexandria in February 1547<sup>28</sup>. The *bailo*, however, was not sure that this order

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1022; vol. 57, col. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 58, coll. 548, 551-553.

<sup>23</sup> K. Setton, *The papacy and the Levant 1204-1571*, vol. 3, *The Sixteenth Century to the Reign of Julius III*, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 409.

<sup>24</sup> *Asve, Apc*, f. 4, n. 33, cc. 38v-41.

<sup>25</sup> *Asve, Apc*, f. 4, n. 72, cc. 119v-121v. About Agazzi family cfr. E. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople, Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2006, pp. 50-52.

<sup>26</sup> *Asve, Apc*, f. 4, n. 75, cc. 122v-124v.

<sup>27</sup> *Asve, Apc*, f. 4, n. 77, cc. 125-127; f. 1, reg. 3 bis, c. 77.

<sup>28</sup> *Asve, Apc*, f. 4, n. 94, cc. 154-156.

would have been effective since all the sea captains were in great favour at the court and, above all, the great vizier Rüstem *paşa* himself protected Piri reis who wanted to be refunded for the seamen he had lost in the *Liona* clash: in this moment he stated that he had been attacked by the Venetians while the *bailo* stressed the fact that he had killed 12 men, wounded another 12, and that the Venetians had already given him 200 ducats to appease the affair<sup>29</sup>.

Piri reis's luck, however, was fading away: as he had become more and more important after Hayreddin's death (4 July 1546), it may be that Rüstem's loss of power (6 October 1553) affected his situation. We know that in 1552 Piri reis failed in an expedition against the Portuguese but he came back to Egypt with the gold he had raided in Hormuz and Basra<sup>30</sup>. This was the reason for his ruin. For this fact he was beheaded in Cairo by order of the sultan. We do not know when this actually happened. On his coming back to Venice, on 17 August 1554, the Venetian consul in Cairo Daniele Barbarigo (1550-1553) reported that Piri Reis had been killed because he had not done his duty. This diplomat had finished his charge in March 1553, but his successor arrived in Egypt on the following 14 December and he had to wait for him<sup>31</sup>. Other Venetian sources say that something very remarkable happened in Cairo between January and February 1553, but they do not explain exactly what really happened<sup>32</sup>. On 16 December 1553, however, a letter written in Constantinople on 15 November 1553 reached Venice. It said that Piri Reis had been beheaded in Cairo because he had been corrupted by the Portuguese and had raised the siege of Hormuz.

By order of the Sublime Porte, the *beylerbeyi* of Cairo ordered that Piri reis was beheaded. He was the commander in chief of the fifty galleys that the sultan has in the Red Sea. He was charged with having raised the siege of the fortress of Hormuz because of bribery and the captain of Rüstem's ship, a man of value, was put in his place<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Asve, *Apc*, b. 4, n. 90, cc. 143-147; n. 93, 152-154. E. Alberi (a cura di), *Le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti*, vol. 1, p. 69: Bernardo Navagero's report from Constantinople, 12 March 1553.

<sup>30</sup> S. Özbaran, *Ottoman Expansion towards the Indian Ocean in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*, İstanbul Bilgi University Press, İstanbul, 2009, pp. 107-111.

<sup>31</sup> M.P. Pedani, *Reports of Venetian Consuls in Alexandria (1554-1664)*, in M. Tuchscherer, M.P. Pedani (eds.), *Alexandrie ottomane*, 1 (Études Alexandrines, 19), Ifao, Cairo, 2011, pp. 43-182, in particular pp. 76-77.

<sup>32</sup> Asve, *Senato Secreti*, reg. 68, cc. 116-117/274-276, 119/ 280.

<sup>33</sup> F. Gaeta (a cura di), *Nunziature di Venezia*, Istituto Storico Italiano per l'Età Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma, 1967, vol. 6, p. 297: *Ch'el Bassà del Cairo, per comandamento della Porta, haveva fatto decapitare Pirà Rays, generale delle cinquanta galere che tiene il Turco nel Mar Rosso, incolpandolo d'havere levato l'assedio per mangiarie alla fortezza d'Ormus et in suo luoco s'era mandato il patron della nave di Rustan, huomo di valore*; M. Arikan, P. Toledo, *Venedik'teki Papalık sefareti belgeleri'ne göre Türkler (1533-1569)*. «Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi OTAM», 4 (Ocak 1993), pp. 375-436.