

SAYI 39 • 2012

**OSMANLI ARAŐTIRMALARI**  
THE JOURNAL OF OTTOMAN STUDIES

*Other Places:  
Ottomans traveling, seeing, writing, drawing the world*

A special double issue [39-40] of the  
*Journal of Ottoman Studies / Osmanlı Arařtırmaları*

Essays in honor of  
**Thomas D. Goodrich**

Part I

Misafir Editörler / Guest Editors  
Gottfried Hagen & Baki Tezcan

İSAM 

# From Hungary to Southeast Asia: The Ali Macar Reis Atlas in a Global Context

Giancarlo Casale\*

*Macaristan'dan Güneydoğu Asya'ya: Küresel Bir Bağlamda Ali Macar Reis Atlası*

Özet ■ Bu makale, onaltıncı yüzyılın ortalarına tarihlenen ünlü Ali Macar Reis deniz atlasında bulunan dünya haritasını yeni bir siyasi bağlamda inceliyor. Haritanın üzerindeki açıklamaların yakından okunması ve Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi'nden belgeler ışığında, haritanın içeriğinin, 1567'de Açe'ye düzenlenen sefer sonucunda Osmanlılar'ın Hint Okaynusu'nun belirli bölgelerine ilgisinin artışı yansıttığını savunmaktadır. Bu okumanın "pratik" çağrışımlarından yola çıkarak, bu çalışma aynı zamanda onaltıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı dünya haritalarının izleyici çevreleri ve yine bu haritaların ilk elden kullanıcıları üzerine bazı yeni düşünme yolları önerir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ali Macar Reis, haritacılık, Açe, dünya haritaları.

In a very real sense, we are now in the midst of a "golden age" in the study of early modern Ottoman cartography. As the numerous studies in the present volume attest, the past few years have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of scholarly interest in Ottoman maps and the people who made them. And just as importantly, this research has been accompanied in equal measure by a steady stream of museum exhibits, documentaries, and "coffee table" publications aimed at a general audience—both within Turkey and internationally—that collectively speak to a popular level of enthusiasm for the subject of cartography that scholars of previous generations could only dream of.<sup>1</sup>

\* University of Minnesota.

1 On emblematic examples of this popularizing trend is the international exhibit titled *Piri Reis'ten Katip Çelebi'ye*, which featured a dazzling number of Ottoman maps (although unfortunately for the most part in facsimile). For the website of the exhibit, including slides of the featured maps, see <http://tarihvedenedeniyet.org/2009/08/harita-sergisi-piri-reisten-katip-celebiye/>

And yet, for all of this very welcome attention, as specialists in the field we still find ourselves unable to answer some of the most basic questions about Ottoman cartography during the sixteenth century, a problem that becomes particularly acute when we turn to the subject of Ottoman world maps. For unlike siege diagrams, architectural plans, or even portolan charts, all of which had obvious practical applications and were drafted with these applications in mind, when it comes to world maps the purpose remains as mysterious to us today as the manner in which they were produced.<sup>2</sup> What could such maps have meant to the Ottomans who consulted them? Why, how, and according to what standards were they drafted? And under what circumstances—if any at all—were Ottoman cartographers able to meet each other, exchange ideas, and study one another's work as they developed their own unique representations of the world?

While the task of providing a definitive answer to these questions lies beyond the abilities of your humble servant, in the pages below I would like to present a small body of evidence of at least one instance in which Ottoman officials, working collaboratively in a specific place (the Imperial workshops of Topkapı Palace), produced a world map for a specific purpose (a naval campaign to Southeast Asia). In doing so, I hope to make a fitting contribution to this special issue in celebration of the career of Professor Thomas Goodrich, who through his groundbreaking research and his generosity as a scholar has done so much to make modern students of Ottoman mapmaking feel as if we too, rather than lonely individuals struggling in the dark, are a part of something larger than ourselves.

Our exploration begins with one of the best-known examples of sixteenth-century Ottoman cartography: the world map included within the pages of the atlas of Ali Macar Reis, or “Ali the Hungarian Sea Captain,” housed today in the collection of the Topkapı Palace Library (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> This map, completed in 1567, has been thoroughly studied by a number of modern scholars, and has been identified as a work closely based on a Western prototype of the school of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi.<sup>4</sup> As Prof. Goodrich has pointed

2 For a discussion of one famous Ottoman siege diagram from the sixteenth century, see Fevzi Kurtoğlu, “Hadım Süleyman Paşa'nın Mektupları ve Belgrad'ın Muhasara Planı”, *Bellekten* 9 (1940): 53-87; on architectural models, see Gülru Necipoğlu, “Plans and Models in 15th and 16th-Century Ottoman Architectural Practice,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (1986): 224-43.

3 Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 644.

4 See Svat Soucek, “The ‘Ali Macar Reis Atlas’ and the *Deniz Kitabı*: Their Place in the Genre of Portolan Charts and Atlases,” *Imago Mundi* 25 (1971): 17-27; See also Soucek, “Islamic Charting in the Mediterranean,” in J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Vol.2, Book 1: The History of Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian*

out, the map bears a particularly strong resemblance to an updated version of Gastaldi's *mappa mundi* dating from 1561 (now housed in the British library), although it also shares similarities with a number of other roughly contemporary adaptations.<sup>5</sup> One such example, Paolo Forlani's *Universale Descriptione*, published by the Venetian printer Ferdinando Bertelli in 1565 (see Figure 2), seems an especially likely candidate as it was widely circulated and appeared in print just two years before the date of Ali Macar's atlas.<sup>6</sup> In any case, it is clear from the details of Ali Macar's map that, whatever specific chart may have served as a model, it was based not on the original Gastaldi map of 1546 but on a much more recently updated version (or perhaps more than one version) completed sometime in the 1560s.

Keeping this in mind, let us now turn to an element of Ali Macar's map that has no obvious relationship to any Western prototype: its Turkish-language captions. Of these, the overwhelming majority are simple place names, some drawn from everyday usage in colloquial Turkish (e.g. *Ak deniz* or "White Sea" for the Mediterranean), others rooted in the terminology of classical Arabo-Islamic geography (e.g. *Serendib* for Sri Lanka), and still others that are neologisms derived, at least in principle, from Western sources (e.g. *Portukāl İskelesi* or "the Port of the Portuguese" for the Isthmus of Panama). There is, however, one—and only one—location on the map that Ali Macar has chosen not merely to name but to briefly describe. This, rather surprisingly, is the Maldive Archipelago, to which

---

*Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Kemal Özdemir, *Ottoman Nautical Charts: the Atlas of Ali Macar Reis* (Istanbul, 1992); Thomas Goodrich, "The Atlas-1 Hümayun: A Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Maritime Atlas Discovered in 1984," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 10 (1985): 25-44; and Goodrich, "Some Unpublished Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Maps," in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Emeri Van Dunzel, eds., *Comité International d'études Pre-Ottomanes e Ottomanes, VIth Symposium, Cambridge, 1-4 July 1984* (Istanbul: IFEA, 1987), 99-103. The atlas was first published by Fevzi Kurtoğlu, *Ali Macar Reis Atlası* (Istanbul, 1935).

5 See Goodrich, "The Atlas-1 Hümayun," 91; Soucek, "Islamic Charting," 282.

6 Paolo Forlani, *L'Universale descrizione di tutta la terra conosciuta fin qui* (Venetia, 1565). See also David Woodward, *The Maps and Prints of Paulo Forlani: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1990). Goodrich argues against this possibility, reasoning that it was unusual for Ottomans to work directly from printed, as opposed to manuscript, maps. See Goodrich, "The Atlas-1 Hümayun," 91. On the other hand, we do have contemporary documentation of the use of printed Western maps by officials in Topkapı Palace. In 1573, for example, just five years after the date of Ali Macar Reis's atlas, a translator at the Ottoman court is known to have ordered and received two printed copies of Abraham Ortelius' *Teatrum Orbis Terrarum*, first published in the Low Countries in 1570. See Gabor Agoston, "Information, Ideology, and the Limits of Imperial Policy: Ottoman Grand Strategy in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry," in Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman, *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 87.



**Figure 1:** The *Mappa mundi* from the atlas of Ali Macar Reis, 1567. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 644. fols. 7b-8a.

the author refers as “The Twenty-Four Thousand Islands, twelve of which are deserted and the other twelve of which are cultivated” [*Yigirmi dört biñ cezire on ikisi vîrân ve on ikisi ma’mûr*].

Now why, of all places, would Ali Macar choose the Maldives as the only location on his map worthy of an extended description of this kind? Frustratingly, other known examples of Western Gastaldi-type maps offer us little in the way of an explanation, as their captions seem never to have included similar language when describing the islands of the Indian Ocean. However, there is at least one contemporary geographic work of Ottoman provenance in which we find quite similar language: the intelligence report of Lutfi Reis, who between 1564 and 1566 traveled through the Maldives while on a secret diplomatic mission to the court of the Sultan of Aceh in Southeast Asia. Suggestively, in the rather lengthy portion of this report devoted to the Maldives, Lutfi begins as follows: “The Maldives consist of twenty-four thousand islands...twelve thousand of which are populated and twelve thousand of which are uninhabited” [*Divâ dimekle ma’rûf yigirmi dört biñ ceziredür...on iki biñ ceziresi âdemle meskûn ve on iki biñ cezireleri harâb ğayr-ı meskûndur*].<sup>7</sup>

7 Giancarlo Casale, “His Majesty’s Servant Lutfi: The Career of a Previously Unknown Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Envoy to Sumatra based on an Account of his Travels from the Topkapı Palace Archives,” *Turcica* 37 (2005): 43-81, at 73.



Figure 2: Paolo Forlani, *L'Universale descrizione di tutta la terra conosciuta fin qui* or “Universal Description of all of the World Discovered Until Now” (Venice, 1565).

While not exactly the same as the caption in Ali Macar’s map, the parallels in both structure and content between the two texts seem quite clear. What is less apparent is how best to account for such a close correspondence in the language employed by each author. Is their similarity simply reflective of a common usage of the time? Or is it instead indicative of a more intimate relationship between the two works? Although the first option is certainly within the realm of possibility, in order to prove it one would need to produce examples of similar usage from other contemporary Ottoman sources—and I, at least, am unaware of any. On the other hand, we do possess a certain amount of documentary evidence about the respective careers of Lutfi Reis and Ali Macar Reis, and when placed together these seem to suggest that the similarities in the two authors’ texts were anything but a coincidence.

To begin with, as Svat Soucek has shown, a certain “Ali Macar” appears as early as 1558 in a list of the members of the “Guild of Rumi Painters” (*Cemā’at-ı Nakḫāşān-ı Rūmīyān*) employed by the imperial palace.<sup>8</sup> Assuming we are here dealing with the same individual, this would imply that Ali Macar (*sans* “Reis”) was employed as a draftsman in the palace atelier for nearly a decade before he

8 See Soucek, “Islamic Charting,” p.280, based on a document from the Topkapı Palace Archives, D. 6500, published in Rıfki Melul Meriç, ed., *Türk Nakış Sanaatı Tarihi Araştırmaları*, Vol.1: *Vesikalar* (Ankara, 1953), 6.

completed the atlas that bears his name.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this appointment seems not to have prevented him in any way from pursuing a parallel life as a man of the sea. If anything, it appears that his employment in the palace may have been instrumental in enabling him to advance more quickly through the ranks of the Ottoman navy. So much can be surmised from an entry in a *ru'ūs defteri* from 1571—again presented by Soucek—in which Ali Macar is identified as a “captain of the Sultan’s private galleys” (*hāṣṣa reʿisleri*).<sup>10</sup>

Now this last detail becomes a clue of more than passing interest when, turning to Lutfi Reis, we note that that he too is described in two *mühimme* documents from 1567 in quite similar terms, as a member of the “special palace corps of sea captains” (*müteferrika reʿisleri*).<sup>11</sup> In other words, both he and Ali Macar were not only captains in the Ottoman navy, but were both employed at the same time in special naval officers’ corps directly tied to the palace. This, combined with the fact that Lutfi’s report and Ali Macar’s map were completed within one year of each other—and are both still housed in Topkapı Palace today—makes it almost certain that the two knew one another, and quite probably had an active working relationship.

The likelihood of a direct association between the two men, and the close chronology of their respective works, becomes even more significant when considered within the larger context of contemporary Ottoman imperial policy during the mid-1560s. Specifically, towards the end of 1566—immediately following Lutfi’s return from his mission to the east earlier that year—the Ottomans had begun preparations for a massive military expedition to Southeast Asia in support of their new ally, the Sultan of Aceh. As is well known, the bulk of this expeditionary fleet was later rerouted to suppress an uprising in Yemen, and never reached its destination. But in August 1567/Safar 975, the date appearing on Ali Macar’s map, the expedition to Aceh was still a very live project, with the fleet standing in readiness in the arsenal of Suez and set to depart for the Indian Ocean

9 As Soucek points out, the fact that “Reis” does not appear with Ali Macar’s name could be interpreted as evidence that it is not, in fact, the same person. It is also possible that “Ali Macar Reis” did not actually draw the maps in the atlas that bears his name, but only filled in the place names, since the verb that he uses is “to write” (*katıba*) rather than “to draw” (*nasama*). See Soucek, “Islamic Charting,” 280.

10 Istanbul, Başbakanlık Arşivi, Kamil Kepeci, #223, 19, quoted in William Brice, Colin Imber and Richard Lorch, *The Aegean Sea Chart of Mehmed Reis Ibn Menemenli, A.D.1590/1* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1977). See also Soucek, “Islamic Charting,” 280. The document in question dates from 1571.

11 Istanbul, Başbakanlık Arşivi, MD 7, #234 & #236. See also Casale, “His Majesty’s Servant Lutfi,” 47-8.

within a matter of weeks.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, alongside his gloss about the Maldives, Ali Macar has prominently labeled “Aceh” (*Acġ*) on his map as well. This addition, of obvious strategic interest for the Ottomans of the time, is also interesting to us for a more analytic reason: The sultanate of “Aceh,” as distinct from the island of Sumatra on which it is located, does not typically appear on contemporary Western Gastaldi-type maps, nor is it to be found in classical Arabic geographies (having risen to prominence only in the sixteenth century).<sup>13</sup> As such, only the exigencies of contemporary politics—and the guiding voice of Lutfi Reis—can explain its inclusion on Ali Macar’s map.

Against this background, we are now ready to present a plausible reconstruction of Ali Macar Reis’s “working method” as he created his now famous world map: At some point in the mid-1560s, most likely the early months of 1567, Ali Macar was commissioned by his employers in the Ottoman palace to draft a Mediterranean atlas. This he executed in what can be called the “Ottoman portolan style,” a school of mapmaking that, combining the traditions of Piri Reis and the conventions of contemporary Italian portolan charts, would have been familiar to him from his years of working for the palace as both a cartographer and a sea captain. However, because his commission coincided with a flurry of activity related to the upcoming expedition to the Indian Ocean—an area of the world about which this mapmaking tradition had very little to say—he also procured an updated Gastaldi-type world map, and used it as the prototype for a double-folio *mappa mundi* that he appended as the last chart in his atlas. He then cross-referenced this map with Lutfi’s report (or perhaps talked with Lutfi directly), and made additions that would render the map more useful for the purposes at hand. These additions included the brief description of the Maldives—a place that figured prominently in Lutfi’s narrative and through which the Ottoman expeditionary force undoubtedly expected to pass—as well as the caption for “Aceh,” the ultimate destination of the Ottoman fleet.

In the aggregate, this picture squares relatively well with what we know about cartographic practice among Ottoman seamen from other contexts, in which the consultation of multiple sources, cross-referencing, and the situationally specific updating of maps were by no means unheard of. Certainly the well-studied example of Piri Reis comes first to mind in this regard, but there are other examples as

12 See Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 129–35.

13 On the contested history of place names in insular Southeast Asia, see Michael Laffan, “Finding Java: Muslim nomenclature of insular Southeast Asia from Śrīvijaya to Snouck Hurgronje,” *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 52 (November 2005): 1–70.



well.<sup>14</sup> From anecdotal evidence, for instance, we know that the admiral Hadım Süleyman Pasha kept and updated charts of the Arabian Sea during his naval campaign to Gujarat in 1538, and that these continued to be consulted (and perhaps added to) by Ottoman authorities in Egypt well into the 1580s.<sup>15</sup>

Even so, it has sometimes been suggested that when it comes to *mappae mundi*, as opposed to portolans or other use-specific maps (such as siege diagrams or architectural layouts), the Ottomans were comparatively uninterested in their accuracy or their utility, tending instead to see them as projections of an entirely abstract vision of religious and political space.<sup>16</sup> Without dismissing such considerations, which are undoubtedly important for understanding the importance of world maps *as a genre*, Ali Macar's *mappa mundi* offers us a fleeting glimpse of some of the ways in which the Ottomans could also use such maps for much more concrete purposes. In August of 1567, as the latest urgent dispatches from the arsenal in Suez reached Istanbul, it is an easy thing to imagine the Sultan and his viziers huddled around their new map and scrutinizing its every detail—as they reviewed their master plan, gauged its chances of success, and pondered the potential gains of their great gamble in Southeast Asia. And so, at least in this isolated case, the Ottomans' use of world maps proves not to have been so mysterious after all.

*From Hungary to Southeast Asia: The Ali Macar Reis Atlas in a Global Context*

Abstract ■ This article presents a political context for understanding the world map contained within the pages of the famous mid sixteenth-century portolan atlas of Ali Macar Reis. Through a close reading of the Turkish-language captions in the map itself, in combination with other supporting material from the Topkapı Palace Archives, it argues that the map's contents reflect heightened Ottoman interest in specific areas of the Indian Ocean as a result of the planned Ottoman expedition to Aceh in 1567. Because of the "practical" implications of this reading, the article also tentatively suggests new ways to understand both the audience for sixteenth-century Ottoman world maps, as well as the ways in which they were used by the people who consulted them in the palace.

Keywords: Ali Macar Reis, cartography, Aceh, world maps.

14 On the cartographic practice of Piri Reis, see Svat Soucek, *Piri Reis and Turkish Map Making after Columbus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For a similar example from another map in Ali Macar's atlas, see Soucek, "Islamic Charting," 281.

15 See Giancarlo Casale, "An Ottoman Intelligence Report from the Mid Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean," *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 31/1 (2007): 181-88, at 187-88.

16 This is a problem that I have tried to address in somewhat greater length in a separate article. See Giancarlo Casale, "Seeing the Past: Maps and Ottoman Historical Consciousness," in Erdem Çıpa and Emine Fetvacı, eds., *Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future: Essays on Ottoman Historiography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2012).