An early version of Piri Reis' naval charts

Claus-Peter HAASE

Orientalisches Seminar, Kiel
Le manuscrit Cod. ms. ori. 34 (fol. X 25) de la bibliothèque de l'université de Kiel est une version ancienne de l'ouvrage de Piri Reis. Longtemps passé inaperçu, ce volume contient une précédente version du texte avec des cartes précieuses qui paraissent avoir servi à des marins - ainsi que semblent l'indiquer diverses notes ajoutées par une main malière. Absolution faite d'un désordre qui est sans doute l'œuvre d'un relecteur malintentionné, la séquence des cartes diffère de celle de la seconde version : une série de marques empruntées à différents systèmes de numération permet de reconstruire un groupement initial par régions, ce qui est fort utile pour un marin.

Surprisingly, the bound volume of 22 x 15.5 cm in the University Library of Kiel in Northern Germany (Cod. ms. ori. 34) never aroused the interest of the Ottomanists Georg Jacob and Theodor Menzel, who taught there, even though Menzel himself was a successful manuscript collector. It is listed as a collection of geographical charts with anonymous explanations in the short title catalogue by Henning Rajten for the previous small collection, but even this reference is missing in the list of public collections compiled by Fuat Sezgin. The manuscript was acquired around 1833 from the library of the scholar and high clergyman J. C. G. Adler, mentioned below by Stig Rasmussen as a Danish orientalist, when Schleswig-Holstein belonged to Denmark, and who is known for his Bible studies on Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts in Rome—Italy could well be the provenance of this manuscript. Recently the University Library has been able to acquire over 700 manuscripts, some of them Arabic and Persian but mostly Ottoman, from the most valuable collection of the former Kiel orientalist, Theodor Menzel (died 1939), and a new catalogue, identifying this as a copy of Piri Reis' Naval charts is presently in preparation for the Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland.

According to the fine study by Sourouk and Goodrich, this manuscript belongs to the group of practical sailing handbooks which use the shorter first version of Piri Reis' Kitab-i bahriye. It contains as much of his texts as can be scrawled around the drawings and several additions to them concerning changes in the viability of sea routes and access to harbours. There is no colophon, but some owners have left marks and dates, the earliest of which mentions an intended sea journey from Istanbul to Cyprus on 28th Safar 1006/10.10.1597 (f. 4a); the same unskilled hand has recorded the goods (food) which he and one of his companions acquired; another one is probably to be read 1071/1660-1 (f. 1a), one appana hafti-zade Mustafa is mentioned in connection with a voyage to Azov, North of the Crimea (f. 58a), a region not found in the maps preserved in this manuscript. But it is another definite indication of the fact that these charts were actually used by sea captains and, I believe, it shows the date of the original form of this now incomplete manuscript to be somewhere in the last third of the 16th century, well before the owners' notations.

The 58 folios preserved contain 51 charts of the Mediterranean with several lacunae, at least three of them are in a different hand, two folios are thicker and even stiffer than the others, the watermarks mostly depict the anchor and six-pointed star, more rarely the trellis with the same star, the binding is secondary and upside down. Altogether the manuscript shows signs of having been put together in a disorganized way; the quires or layers are very irregular, and the reasons for this should interest us also, as we are not meeting here just to look at more or less beautiful seacharts.

It is a special pleasure to introduce this overlooked manuscript in Paris, as on the frontispiece it seems to show what the Eiffel Tower could have looked like in the late 16th century, or rather the crown ornament of the stern-post of a ship (Fig. 1).

---

4. 1480 or earlier?—961/1553-1554, but see Sourouk in ES: x.e. Piri Reis, 1993, who refers to doubts as to whether the cartographer and the admiral of the Ottoman fleet who was decapitated were the same person.

---

Fig. 1. Stern-post ornament of a ship (?) Ms. Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. ms. ori. 34, f. 4b.
En passant, it should be noted that most of the coast and island lines are very carefully executed, in spite of the stylized bow form constantly repeated (Fig. 2), they show far more precision than the elegantly flowing but untrustworthy shore lines of the presentation copies and atlases, especially
but not only – of the enlarged second redaction by Piri Reis (Fig. 3). As has already been observed, the cities, forts and villages depicted do show abbreviated typical features, like the windmills of Rhodes or the date palms of Djerba (Fig. 4), and vary from copy to copy; not all of them seem to be derived from traditional chart iconography. The latter occurs e.g. in the island of Istanbulıye hubuzlıı/ Kandaleusa (Fig. 5) with its construction for unloading ships without a harbour, which is the only coloured drawing and therefore hints at the origin of the major tradition followed by Piri Reis for the Aegean –namely some charts which had also been used for the woodcut Isolario of Benedetto Bordone (1528, 1534) equally showing only this island with a dense inner drawing. Usually they are traced back to the first printed Isolario by Bartolommeo dalla Sonetti (Venice, ca. 1485-1486) 5. There are several instances where an owner’s hand has scribbled new features into the coastal lines (Fig. 6), and this may indicate the way in which these charts slightly changed their form and remained in practical use until printed versions improved and superseded them.

An odd feature is the regional arrangement followed in the original versions of Piri Reis – according to the two Turkish editions 6 of the expanded version and very similar in the unfinished Kahle facsimile 7 of the first version. There is a remark by Soucek 8 that several of the later adapted versions show rearrangements especially of the back parts of the maps. The starting points are in the first version the island of Bozca (Tenedos), in the second the Dardanelles and Gellibolu, thought to be Piri Reis’ hometown, whenever he was on shore. Originally there was probably no sign for, or depiction of Istanbul and no complete map of the Marmara sea. The islands of Imbros/Lemnos or Imroz/Imros are on the first pages, then follow the shores of Thrace and Greece till Ágioshko/Euboea, then the author jumps back to West Anatolia with Midilli/Lesbos and the coast of Foça/Phocas and İzmir, several isles of the Dodekanese follow, then the rest of Greece, both sides of the Adriatic, then Italy, France, Spain, North Africa, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and again Anatolia and the Aegean from South. The series usually ends with Crete and other isles of the Cyclades; the larger isles like Sicily, Sardinia, Mallorca, etc. are depicted alongside the nearest coasts.

The larger second redaction shows many isolated islands on single charts, which seems impracticable if one wants to find them from near a shore or another island as no specific compass indications or other navigation aids are given; thus the smaller version shows more practical features in this area.

Fig. 5. The island of Istanbul near the island of Kandaleusa.
Ms. Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. ms. art. 34, f. 35b.

Fig. 6. Alqrovo, Euboea and Athens, with added (drowned?) bridge.
Ms. Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. ms. art. 34, f. 30b.

Fig. 7. Iliryoa/Larios and the coast of Karsheq with part of Istanköy/Kos and smaller islands.
Ms. Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. ms. art. 34, f. 20b-21a.
Fig. 8. Southwestern Anatolia and the coloured island of Ḩamābyūya bābāšīyta Kandaleusa.
as well since it groups most of the islands together with a coast line, like on f. 21a, but not always, like on f. 20b (Fig. 7).

We had the opportunity to arrange photocopies of this manuscript according to the general coastal outlines—as it is known from portolanes and atlases. The way in which we have arranged the charts in Fig. 8 looks funny but they were obviously not meant to be seen together like this due to the fact that they are not all drawn to the same scale. Now, most of the charts are arranged on their sheets in the same order as in the published versions, so it was noticeable that the author actually had the continuous coastline in mind and turned each folio so as to get as long a line as possible on its surface (compare f. 20a on Fig. 9). Also the islands are located so as to fill as much space as possible of the paper—surely in the typical Oriental fashion of using every tiny bit of paper by leaving just the smallest possible margin. Practically every page starts anew with the coastal line somewhere at the margin, with only a few exceptions. As next to nothing is depicted of the hinterland, there are only a few instances of deep gulfs and promontories, where two sheets or more have to be placed next to each other to cover the area. Only f. 22b-23a with Samos, Himarán/Lipsi and the coast are in the form of a double page, apparently by accident.

Apart from one single and three or four double leaves (bifolia) being out of place in the manuscript as it is bound, slip-folded and foliated now, the main deviation from the usual order occurs in the Aegean coasts and islands. Quire 6, a bison, seems to embrace, as far as I can see, quire 7 as a quaternio, and it is the third double leaf of the latter that contains the original starting point of the work with the Dardanelles (f. 28b). In short: since the present order makes no sense, in order to arrive at the original sequence one has to split up this third double leaf, turn it upside down, leave out the (partly empty) fourth and inner double leaf and fold the rest into the opposite direction to arrive at the original order. The confusion may have arisen due to the source of this manuscript, but for practical reasons I do not believe this. Except for the wrong composition of the third double leaf, the mistakes could be explained by confusion due to the binder, and he may have been misled by a short series of catchmarks (éclats, though not in its proper sense, but marking the pages following each other by using identical signs) which occur here as well as in the parts of the generally less well-known western Mediterranean (Fig. 10). Here they consist of signs of the Arabic numerals from 4 to 9 which have hardly been altered, without 7 and with an addition which looks like 80. They are followed by some signs similar to Greek abbreviations and, on the Western charts, by a longer series of Arabic letters in the ʾabqāl-sequence and further signs of astrological type (Figs. 11-12).

Fig. 9. The isle of Kalamaz / Kalimnos and the gulf of Bodrum.
Ms. Kiel, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. ms. orient. 34, f. 19b-20a.

Now, these do not indicate the original order of the charts in Piri’s other versions, but they do group the charts coherently into regions. Thus the two numbers 5 connect the isles of Lemnos and Lesbos, which actually are not too far away from each other, but which in most manuscripts have five pages between them; further, nos 4 and 5 are one of those cases where the island with some shore and the rest of the coast line would have to be grouped parallel to each other on two or more sheets and not in line. Further, the numeration jumps from layer 7 to the latter part of layer 6 and combines the pages forming the gulf of İzmir and that of Mandala south of it. Something similar happens with the gulf of Bodrum/Halikarnassos with the next series of catchmarks, this time with three similar signs like a coarse Latin M. But most noticeable are the series of numbers on the Greek coast after Euboea, not jumping over to Anatolia. This appears to make sense for a captain sailing along the coasts and not between the islands with their dangerous currents.
I do not think that the marks date from the first scribe of the maps or texts, but rather from someone who put the rests of a manuscript together for practical use. In some instances, e.g. Italy, the series of marks is not affected by the lacunae of the maps, and they are not to be found on every sheet. Of course seeing a series of réclame-catchmarks, the bookbinder tried to make use of them, but perhaps comparing the effect with a parallel manuscript he may have given up helplessly and have left the mess to the librarian or the cataloguer of manuscripts. The latter would be very grateful for any indication of comparable signs and their usage as we have not come across similar ones anywhere else.

Discussion

Prof. Kouymjian pointed out that the astronomical-astrological connotations of some catchmarks appear in many "alphabets" in use in the occult sciences; Dr. Witkam added that astronomy of course was an indispensable branch of seafaring knowledge and the use of such signs corroborates the impression that they were added by one of the captains possessing this manuscript.