THE LEGENDARY BIOGRAPHIES OF TAMERLANE

Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia

RON SELA

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The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane

Timur (or Tamerlane) is famous as the fourteenth-century conqueror of much of Central Eurasia and the founder of the Timurid dynasty. His reputation lived on in his native lands and reappeared some three centuries after his death in the form of fictional biographies, authored anonymously in Persian and Turkic. These biographies have become an important part of popular culture, but despite a direct continuity in their production from the eighteenth century to the present, they remain virtually unknown to people outside the region. This remarkable and rigorous scholarly appraisal of the legendary biographies of Tamerlane is the first of its kind in any language. The book sheds light not only on the character of Tamerlane and how he was remembered and championed by many generations after his demise, but also on the era in which the biographies were written, and how they were conceived and received by the local populace during an age of crisis in their own history.

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The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane

Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia

RON SELA
Indiana University Bloomington

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For Hila

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Abbreviations

"Books of Tīmūr"

Dāstān	*Sayyid Muḥammad Khoja b. Ja'far Khoja. Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr. MS. IVAN Uz No. 185/I.*
Dāstān 7390	*Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr ṣāḥib-qirān. MS. IVAN Uz No. 7390.*
Kunūz	*'Abd al-Raḥmān Sīrat. Kunūz al-a'ẓam (Tārīkh-i Tīmūrī). MS. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS Or. Quart. 1231.*
Temurnoma (Ravshanov)	*Temurnoma: Amir Temur Kuragon zhangnomasi. Ed. P. Ravshanov. Tashkent: Chulpon, 1990.*
TN Kullīyāt	*Tīmūr-nāma. Kullīyāt-i fārsī. Ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Qāsim ibn Mīrzā 'Abd al-Khāliq Bukhārī. Tashkent, 1912.*
TN 699	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 699.*
TN 1501	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1501.*
TN 1526	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1526.*
TN 4436	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4436.*
TN 4817	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4817.*
TN 4890	*Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4890.*

Other Abbreviations

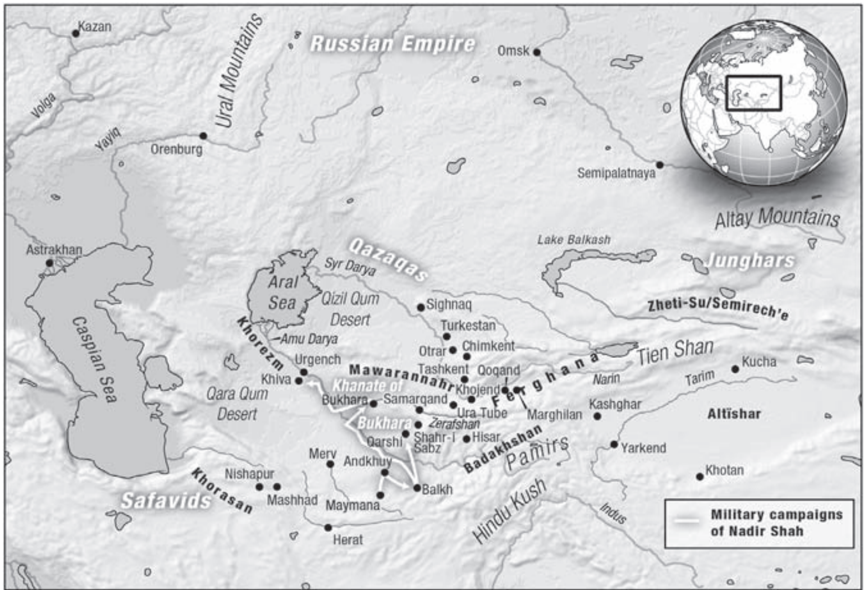
AEMA	*Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*
AS/EA	*Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*
Bartol'd, Sochineniia	*Bartol'd, V. V. Sochineniia. Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoĭ literatury, 1963–77. 9 vols.*
CAC	*Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*
CAJ	*Central Asiatic Journal*

CAM	*Central Asia Monitor*
CAS	*Central Asian Survey*
EIr	*Encyclopedia Iranica*
EI²	*Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
IVAN Uz	*Institut vostokovedeniia Akademii nauk Uzbekistana (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan)*
JAH	*Journal of Asian History*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JWH	*Journal of World History*
PIA	*Papers on Inner Asia*
RIFIAS	*Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies*
Storey – Bregel	*Persidskaia literatura, bio-bibliograficheskii obzor. Moscow, 1972.*
SVR	*Sobranie vostochnykh rukopiseĭ Instituta vostokovedeniia AN UzSSR*
VI	*Voprosy istorii*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesselschaft*

Note on Translation and Transliteration

The transcription of Muslim names and terms from Arabic, Persian, and Turkic follows a modified scheme of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Place names are given usually in simplified transcription. The transcription of Russian names and terms follows the system of the Library of Congress.

In the excerpts from Tīmūr's biographies I tried to render the translations as smooth and flowing as possible, avoiding additions in brackets with the exception of introductory titles. All the segments in parentheses do appear in the original text (with no parentheses, of course) but should be understood, I believe, as the narrator's interjections and commentary, as he was trying to situate certain portions of the text in a historical context or to clarify their meaning for the audience. In addition, although the original text – like most eighteenth-century Central Asian texts – was devoid of punctuation marks and diacritics, I chose to present the biographies in a format appropriate to a modern work of fiction. All the dates in the translations are given in *hijri* years, but elsewhere remain in accordance with their accepted Gregorian usage.



Central Asia in the first half of the 18th century

Introduction

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Central Asia witnessed the enigmatic appearance of imaginary biographies about Tīmūr (Tamerlane), the famous conqueror of much of Central Eurasia three centuries earlier. These texts, authored anonymously in Persian and in Chaghatay Turkic at least three hundred years after Tīmūr's death, quickly gained enormous popularity. But despite their almost uninterrupted production from the eighteenth century until the present, they remain virtually unexplored by scholars and unfamiliar to people outside the region.[1]

Tīmūr's "heroic apocrypha," as I label this narrative cycle, consist of lengthy biographies of the hero, in prose, chronologically ordered from his birth to his death and presented in dozens of anecdotes. A "typical" manuscript begins with prophecies announcing Tīmūr's imminent birth, foretold by eminent Sufi shaykhs or by men of mythical, historical, and heroic significance, such as Alexander the Great. The story then develops through the course of Tīmūr's childhood, the young hero's first love, a daring prison rescue by his future bride, and the adventures that lead to his enthronement, including a memorable dream appearance by none other than the Prophet Muḥammad. In the course of the narrative, Tīmūr goes on pilgrimage to the graves of Qur'anic prophets while visiting the holy cities of Mecca and Jerusalem. He experiences countless adventures, battles, crises, and accomplishments, emerging triumphant from his campaigns in India, Russia, and the Ottoman lands.

The biographies are interspersed with many tales, ostensibly based on oral traditions, revealing the significance of different Muslim – more often than not, Sufi – authorities and their role in the formation of diverse peoples and communities in Central Asia.

[1] Central Asia is defined here as the western part of Inner Asia, stretching from the Caspian Sea in the west to Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) in the east. The book focuses on the territory of the three Central Asian khanates – Bukhara, Khiva, and Qoqand – that governed most of the region from the eighteenth through the early twentieth century (or 1876, for Qoqand). The center of gravity in this work is the khanate of Bukhara.

The choice of Tīmūr for the protagonist of these texts is particularly remarkable given that the conqueror's legacy is reputed to have departed from his homeland more or less a century after his death in the year 1405, only to find its prominence elsewhere: in Mughal India, Safavid Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and even in Europe. This alleged disappearance of Tīmūr's legacy is usually assigned to the nomadic invaders and migrants from the steppes who had taken over the Timurid domains in the early sixteenth century. The newcomers – a host of Turkic, predominantly Uzbek tribes led by descendants of Chinggis Khan, commonly known as the Abu'l-Khayrids – seemed to emphasize the break with the Timurids and also to downplay the image of the fierce conqueror. After all, Tīmūr and his descendants had been their mortal enemies for a while, even if they did cooperate on numerous occasions previously. Since most court propaganda under Uzbek and Chinggisid rule would have us believe that Tīmūr was no longer of any real consequence after the sixteenth century, historians simply assumed that they had to look for his legacy elsewhere, above all in places where his fame became instantly recognizable. Nevertheless, it seems that Tīmūr's spirit never really left the land of his birth even if his repute fell into relative dormancy until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Only then, at a time of profound transformation in Central Asian history, did the long-dead ruler come to life in one of the most unusual developments of the period. Moreover, although the appearance of his legendary biographies was probably the most compelling manner for his glorious return, it was not the only one.

My interest in these biographies began almost a decade ago, while conducting research in archives across Eurasia. As I was evaluating different eighteenth-century Central Asian sources, I began to encounter in the Turkish, Hungarian, German, Russian, Swedish, Uzbek, and Tajik manuscript catalogs more and more references to works bearing the generic title *Tīmūr-nāma* (or, *Book of Tīmūr*). Catalog entries hinted at similar contents for these works but at the same time cautioned the reader not to take these texts too seriously because they contained too many "folkloric and fantastic elements" and would therefore prove fairly useless to a self-respecting historian. Having failed to adhere to the catalogers' warnings, I investigated further and discovered that the descriptions of the manuscripts had much in common:

- The manuscripts in question are often extensive works, sometimes up to 500 folios (or 1,000 pages) long.
- All the manuscripts emerged in the eighteenth century and since, not earlier.
- All seem to share similar content.
- All are Central Asian creations: Contrary to many other works that had been produced originally in Central Asia and later copied and recopied in Iran,

India, and in the Ottoman Empire, the manuscripts in the various archives were authored or copied in Central Asia, not outside the region.
- The authors or compilers of these works are almost always anonymous and no patrons are acknowledged.

Closer inspection of many of the manuscripts themselves (or microfilms thereof) revealed a complicated story that ventures beyond a simple dismissal of the tales as "fantastic." On the one hand, events in these *Books of Tīmūr* do indeed oscillate between fact and fiction frequently, feature incredible encounters and exhibit many stylistic formulas that border on the hagiographical or the fabulous. On the other hand, Tīmūr's biographies maintained a very special and interesting relationship with works that have long been considered part of the conventional historical and literary canon in the Turco-Iranian world, most particularly with the extensive and rich historiographical legacy of the Timurids. From Yazdī's *Ẓafar-nāma* to Mīrkhwānd's *Raużāt al-ṣafā*, from Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū to Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī, the official histories are often referenced in Tīmūr's biographies, many chapter headings were copied directly from the court or dynastic chronicles, and most of the characters are historical figures even if their appearance is anachronistic or made up. *Books of Tīmūr* are therefore apocryphal in the sense that they are noncanonical yet aware of and manipulate the historical canon; they are imaginary and their authorship is unsubstantiated and debatable, yet they claim to be the source of truth. Upon further reflection, it seems that for many in the region, Tīmūr's "heroic apocrypha" served as Central Asia's popular history.

Tīmūr's legendary biographies have been ignored or omitted from nearly all scholarly considerations, partly because the texts seemed to elude traditional categorizations and classifications and therefore remained outside the clear demarcations of genre boundaries. Thus, surveys of literature (Persian, Turkic, Central Asian) tended to disregard the biographies, possibly because the latter were not considered – perhaps justifiably so – sophisticated specimens of literary triumph. Surveys of Central Asia's epic traditions would not have them either, most likely for lacking established "epic" criteria such as poetic qualities, certain stylistic standards, a clearer oral dimension, and a complex performance. When reviewing official historical sources for the study of Central Asia's history and culture, the picture becomes a little murkier. The first, rather brief scholarly evaluations of Tīmūr's legendary biographies estimated, for reasons that will become evident later in this book, that they had been written with the intent to produce a "real" history of Tīmūr and his successors. When it was realized that these biographies probably did not shed any new light on the fourteenth-century Tīmūr – even if they illuminate very brightly his eighteenth-century symbolic reincarnation – modern historical surveys discarded them as well. Ironically, most of the biographical manuscripts are listed in the History section of the different catalogs, occasionally accompanied by a warning to avoid using them as historical sources.

It is difficult to determine how many manuscripts of *Books of Tīmūr* still exist, partly because the texts have been cataloged under many different titles in addition to the aforementioned *Tīmūr-nāma*. It is also important to emphasize that not every manuscript bearing this rather generic label inevitably belongs to our biographical corpus. Thus, the celebrated "epic poem" *Tīmūr-nāma* by ʿAbdallāh Hātifī (d. 1521) is a very different type of composition, although this work, too, was known to the authors or compilers of the legendary biographies and served to inform a small part of their account. To further muddle up the picture, some of our manuscripts were also labeled *Ẓafar-nāma* (*Book of Victory*) in the catalogs, a title that has been most commonly identified with Yazdī's renowned oeuvre. This title has been used – particularly in manuscript catalogs and in historiographical surveys of Indo-Persian literature – to refer to Hātifī's *Tīmūr-nāma* as well. Lastly, Tīmūr's so-called autobiographies that appeared in India in the 1630s and became known by such appellations as the *Malfūẓāt-i Tīmūrī* (the "utterances" attributed to Tīmūr) and the *Tūzūkāt-i Tīmūrī* (Tīmūr's "institutes") also seem to have no direct relationship with the biographies discussed in this book.[2] These Indian "memoirs" of Tīmūr made their way to Central Asia only in the nineteenth century and their mandatory popularity in present-day Uzbekistan has been a relatively recent phenomenon.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that no scholarly work exists, in any language, that discusses Tīmūr's legendary biographies in depth, neither exploring individual manuscripts nor the corpus as a whole. Although it seems that specialists in Central Asian history have heard of these texts, they have remained largely unfamiliar with their contents and diversity. One may assume that the legendary character of the biographies warded off most scholars. Early on, several explorers and academics wrote them off as simple legends, unworthy of scholarly inquiry, and so there have been no attempts to deal with the texts at any level. In fact, the last time any of these manuscripts were visited at some length – apart from their catalog descriptions (mainly the ones in St. Petersburg, Tashkent, and Dushanbe) or the occasional reference – was over a century ago, when attempts were made by Russian Orientalists to speculate about the nature of some of these compositions. Other than the initial observations, stories that were borrowed randomly from manuscript fragments appeared sporadically in translation in the late nineteenth century and were treated as amusing anecdotes or folk tales, with little to no analysis. The translators did not know that the stories were taken from much more comprehensive texts – and certainly were unaware of their existence as part of a larger corpus – and thus were also unable to

[2] *The Mulfuzat Tīmūry, or, Autobiographical memoirs of the Moghul Emperor Tīmūr written in the Jagtay Turky language*, tr. Charles Stewart (London, 1830); for an example of the "Institutes," see the trilingual edition *Temur tuzuklari = Institutes of Temur = Les instituts de Temour* (Tashkent, 1996), one of numerous recent renditions of the work.

assess their significance.[3] As previously mentioned, Tīmūr's biographies are not brought up in general surveys of Persian or Turkic literature or even in more specific studies on the literary history of Central Asia; they have been equally ignored in bibliographical surveys or in essays devoted to the conqueror and to his legacy. We do not have a scholarly edition of any of the texts, not to mention a translation. Consequently, these works were also never thought of as belonging to one group and were never treated as a genre. In other words, they have been mostly ignored. Nevertheless, *Books of Tīmūr* endured as some of the most popular literary creations in Central Asia over the last three centuries and have been persistently copied and recopied, with relatively little interruption, from the eighteenth century until the present. We have dozens of manuscripts of varying lengths copied in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century, including an extensive lithograph of a manuscript from late-eighteenth-century Bukhara that was reproduced in Tashkent in 1912.[4] Manuscripts continued to circulate in Central Asia until the Soviet era, when their production seems to have died down, presumably under order of the authorities. However, they were not forgotten, and as soon as the Soviet state collapsed, a new and more concise rendition of one of the texts, in Uzbek, was published in Tashkent and printed in 200,000 copies at a very affordable price.[5] I am told that more editions are in their planning stage.

The Legendary Biographies of *Tamerlane* has several goals. The first is to introduce the corpus of manuscripts to the audience, both academic and lay, and to open the gates for further study of these fascinating texts. This volume represents a preliminary exploration and does not profess to offer the final word on this subject. Rather, it should serve as an invitation for more scholars to conduct their own investigations. Many of the stories narrated in the biographies will surely invoke a degree of familiarity from students of the literary and epic traditions of other cultures within and beyond the Muslim world, and I believe and hope that more comparative considerations may also encourage further scrutiny of these texts from different angles.

In introducing the origins of Tīmūr's biographies, this study also seeks to highlight certain aspects of Central Asia's history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, typically a dark hole in the knowledge of much of the scholarly community, as most publications tend to gloss over the period in question. The book draws attention to the changing agendas of political legitimacy, to the peculiar interaction between Sufis and *ʻulamāʼ*, the supposed tension

[3] H. Vambéry, "Eine legendäre Geschichte Tīmūrs," *ZDMG* (1897), 215–32; V. Klemm, "Predanie o rozhdenii Tamerlana," in *Turkestanskiĭ literaturnyĭ sbornik v pol'zu prokazhennykh* (St. Petersburg, 1900), 304–14.

[4] *Tīmūr-nāma*. *Kullīyāt-i farsi*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Qāsim ibn Mīrzā ʻAbd al-Khāliq Bukhārī (Tashkent, 1912).

[5] *Temurnoma: Amir Temur Koragon djangnomasi*, ed. P. Ravshanov (Tashkent, 1990).

between the *sharī'a* and so-called customary practices, as well as Central Asia's place in the history of the Muslim world. It was in the eighteenth century that a new vision in the region emerged – a vision that shaped Central Asia's cultural and political boundaries and its self-image and became the mode of cultural discourse that continued well into the Russian era. Moreover, the eighteenth century – and not the late twentieth century, as many mistakenly presume – also witnessed the origins for Central Asia's claim of Tīmūr as its model native champion.

Tīmūr's legendary biographies began as a product of the early eighteenth century, an era that has long been considered the nadir of Central Asia's decline and isolation. Although this perception has been challenged of late, I view the unequivocal dismissal of the 'decline' paradigm not only as premature but as simply erroneous. The crisis theme, displayed very clearly in Tīmūr's biographies, accompanies this book from start to finish and is at the center of its final chapter. Indeed, I believe that these texts emanated from and responded to a prevailing crisis. The harsh political and economic conditions in Central Asia in the first half of the eighteenth century, coupled with real and imagined fears and anxieties, also led, among other things, to a certain degree of introspection in some quarters. This looking inward was not so much a conscious effort to pontificate philosophically about the causes of the predicament, but rather began as an intuitive reaction that envisioned a glorious past, and through that past imagined a better present and future. Tīmūr's biographies mirror this perception, although the texts may not have been only passive reflectors of their surrounding culture and may have even actively affected that culture.[6] In recalling and retelling Tīmūr's story, Central Asians could discover a model for behavior; could debate and reevaluate the nature of kingship, the responsibilities of spiritual and communal leaders, and also the role of each and every one of them in society. Moreover, they could boast a whole new history of their own with a local hero who had shaped the world, a world that was far removed from their immediate reality. Tīmūr's legendary biographies also contributed to the initial formation of a more localized Central Asian identity, particularly among segments of the population in Mawarannahr (also known as Transoxiana), a region typically regarded as Central Asia's sedentary heartland.[7] Like most "identities," this one too is not easy to pin down. But it seems clear from reading *Books of Tīmūr* that something emerged from our texts: a sense of sharing a unique and accessible past coupled with a clearer understanding of a common fate. Equally important was the growing realization of what Central Asia was not, a realization that had been augmented by geopolitical as well as cultural and religious circumstances. Central Asia was no

[6] For more on this line of inquiry, see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[7] It is often overlooked that the area continued to house also a significant population of nomads well into the nineteenth century.

longer a part of a larger empire, and the presence of superior (technologically, militarily) and bigger political entities on its doorstep was becoming very real and was serving as a catalyst for profound changes.

Tīmūr's biographies, although born in the early eighteenth century, continued to be copied and reproduced for three hundred years. With each manuscript, new stories were collected and introduced, and others omitted. Audiences understood (and still understand) their meanings differently over time. The biographies even functioned as a rallying cry for different constituencies to support a particular cause or to unite against a common foe – for example, as motivation for or reflection of resistance to Russian imperialism in the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, the stories remained a source of entertainment, purveyors of didactic messages, and also increasingly imbued their audiences with a sense that they were a part of a historical continuum, a continuum that included explanations about their past, their beginnings, and their growth as a community.

The Plan of This Study

To an extent, this volume emulates the biographical style and is arranged in a similar fashion, treating the manuscripts of the *Books of Tīmūr* chronologically as if they were themselves the subject of a biography. The sequence presented here, sketching their existence from their point of origin until the present, is probably more orderly and somewhat less disjointed than the way the texts presented the story of their protagonist.

The first chapter, "The Origins and Usages of Tīmūr's Heroic Apocrypha," conducts the reader through the original introductions to the texts and the numerous questions that arise from these introductions. We examine the reasons given – or not given – in the manuscripts to explain their own purpose and existence; we look into the puzzling queries of provenance and authorship; and we consider the literary and oral traditions that the authors claimed as their sources and evidence. Such claims lead us into questions of genre and to what we regard as the apocryphal nature of the texts, particularly given the biographies' contention for associations with the older historical sources. At the same time, we do not discount the literary and ideological links that existed between these apocryphal writings and Sufi hagiographies, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the Prophets) and the Arabic *Sīra* (biography). Chapter 1 further introduces the structure and arrangement of the biographies – both as they were introduced in the texts and as they appear in actuality – including the authors' convenient summary of Tīmūr's life and their brief discussion of Tīmūr's lineage. We follow with an outline of the manuscript tradition that evolved from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, touching on the chain of transmission or the retelling of these stories, and the pertinent queries of popularity and patronage. Some of the most intriguing uncertainties concern the identity of the audiences for the biographies and the manner in which

these tales were conveyed to possible readers and listeners, perhaps by way of storytelling. The chapter hints at the role of storyteller guilds in the region, compared with similar institutions in other parts of the Muslim world. Finally, we explore how these works had been understood by the scholars who had first collected and read them, already in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the tradition of scholarship (or lack thereof) that built on the initial explorations.

The following chapters – "Tīmūr's Birth and Childhood," "Youth," "Inauguration and Kingship," and "Premonitions" – constitute a literary portrait of Central Asia's native hero and introduce the biographies with portions of text in English translation, complemented with brief introductions and commentary. Because the biographies were composed of numerous related and seemingly unrelated anecdotes, in many reproductions, the selection of translations reflects some of the different types of stories found in the works and also relies on different renditions of the stories from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. These four chapters present the different stages in Tīmūr's life, following the hero from his birth – or even a little earlier – through his busy youth, to his rise to prominence and his dreams and visions of things to come. My annotated translations of different segments in Tīmūr's life explore a variety of literary topoi, including characteristic forms of prophecy, dream sequences, symbols and miraculous contests, as well as other themes that occupied the authors and, undoubtedly, portions of Central Asian society in the eighteenth century. Throughout the biographical representations, recurring connections appear between the protagonist and diverse Muslim circles (Sufis, *'ulama'*, heretical groups and bearers of 'Alid charisma), as well as significant historical and mythical figures. The biographies illustrate integration and conflict of lineage and loyalties – for example, between the house of Tīmūr and the house of Chinggis Khan, and between the house of Tīmūr and prestigious local families – as well as the break between Chinggis Khan's successors and tribal leaderships, a potent characteristic of the eighteenth century. The crisis theme, expressed, among other things, by unrelenting apocalyptic dreams and visions, is also presented.

The final chapter presents the biographies' origins in their greater historical context, particularly within the political, social, and economic circumstances in the region in the first half of the eighteenth century. These circumstances were clearly reflected in our biographies, but also in a myriad of other sources, from dynastic histories to travelers' reports. The old notion of a region in "decline" was never thoroughly explained, and the recent trend in scholarship that assumes a crisis-free era is also discussed. This chapter explores in some depth the nature of the crisis and the development of different methods of coping with it in Central Asia: the emergence of new forms of political and religious symbolism, the impact of Islamic movements from India, the birth of a new political order, the surfacing of new centers of power, changes in the economy, and ultimately, for our present purpose, the appearance of our texts.

The eighteenth century – a period of immense transformation in the region; indeed a period that planted the seeds for future developments in Central Asia – is regrettably understudied. Perhaps because most of the important historical works are still in manuscript form and often difficult to access, or because of the period's reputation as an age of decline, there is hardly any work in English that discusses any aspect of the eighteenth century in depth. By exploring the major causes for the transformation, this chapter seeks to outline the crisis in the first half of the eighteenth century and to offer a perspective that may enable a better evaluation of the creation and the meaning of Tīmūr's legendary biographies, as well as the complicated legacy of the ruler in Central Asian history.

Tīmūr's Legacy in Central Asia[8]

The veneration of Tīmūr, Uzbekistan's national hero whose statues have replaced those of Soviet political and cultural champions in the squares of the young republic's towns, immediately attracted the attention of many visitors, scholars, and commentators. Observers were quick to recognize the significance of the impressive new monuments[9] and promptly evaluated them within the framework of new (or rather, old) insights into questions of national identity and related issues. In short, all the rhetoric of theory now found a new target, and the so-called cult of Tīmūr rapidly and perhaps paradoxically multiplied its audience.[10] As part of the fashionable inquiries, there were also those who rebuked the choice of Tīmūr for a national hero – why should the Uzbeks choose such a "ruthless" conqueror, indeed "one of history's worst mass murderers" as their symbol?[11] At the same time, even the skeptics acknowledged with a sympathetic nod that this was simply another characteristic of nation building. The only continuity with Central Asia's past that most analysts

[8] A preliminary version of this segment was published as Ron Sela, "A Different Reassessment of Tīmūr's Legacy in Central Asia," in *Emir Tīmūr ve Mirasi*, eds. Abdulvahap Kara and Ömer İşbilir (Istanbul, 2007), 23–31.

[9] Not to mention the roads, parks, and subway station named after him, as well as museums, funds and medals, portraits, films, novels, plays, the publication in Uzbek translation of several Timurid historical chronicles, and the colossal celebration of the 660th anniversary of Tīmūr's birth.

[10] Among the host of publications, see, for example, Ken Petersen, "Celebrating Amir Tīmūr," *CAM* 5 (1996), 14–15; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Nation-Building in Uzbekistan," *CAS* 15/1 (1996), 23–32; S. Pollock, "Historiography, Ethnogenesis and Scholarly Origins of Uzbekistan's National Hero: The Case of Tīmūr," in *Materials of the International Scientific Conference "Amir Temur and His Place in World History": 23–26 October, 1996 Tashkent*, 44–47; M. V. Shterenshis, "Approach to Tamerlane: Tradition and Innovation. Ending 600 Years of Historiography of Tīmūr," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 2 (2000), 193–200. A more informed approach was taken by Stephen Hegarty, "The Rehabilitation of Temur: Reconstructing National History in Contemporary Uzbekistan" *CAM* 1 (1995), 28–35. For the Uzbek "defense," see Muḥammad Ali, "A Few Words about Amir Tīmūr," *CAM* 3 (1996), 36–38.

[11] See, for example, Critchlow, "Uzbekistan's Prospects," *CAM* 4 (1998), 1; Lutz Kleveman, *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 169.

discovered was a succession and justification of the authoritarian state, demonstrated, in this case, within the context of post-Soviet power worship. Islam Karimov, it was claimed, Uzbekistan's president since 1990, was merely trying to be perceived as a contemporary mirror image (perhaps somewhat less affecting) of Tīmūr, assuring Uzbekistan's populace that Tīmūr's professed legacy of governance was the right path to follow.

Students of Central Asian history, or anyone else with an interest in the region, learn about Tīmūr by and large in the context of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries or that of the late twentieth century. We learn about Tīmūr's rise to power, his successful campaigns and triumphs throughout the Middle East, in northern India, and over the Ottoman Empire, and about his meetings with some of the most distinguished public figures of his time. Ibn Khaldūn, the noted historian and philosopher, even referred to Tīmūr after meeting him outside Damascus as "one of the greatest and mightiest of kings … favoured by Allah."[12] Many seem to be under the impression that after his death in 1405 and the demise of his house approximately a century later, Tīmūr – the man and the symbol – virtually disappeared from Central Asia and for nearly five hundred years found his prominence elsewhere: in Mughal India, Safavid Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and even in Europe.[13] True, many artists, artisans, and intellectuals, especially from the province of Khorasan, who had flourished under Timurid rule, still enjoyed a certain degree of patronage in the courts of Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent, and Balkh. In addition, several Timurid traditions, most notably in systems of administration and taxation, were still maintained and developed under the Timurids' successors.[14] However, Tīmūr's commanding legacy that had enjoyed such a forceful presence in Central Asia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries practically faded away. The Uzbeks, led by the Abu'l-Khayrids, descendants of Chinggis Khan, generally emphasized the break with the Timurids – their great rivals, at least in the beginning – and naturally downplayed the image of the fierce conqueror and, for some, the usurper of the throne. Since most, although not all, court propaganda under Uzbek and Chinggisid rule would have us believe that Tīmūr was no longer of any real consequence, historians simply assumed that they had to look for his legacy elsewhere.

Having lost the battle for Mawarannahr to the Uzbeks, Ẓahīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur (1483–1530), himself a descendant of Tīmūr (and Chinggis Khan), was forced to flee to Hindustan (India) where he would be celebrated

[12] Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane: their historic meeting in Damascus, 1401 A.D. (803 A.H.: a study based on Arabic manuscripts of Ibn Khaldun's "Autobiography": with a translation into English, and a commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952).

[13] See, for example, Stephen Frederic Dale, "The Legacy of the Timurids," *JRAS* Series 3, 8:I (1998), 43–58. Beatrice Manz also passes over most Tīmūr-related developments in sixteenth-nineteenth century Central Asia in her otherwise very valuable survey of Tīmūr's legacy. See Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses," *JWH* 13/1 (Spring 2002), 1–25.

[14] M. E. Subtelny, "Art and Politics in Early 16th Century Central Asia," *CAJ* 27 (1983), 121–48.

subsequently as the founder of the Mughal Empire. Bābur's descendants in Hindustan began to appropriate the legacy of Tīmūr, their great progenitor, by styling themselves "Gurganiya," following Tīmūr's self appellation of *gūrgān* (or *gürägän* – the royal son-in-law), a powerful position in Mongol hierarchy. They acknowledged Tīmūr as their primordial father on their seals, in their historiography, and even by assuming one of his many titles, *Ṣāḥib-qirān*.[15] Several Mughal emperors tried to reclaim Central Asian possessions (like the city of Balkh), and Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627) and Awrangzīb (r. 1658–1707) even contributed to the upkeep of Tīmūr's tomb in Samarqand.[16] The Mughals also adopted several traditions of statecraft from the Timurids, continued to maintain – similar to some of their ancestors – close ties with shaykhs of the Naqshbandi Sufi *ṭarīqa*, and of course imitated and built on Timurid artistic and architectural traditions, emulating Timurid flair for grandeur and building styles.[17] The Mughals were also inspired by Timurid historiographical traditions, particularly during the reigns of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and Shāh Jahān (r. 1628–1658). Of special significance was the famed "discovery" of Tīmūr's "autobiography" as well as his "advice" on proper governance. These compositions, supposedly authored by Tīmūr himself for his grandson in Chaghatay Turkic, were allegedly preserved in the library of the governor of Yemen, where they had been acquired, translated into Persian, and eventually presented to Shāh Jahān in the 1630s.[18]

Further to the west, the Safavids, rulers of Iran from 1501 to 1722, effectively espoused similar aspects of Timurid legacy. Safavid architecture, painting, and metalwork were greatly influenced by Timurid art and architecture; Safavid chronicles idealized the court of Ḥusayn Bayqara (d. 1506), the renowned sovereign of Khorasan, and Iranian court historiography was largely modeled on the great Timurid historical records, above all Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī's *Ẓafar-nāma*, the account most often cited by post-Timurid historians, and Mīrkhwānd's *Raużāt al-ṣafā*.[19] Safavid historiography celebrated Tīmūr

[15] *Ṣāḥib-qirān*, or "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction," was a title bestowed upon those lucky few who, according to tradition, were born during the fortunate conjunction between Jupiter and Venus. For most post-Timurid rulers in the Turco-Iranian world (and Hindustan) who had used the title for themselves – among them Shāh ʿAbbās, Shāh Jahān, Nādir Shāh, and many more – *ṣāḥib-qirān* invoked a direct association with Tīmūr himself. The term was also applied, sporadically, to other heroic figures such as Alexander the Great and Chinggis Khan. As we will see later, Tīmūr's legendary biographies offer a surprising explanation for the term and its origins.

[16] See, for example, R.C. Verma, "Mughal Imperialism in Transoxiana," *Islamic Culture* XXII (1948), 250–64; "The Great Mughals and Transoxiana," *Islamic Quarterly* II (1955), 47–60; R. Foltz, "The Mughal Occupation of Balkh, 1646–1647," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7:1 (1996), 49–61.

[17] See Dale, "Legacy," esp. 44–51; Irfan Habib, "Tīmūr in the Political Tradition and Historiography of Mughal India," *CAC* 3–4 (1997), 297–312.

[18] Habib, "Tīmūr," 303–09. See also Anke von Kügelgen's recent observations on Timurid autobiographies in her "Zur Authentizität des 'Ich' in Timuridischen Herrscherautobiographien," *AS/EA* 60/2 (2006), 383–436.

[19] See Sholeh Quinn, "The Timurid Historiographical Legacy: A Comparative Study of Persianate Historical Writing," in *Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the*

as the successor of Alexander the Great and Chinggis Khan and therefore also as a model for the rulers of Iran, from Shāh Ismāʿīl (d. 1524) to Shāh ʿAbbās (d. 1629), and even for the post-Safavid Turkmen ruler Nādir Shāh Afshār (d. 1747).[20] Tīmūr's own prized possessions, both real and fabricated, were sought and valued by world leaders. In one case, Shāh Ṣafī (r. 1629–1642) received Tīmūr's sword as a present. In addition to the reverence shown for his alleged memoirs in India or for his sword in Iran, the cloak of the Prophet Muḥammad, allegedly in Tīmūr's treasury, also became an object of desire. According to an Afghan historian, Tīmūr brought the cloak of the Prophet to Samarqand from his campaigns in "ʿIrāq-i ʿArab." He built a structure called Khoja Khiżr to house it, appointed sayyids to supervise the shrine, and established an endowment (*waqf*) to pay the shrine keepers. The cloak was then moved to Bukhara and later to Juzun (also known as Faydabad). Finally, Aḥmad Shāh recovered the revered cloak and arranged to bring it to Qandahar.[21]

Even in the Ottoman Empire, once the scene of bitter rivalry with Tīmūr, the historian Mustafā ʿAlī (d. 1600) called for an objective reevaluation of Tīmūr's career and used Tīmūr to criticize those Ottoman rulers who had strayed from what he considered the proper path. Tīmūr was described by ʿAlī as a universal Muslim monarch, thereby enjoying a considerable advantage over the Ottoman sultans, portrayed as players in a limited regional setting. Tīmūr was also perceived as a capable integrator of Islamic law with dynastic laws modeled on an idealized "code of the steppe" (*yasa*).[22] In the Empire, "the scholars, and the literary language of the Timurid domains played as essential role in the development of Ottoman culture."[23] More or less at the same time, or even a little earlier in the sixteenth century, Tīmūr emerged as a celebrated figure also in Europe (and later in America), commanding considerable romantic appeal.[24] The focus of many plays, operas, and novels, Tīmūr has

Safavid Period, ed. Andrew J. Newman (Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, 2003), 19–32; Maria Szuppe, "L'évolution de l'image de Timour et des Timourides dans l'historiographie safavide du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle," *CAC* 3–4 (1997), 313–31; John E. Woods, "The Rise of Timurid Historiography," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46 (1987), 81–106.

[20] Sholeh A. Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles," *Iranian Studies* 31/2 (Spring 1998), 149–58.

[21] Robert D. McChesney, *Waqf in Central Asia: Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1480–1889* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 225–26.

[22] The *yasa* was probably an evolving and adaptable set of commands issued by Chinggis Khan, and by other leaders after him, that formed an important part of the Mongol code of conduct, particularly in matters pertaining to court protocol, hunting, migration, and taboos. Tīmūr's interpretation and upholding of the *yasa* was known as the Timurid *törä*. On the relationship between the *yasa* and the *törä*, see Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, 2007), 15–29.

[23] Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 276.

[24] Vincent Fourniau, "Quelques aspects du thème timouride dans la culture française du XVIè au XIXè siècle," *Oriente Moderno* 2 (1996), 283–304; Marcel Brion (ed.), *Tamerlan* (Paris, 1963), 372–74.

been starring in literary and musical compositions by the likes of Christopher Marlowe, Georg Friedrich Händel, Goethe, Edgar Allen Poe, Mario Vargas Llosa, and others. This fascination with Tīmūr also served to inform the many modern biographies written about him, particularly in Europe.[25]

What all these historical phenomena have in common is their existence *outside* of Tīmūr's direct sphere of influence, his native Central Asian lands. After all, Tīmūr was born near Shahr-i Sabz, spent his youth in the environs of Bukhara, made Samarqand the capital of his vast empire, and survived in popular imagination as the native hero of contemporary Uzbekistan. Moreover, the physical landscape of the region is studded with the monumental construction projects that he and his descendants had sponsored, monuments that continued to tower above both kings and ordinary folk in Central Asia for centuries to come. What, then, happened to Tīmūr's legacy in his native lands in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries? How did many of his real and imagined beneficiaries in Central Asia cope with or respond to his bestowed heritage?

Attempts to study Tīmūr's legacy in Central Asia have not been very fruitful due to scholars' general unfamiliarity with the Central Asian sources of the post-Timurid era. Consequently, we do not learn about Tīmūr in a Central Asian context from the sixteenth until the twentieth century. Only then – according to modern scholarship – and more particularly in the 1910s and 1920s, was Tīmūr's fame rekindled as various cultural groups were named after him, and poets and playwrights wrote dramas appealing to Tīmūr's spirit to "restore Turkistan's greatness."[26] Especially vocal was ʿAbdorauf Fitrat (1886–1938), a prominent reformist, political activist, and author, whose 1918 historical drama, *Tīmūrning saghanasi* (*Tīmūr's mausoleum*), served as a uniting call for (a limited number of) Central Asian nationalists.[27] Efforts to invoke or reject the hero (or villain, depending on one's directed moods and political agendas) continued during the Soviet era and moved along the continuum of appreciating Tīmūr's military prowess and cultural patronage to rejecting his reputation as a despicable barbaric chieftain. During and after World War II, interest in Tīmūr grew, perhaps also with the famed (and filmed) unearthing of his tomb by Mikhail Gerasimov in order to recreate the conqueror's portrait based on his exhumed skull. Publications by A. Iu. Iakubovskii, for example, featured the above-mentioned dichotomies (cruel tyrant versus able strategist) in the

[25] The biographies typically centered on the conqueror's life in his day and did not include such accounts as the present study handles. Among the many biographies, see, for example, Jean-Paul Roux, *Tamerlan* (Paris, 1991). The legendary biographies have also been absent from anthologies of sources dedicated to Tīmūr's life and legacy, such as Rustan Rakhmanaliev's *Tamerlan: epokha, lichnost', deianiia* (Moscow, 1992).

[26] See Edward Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present: A Cultural History* (Stanford, 1990), 242–48. See also the more recent summary in Manz, "Tamerlane's Career," 16–20.

[27] Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 174.

popular perception of Tīmūr.[28] Ibragim Muminov's 1968 publication about the fourteenth-century ruler, which, among other things, accepted Tīmūr's "autobiography" as genuine, aroused the suspicion of Soviet authorities.[29] In its fear of any increase in "local nationalism," the Soviet government criticized harshly attempts to turn Tīmūr into a great champion, and readers were reminded that Tīmūr's policies "condemned the region to backwardness."[30] Tīmūr could not simply be ignored, of course, and he continued to live in most textbooks about the region's history. It was clear, however, that any pronounced reverence for the conqueror would be met with restrictions. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, as noted earlier, Tīmūr and Timurid legacy resumed their role in shaping Uzbek national awareness (an awareness that had begun prior to the collapse of the USSR) and in the construction of Uzbekistan's national mythology.[31]

Given Tīmūr's relative absence from Central Asian historiography from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, it may come as a surprise that Tīmūr's supposed recent "revival" was neither a Soviet phenomenon nor a post-Soviet curiosity, but rather a long-standing practice that has been evoked in the region at every junction of political uncertainty, at least since the eighteenth century, and that has been serving Central Asian communities for generations. Tīmūr's resurgence in the eighteenth century and his legacy during the centuries of proposed silence will occupy the rest of our introductory remarks.

When the armies of Muḥammad Shïbānī Khan (1451–1510) swept across Mawarannahr early in the sixteenth century, they defeated the ailing Timurid states, vanquished their allies, and absorbed their memory. For two hundred years, the Shïbanids and their successors, the Ashtarkhanids,[32] cultivated a historiography that naturally aimed at securing their own place on the world stage and downplaying the significance of their predecessors. The newcomers were celebrating the restoration of the Chinggisid ideal, namely the principle

[28] On Iakubovskii and his alleged agendas, see Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks*, 241–45, and Yuri Bregel's response in his *Notes on the Study of Central Asia* (Bloomington, IN: RIFIAS 1996, *PIA* 28), 47–48.

[29] Ibragim Muminov, *Rol' i mesto amira Tīmūra v istorii Sredneĭ Azii* (Tashkent, 1968); Manz, "Tamerlane's Career," 19.

[30] Eli Weinerman, "The Polemics between Moscow and Central Asians on the Decline of Central Asia and Tsarist Russia's Role in the History of the Region," *The Slavonic and European Review* 71/3 (July 1993), 471.

[31] Maria E. Subtelny, "The Timurid Legacy: A Reaffirmation and a Reassessment," *CAC* 3–4 (1997), 14–17. Timurid legacy was much more highly regarded than the Shïbanid one, partly because of evident Timurid "presence" in the form of existing artifacts and impressive architecture, but also, to a certain extent, due to the Shïbanids' late arrival into the region and the Soviets' wish to confer on the Uzbeks more "glorious" ancestors. Subtelny suggests that the nomadic character associated with the Shïbanids made them unpopular and somewhat inferior to the sedentary population in Soviet eyes.

[32] The Ashtarkhanid dynasty ruled the khanate of Bukhara from 1598 to 1756 (or 1785), and was also known as the Janid or the Tuqay-Timurid dynasty.

that has been prevalent in the region's politics since the 1220s whereby only Chinggis Khan's male descendants had the legitimate claim to the throne. The question of political legitimation had been central and troubling to many, not only in the sixteenth century but also to Tīmūr himself as well as his sons and grandsons.[33] To recap a substantial amount of scholarship on the topic, although Tīmūr was not a descendant of Chinggis Khan, he did not cast off the Chinggisid ideal so easily and found ways to bind himself to his celebrated predecessor. First he married Sarāy Mulk, a Chinggisid princess who also plays a magnificent supporting role in the legendary biographies, and began to style himself *gurgān* (royal son-in-law).[34] He then appointed Chinggisids to serve as puppet khans with little ceremonial authority, in keeping with established practice. Timurid historiography also promoted the story of Tīmūr and Chinggis Khan's presumed shared ancestry, wherein Tīmūr was a descendant of Qachulai, brother of Qabūl Khan – Chinggis Khan's great-grandfather.[35] And yet, Tīmūr was careful not to assimilate other Chinggisid properties such as taking up the title "khan" or performing the ceremony of having himself elevated to kingship on a white piece of felt.[36] In describing Tīmūr's inauguration in 1369–1370, one of his biographers, Sharaf al-Dīn ʻAlī Yazdī, made no reference to Chinggis Khan as a source of inspiration for the ceremony or as a source of legitimation for Tīmūr's kingship. Accordingly, Yazdī made no mention of the performance of the elevation ritual (which, it is plausible to assume, did not take place).[37]

Naturally, for the Uzbeks and their Chinggisid leaders, Tīmūr's reputation was not easy to ignore. Some of them even welcomed, with certain limitations, the opportunity to associate themselves with the famed ruler. In 1525, for example, ʻAbdallāh Naṣrallāhī, charged with the authorship of the chronicle *Zubdat al-āthār*[38] for Sultan Muḥammad b. Söyünch Khoja

[33] And to the compilers of his legendary biographies, as will become evident later.

[34] Years later, in 1397, Tīmūr would marry another Chinggisid princess, a daughter of the Moghul Khan Khiżr Khoja.

[35] On Tīmūr's legitimation process, see, for example, M. Haider, "The Sovereign in the Timurid State (XIV-XVth Centuries)," *Turcica* 8/2 (1976), 61–82; Beatrice F. Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21/1–2 (1988), 105–22 (110–11); John E. Woods, "Tīmūr's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, eds. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press 1990), 85–125; John E. Woods, *The Timurid Dynasty* (Bloomington, IN: RIFIAS 1990, *PIA* 14). Tīmūr's genealogy, proclaiming the shared ancestry with Chinggis Khan, was also engraved on his tombstone and in the foundation inscription of Samarqand's great mosque.

[36] The elevation on the felt rug, held at its corners by the four most important dignitaries in the realm, had been the culmination of the inauguration of Inner Asian rulers for nearly two millennia. On the history of the ritual and the many diversions from its prescribed practice, see my *Ritual and Authority in Central Asia: The Khan's Inauguration Ceremony* (Bloomington, IN: RIFIAS 2003, *PIA* 37).

[37] Sharaf al-Dīn ʻAlī Yazdī, *Zafarnāma*, ed. Muḥammad Abbāsī (Tehran, 1957), vol. I, 155–60.

[38] For more on the author and his work, see Devin DeWeese, "A note on manuscripts of the *Zubdat al-āthār*, a Chaghatay Turkic History from sixteenth-century Mawarannahr," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 6 (1994), 96–100.

Khan, his patron and ruler of Tashkent,[39] proudly portrayed his master's inspiring pedigree: a paternal descent from the great Mongol conqueror, and a maternal lineage stretching back to the hero of this book. The skillful author also invoked the coveted title *ṣāḥib-qirān* ("Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction") to help make his point as unambiguous as possible. "May it be clear to the people of the world," wrote Naṣrallāhī, "that the sultans of the Turks are [descended] from two *ṣāḥib-qirān*s: One of them is Chinggis Khan and the other – Tīmūr Bek. And since the origins of His Majesty the Sultan of Sultans[40] reach back to those two, it is necessary to write about his ancestors." The author then traced the roots of his patron on his father's side back to Chinggis Khan through the Mongol rulers of the Qïpchaq steppe, and outlined his master's illustrious lineage on his mother's side back to Tīmūr (Sultan Muḥammad was the grandson of the "Queen of Sheba-like" Rābi'a Sultan Begïm, daughter of Ulugh Beg, Tīmūr's grandson). Naṣrallāhī concluded, appropriately, that it was hoped that since his patron had been the heir to these two *ṣāḥib-qirān*s, "God would apportion their countries to him."[41]

At first glance, one may consider the integration of the two illustrious lineages in line with a tradition that had begun already a century earlier with Tīmūr's prolific biographer, Sharaf 'Alī Yazdī, and the alleged covenant – the shared ancestry of Tīmūr and Chinggis Khan – that he had invoked. A more immediate candidate to boast such a glorious lineage was Bābur, the Timurid prince, who, by the year 'Abdallāh b. M. Naṣrallāhī was completing his work (1525), was well on his way to try and overpower northern India.[42] At the same time, Naṣrallāhī's approbation of Tīmūr may have been part of his education and training and not only a fulfillment of his patron's request. The author had worked as a scribe – probably educated in the tradition established, in part, by Yazdī – in the service of the Timurid princes of Balkh before he was forced to flee from the wrath of the Safavids, the new contenders for control over Khorasan. He was part of a substantial movement of men-of-letters who had found their livelihood in Timurid service and had fled northeast from Khorasan in fear of the invading Shi'ite rulers and their Turkmen armies. These refugees were to influence much of the intellectual and cultural undertakings, from art, to history writing, to administrative practices, in

[39] Sultan Muḥammad was Muḥammad Shïbānī Khan's cousin.

[40] A flattering reference to Naṣrallāhī's patron, Söyünch Khoja.

[41] 'Abdallāh b. M. Naṣrallāhī, *Zubdat al-athar* (Misr, 1934), 5–6. My translation from the Chaghatay of a portion of this work has recently appeared in the anthology that I coedited with Scott C. Levi, *Islamic Central Asia: an Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 203–08. The question of Tīmūr's identity as one of the "Sultans of the Turks" will be addressed later.

[42] However, Bābur was a descendant of Chinggis Khan on his mother's side and of Tīmūr on his father's side.

Mawarannahr and beyond, although their activities as part of a social stratum are yet to be studied.[43]

Featuring Tīmūr as an important pillar in their genealogical edifice did not become common practice for the Chinggisids in this new era. Indeed, it seems that sponsorship of literary production and other cultural accomplishments concerning Tīmūr's memory and championing him as a protagonist in his own right were relatively limited. Even his monuments did not experience any particular developments in this period.[44] In other words, for two hundred years, there were no literary works produced in Central Asia that were centered directly on Tīmūr's character, and his legacy seems to have been put aside. In the scholarly arena, the scene was left open for an analysis of Central Asian political and cultural sources of inspiration in line with the supposed tension and competition between the *sharī'a* and the *yasa*.

Although glimpses of Tīmūr may be found in Central Asian official dynastic histories from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, court propaganda seemed to be more comfortable with displaying the break with the Timurids, occasionally exhibiting some respect for Tīmūr, but not much more. Thus, for example, when the Manghït ruler Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan (d. 1758) conquered Shahr-i Sabz, he made a special visit to the Aq Saray palace to pay homage to Tīmūr. Different sites connected to the ruler, particularly in Shahr-i Sabz and in Samarqand, continued to serve as pilgrimage destinations well into the twentieth century.[45]

But beyond such brief allusions, probably the main official story that concerned Tīmūr, albeit indirectly, was the development of the narrative cycle of the Golden Cradle (*Altun Beshik*) by the Uzbek tribal dynasty of the Ming, centered in Qoqand in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to the story, before Bābur fled Ferghana to India, he had left behind a son hidden in a golden cradle. The boy, aptly named after the container in which he had been deposited, was recovered by the Uzbek Mings and gradually came

[43] In the intellectual sphere, such refugees included, among others, Mullā Shādī, Kamāl al-Dīn Binā'ī, and perhaps the most well-known, Zayn al-Dīn Vāṣifī (about Vāṣifī, see, for example, A. N. Boldyrev, *Zainaddin Vasifi: tadzhikskii pisatel' XVI v.: opyt tvorcheskoi biografii*, Stalinabad, 1957). See also A. Schimmel, "Some Notes on the Cultural Activity of the First Uzbek Rulers," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 8 (1960), 149–66; M. E. Subtelny, "Art and Politics."

[44] See for example, Robert McChesney's treatment of the Gur-i Amir, Tīmūr's mausoleum, and the relatively little attention it received from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. (Robert D. McChesney, "Tīmūr's Tomb: Politics and Commemoration." A Lecture delivered at the *Tenth Annual Central Eurasian Studies Conference*, Indiana University, Bloomington, April 12, 2003, and published under the auspices of the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University).

[45] Ṣadr-i Ziyā related that upon his appointment to the position of qazi in Shahr-i Sabz in 1909, he made his way to Samarqand to obtain a blessing by visiting the Shāh-i Zinda complex in the city. While there, he offered the *Fātiḥa* (the first Sūra of the Quran) to "the Great Amīr, the Conqueror of the World, Ṣāḥib-Qirān Amīr Tēmūr-i Gurgān." Sadr Ziya', *The Personal History of a Bukharan Intellectual: The Diary of Muḥammad-Sharīf-i Ṣadr-i Ẓiyā*, ed. Edward A. Allworth et al. (Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, 2004), 251.

to be regarded as their great progenitor.[46] Such a story helped, it is assumed, legitimize Ming rule in Qoqand through the natural association of Bābur with Tīmūr, and perhaps also with Chinggis Khan. Why the Ming rulers would choose to cultivate such a story of origin is a subject for another discussion. We may hypothesize that the Mings wished to find a heroic figure that would provide a model for their own rule, posit an alternative to the seat of central power in Bukhara, and perhaps also strengthen potential ties with India, building on mutual familial associations.

To these eighteenth-century, formal Tīmūr-related developments we may add the attempts by historians of Khiva, under the tribal dynasty of the Qonrgrats, to embrace and even emulate Timurid historiography and Timurid modes of legitimation.[47] More recently, scholars also began to explore the high interest in Timurid culture in Khiva beyond the realm of historiography, and also the tendencies, evident in both Khiva and Qoqand, to imitate the literary and poetic styles of the Timurids.[48]

Interestingly, the less official sources (popular literature, hagiographies, and travel accounts) paint a different picture. One of the most extraordinary stories that appeared in the notes of every foreign traveler to the region in the nineteenth century described a large marble stone known as the Kök Tash in Samarqand's citadel. Every Central Asian ruler presumably obtained his legitimate rank on the occasion of his accession to power by sitting on that particular stone. Most visitors associated this coronation stone with Tīmūr's old, fourteenth-century throne, and according to some reports, the stone was imbued with supernatural attributes and "would not allow a false khan to approach it."[49] In fact, Central Asian rulers after the middle of the sixteenth century were always enthroned in the capital, Bukhara, and not in Samarqand, although we do have reports from the eighteenth and nineteenth century of khans opting to perform the ceremony in Samarqand in addition to Bukhara in order to appease different constituencies. The appearance of the Kök Tash accounts demonstrates, among other things, how the eighteenth century provided an opportunity for some in Central Asia to contest the traditional power

[46] T. K. Beĭsembiev, *"Ta'rikh-i Shakhrukhi" kak istoricheskiĭ istochnik* (Alma-Ata, 1987), 83–84; T. K. Beisembiev, "Legenda o proiskhozhdenii kokandskikh khanov kak istochnik po istorii ideologii v Srednei Azii (na materialakh sochinenii kokandskoi istoiografii," *Kazakhstan, Sredniaia i Tsentral'naia Aziia v XVI-XVIII vv*. (Alma-Ata, 1983), 94–105.

[47] See Yuri Bregel, "Tribal Tradition and Dynastic History: The Early Rulers of the Qongrats According to Munis," *Asian and African Studies* 16/3 (1982), 392–97.

[48] Aftandil Erkinov, "Timurid Mannerism in the Literary Context of Khiva under Muḥammad Rakhim-Khan II (Based on the Anthology Majmu'a-yi Shu'ara-yi Firuz-Shahi)," *Bulletin of the International Institute for Central Asian Studies* 8 (2008), 58–65; and by the same author, "Les timourides, modeles de legitime et les recueils poetiques de Kokand," in *Ecrit et culture en Asie centrale et dans le monde turko-iranien x-xix siecles*, eds. Francis Richard and Maria Szuppe (Paris, 2008), 285–330.

[49] Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan; notes of a journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (Oxford, 1876), 255.

structures in local and regional politics. The Kök Tash innovation was actually a remarkable attempt by tribal rebels to turn Samarqand into a center of authority through the association of the city and one of its major symbols, Central Asia's "Coronation Stone," with Tīmūr, the most powerful tribal, non-Chinggisid military commander in the region's history.[50]

Naturally, Tīmūr was an obvious candidate for many more stories and oral traditions, and travelers in the nineteenth century continuously emphasized hearing tales about the famous conqueror. Joseph Wolff, for example, reported the arrival at his campsite of people from Samarqand, who "conversed about Tamerlane, as though he were dead yesterday." Wolff mentioned a well-known anecdote in the region whereby people "preferred in general Tamerlane to Ghengis Khan, for they say of Ghengis Khan that he knew how to conquer a world – that he was a Jehaan-Geer, a world-taker; but Tamerlane was not only a Jehaan-Geer, but also a Jehaan-Dar, a world-holder."[51] Wolff also reiterated stories communicated to him and to his party during an evening gathering – the members of the caravan were seated in a circle on the ground by the fire – by a "derveesh from Samarcand" about "the deeds of Tīmūr, also called Tamerlane; how he build at Sabz-Awar a tower of skulls of men; of his defeating Bayazid; of his entrance into Samarcand; of the festivities of triumph which he gave at Samarcand; of his death at Atrar when just on the point to march against China."[52]

Different stories and oral traditions about Tīmūr had been circulating in and outside Central Asia for centuries, under one guise or another and among different constituencies. The most famous cycle was probably Tīmūr's alleged autobiographical account that had emerged first in India and within a couple of centuries spread also to other areas of the Muslim world. Somewhat similar accounts were known in other parts of the greater region of Central Asia, especially in the Tatar lands of the Russian empire, where legendary materials about Aksak Tīmūr (Tīmūr the Lame) often were grouped together with tales of Chinggis Khan.[53] Several Tīmūr-related stories may have been influenced

[50] Ron Sela, "The 'Heavenly Stone' (Kök Tash) of Samarqand: A Rebels' Narrative Transformed," *JRAS* 17/1 (2007), 21–32.

[51] Joseph Wolff, *Narrative of a Mission to Bokhara, in the Years 1843–1845*, vol. 2, 104. Twenty-five years later, in his description of Samarqand, Vámbéry repeated Wolff almost to the letter (without acknowledgment): "Timour is spoken of in Samarcand as if the news of his death had only just arrived from Otrar." See Arminius Vámbéry, *Travels in Central Asia* (1864), 245. (Grigoriev's devastating critique of Vámbéry's work – first published in *Izvestiia Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, vol. 4, 1869, 305–08, and later appended, in English translation, to Schuyler's *Turkistan* – demonstrated that Vámbéry probably never visited Samarqand.)

[52] Wolff, *Narrative*, vol. 2, 153–54.

[53] Such as the late seventeenth-century *Daftar-i Chingīz Nāma*. See V.A. Panov, *Avtogbiografiia Tīmūra: bogatyrskie skazaniya o Chingis-Khane i Aksak-Temire* (Moscow, 1934), 219–40; M. A. Usmanov, *Tatarskie istoricheskie istochniki XVII-XVIII vv* (Kazan, 1972), 111–14; Mária Ivanics and Mirkasym Abdulakhatovich Usmanov, *Das Buch der Dschingis-Legende = Däftär-i Cingiz-namä* (Szeged, 2002).

by Central Asian traditions that had been in circulation since the sixteenth century.[54]

However, in Central Asia proper, no full-scale, written narrative cycle about Tīmūr emerged until the eighteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as Russian colonialism was making its presence felt forcefully across the region and European travel to the area grew substantially, more and more tales and legends about the fourteenth-century conqueror surfaced. But beyond the stories and rumors that made their way into the diaries and reports of the foreign travelers, a much more dramatic development in Tīmūr's legacy was the noticeable surge in literary production surrounding his figure in the early eighteenth century, and the growth in Tīmūr's "heroic apocrypha," the focus of this volume. It is safe to estimate that this narrative cycle, consisting of long, mostly imaginary biographies of Tīmūr, chronologically ordered from his birth to his death, became one of the high points of popular literature in Central Asia from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The unfortunate dismissal of these stories as simple legends prevented scholars from realizing that through these works of literature, Tīmūr became a compelling symbol for many Central Asians, especially in the region of Mawarannahr. The biographies were neither a fraction of a larger, general history, nor a section of a history dedicated to the Timurids, as had been thought initially. They were devoted solely to the retelling of Tīmūr's life and deeds. Some of the content of these works, as the compilers themselves acknowledged, relied on previous written histories, although most of the stories that appeared in these manuscripts were novel contributions that possibly originated in oral traditions. Among them were anecdotes concerning Tīmūr's associations with holy men, such as Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, Sayyid Ata, Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī, and many others, or with prominent figures from days long gone, such as Alexander the Great or the eleventh-century philosopher and poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw. More importantly, Tīmūr's legendary biographies essentially provided a set of guiding principles for the Islamic community of Central Asia at a time of crisis. Authored in an age when the world around its audience had already contracted (but at the same time became more uncertain), these legendary biographies instructed the audience on matters of legitimate authority, on the ideal type of relationships between religion and state, and also on the understanding of the individual's place in a Central Asian Muslim society. Tīmūr's "Heroic apocrypha" endured as one of the most popular literary creations in Central Asia in the last three centuries. The recent emergence of the fourteenth-century ruler as a triumphant native hero of the Republic of

[54] Allen J. Frank, *Islamic historiography and "Bulghar" identity among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia* (Leiden, 1998), 15–16. The connection between the Central Asian stories and their rendering in the Tatar context is worthy of further exploration. In his excellent study, Frank also demonstates the differences in Tīmūr's representations in the *Daftar-i Chingīz Nāma* and in the later *Tawārikh-i Bulghāriyya*, as well as the commentaries on Tīmūr by later Tatar and Bulghar intellectuals.

Uzbekistan, a potential restorer of prestige, and a rallying symbol was not a random occurrence. Central Asia’s claim of Tīmūr as its native champion, a claim that has been largely explored only in its post-Soviet context, began three hundred years earlier, in the early days of the eighteenth century, and has continued ever since.

CHAPTER 1

The Origins and Usages of Tīmūr's Heroic Apocrypha

Tīmūr's legendary biographies survive in dozens of manuscripts in archives across Central Asia, in Russia, and in Europe. Their sheer number (and size), and the fact that the "mother" text that gave birth to all the other copies and renditions of the work has yet to be discovered, make the portrayal of a representative manuscript an unusually challenging task. However, given the nature of this study, an attempt to sketch a partial depiction of what seems to be a typical manuscript, based primarily on what the manuscripts themselves tell us, may serve as a stepping stone for future explorations. We therefore open with the author's foreword in which he explains his work and his perception of Tīmūr's legacy, and then proceed with discussions of the manuscript tradition, addressing questions of popularity and genre, and reviewing the relevant scholarship.[1]

The Prologues: Tīmūr's Biographies Introduce Themselves

In most manuscripts, the introduction opens with the indispensable invocation of the *basmallah* ("In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful") and the doxology that follows, praising God, His creation, and His messenger the Prophet Muḥammad. The introductory remarks list the celebrated Muslim prophets, including Ādam, Ibrāhīm, Sulaymān, Nūḥ, Mūsā, and 'Īsā,[2] ending, naturally, with the "seal of the prophets" Muḥammad and offering praises to his companions as well. Each mention of a prophet is followed by a eulogizing verse. The reader is then introduced to the four "rightly-guided" caliphs who had governed the early Muslim polity (from 634 to 661) – each is followed by a verse of tribute – beginning with Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and concluding with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. 'Alī, Muḥammad's cousin (*amm-zāda*), is welcomed by the longest verse.

[1] For the present, I refer to the biographies' creator as "the author," even if his identity (or whether we should refer to an author or to several authors) and his precise task (authorship, editorship, compilation) remain uncertain.

[2] Adam, Abraham, Solomon, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.

The introduction's aim was not to simply follow a chronological order of a Muslim perception of the history of the world. Rather, its goal was to stress the significance of these two groups of men whose tasks had been to guarantee the integrity of the Muslim community, the observation of the *shar'ia*, and the execution of power by a just leadership: on the one hand, the prophets (*anbiyā'*) and messengers (*rusul*), and on the other hand, the kings (*pādshāhān*) and sultans (*salāṭin*). This theme, emphasizing a duality of power, is not limited to the introduction but is manifest throughout the biography. Although reflections over the complementary and competing relationship between the "spiritual" and the "temporal" had existed in Islam since more or less its inception,[3] here it may be seen also as a recommendation – that remains too abstract at this point in the manuscript – for proper governance in an era (the eighteenth century) that seems to have strayed off the prescribed path.

The most prominent of the "sultans and *khaqan*s" who, throughout the history of mankind, had been worthy of special mention are Iskandar Dhū'l-Qarnayn[4] and, of course, Tīmūr. In several manuscripts Iskandar is not accorded more than a few lines. In others, however, a break of sorts appears in the narrative and skips a more thorough description of Dhū'l-Qarnayn's qualities and possibly additional materials. Tīmūr, conversely, is introduced with numerous titles and attributes, including *sulṭān-ghāzī* (sultan and warrior for the faith), *amīr* (commander), *pādshāh* (king), *ṣāḥib-qirān* (lord of the auspicious conjuction), and even *quṭb al-dunyā wa'l-dīn* (axis of the world and religion). The author then stresses that the "blessed origins of both [Tīmūr and Iskandar] reach back to Yāfith ibn Nūḥ,"[5] conferring on the two leaders a shared place in the Muslim view of the origins of Mankind and its restoration after the Flood.[6] The author continues to celebrate, in verse, Alexander's

[3] Among the many studies on such questions, I would mention the attempts to answer whether the early caliphs had been the prime wielders also of religious authority (Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); was Islamic society more prone toward multilayered and flucuating demonstrations of leadership, as the Buyid case seems to suggest? (Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, London, New York: I. B. Tauris, revised edition, 2001); and what were the limits of individuals and institutions in interpreting and implementing the Qur'anic dictum of "Commanding the right and forbidding the wrong"? (Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[4] Dhū'l-qarnayn, "the two-horned," is commonly interpreted as Alexander the Great's designation in the Qur'an (18:83–98). On the identification of the name, see Richard Stoneman, "Alexander the Great in the Arabic tradition," in *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis, et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 7–9. Alexander was invested with powers to traverse the earth and to build a wall to protect mankind from Gog and Magog (Yājūj and Mājūj). We will return to this story in Chapter 5.

[5] Japheth, son of Noah.

[6] Cf. with a story attributed to al-Kisā'ī, the medieval compiler of copious traditions about the Muslim prophets, whereby Nūḥ uttered a prophecy predicting that Yāfith's descendants would be kings and heroes and the descendants of Sām (Shem) would be prophets. See also B. Heller-[A. Rippin], "Yāfith," in *EI²* (online).

and Tīmūr's achievements in world conquest, stating that "the images of their success have not remained undrawn on the tablet of destiny." This part of the introduction ends with the mourning over Tīmūr's death "in the year 807 [A.H.], on the seventeenth of the month of Sha'bān, during the evening prayer, on Tuesday, on the border of Otrar."[7]

The Sources

The author then discloses that he had relied on a number of written sources in order to accomplish his work. Among the sources listed are several well-known compositions and some lesser-known ones as well. In most manuscripts that I examined, the following authors and compositions appear, more or less in the same order:

> Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, author of *Tārīkh-i Shāhrukhī*, Qāżī Bayżāwī,[8] Qāżī 'Abd al-Wakīl author of *Tārīkh-i Farakh Shāhī*, Amīr kabīr shaykh vazīr-i a'zām Mīr 'Alī Shīr,[9] Maulānā Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī author of *Ẓafar-nāma*, Maulānā 'Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī author of *Tadhkirat Dawlat Shāhī*,[10] Maulānā Ashraf author of *Jāmi' al-a'zām*, Khwāndshāh author of *Rawżat al-safā'*,[11] Khoja 'Abdallāh Hātifī author of *Tārīkh-i Tīmūrī*, Khoja Ḥasan Nishāpūrī author of *Tadhkirat al-ahbāb*, 'Ali Irānī author of *Tuḥfat al-asāmī*, 'Abdallāh Balkhī author of *Tām al-tavārīkh* and Mullā Tanish Muḥammad Bukhārī, may the blessing of Allah most high be upon them all.[12]

Most of the authors and texts listed here represent the rich historiographical tradition of the Timurids. Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, Sharaf 'Ali Yazdī, 'Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, Navā'ī, 'Abdallāh Hātifī, and Mīrkhwānd are among the towers of strength of Timurid history writing and literature.[13] The names of several authors and the titles of their compositions seem to divert from the accepted form that modern historiography recognizes them by, and may have been

[7] *Kunūz al-a'ẓam* (*Tārīkh-i Tīmūrī*), MS. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS Or. Quart. 1231, 12. This dating fits with the customary time of Tīmūr's death given in the official Timurid chronicles.

[8] Presumably referring to the thirteenth-century commentator on the Qur'an (d. 1286 in Tabriz) and author of the *Niẓām al-tavārīkh*, a short general history completed in 1275 that covered also the main dynasties in Central Asia and Iran. The author may have consulted this work for his treatment of different accounts of the Ismā'īlis and Nāṣir-i Khusraw.

[9] The reference is, of course, to Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī, the late fifteenth-century statesman and author. In several manuscripts, he is also mentioned as the author of the *Majālis al-nafā'is*, an indication that this was the work that the author had consulted.

[10] Possibly a confusion with the *Tadhkirat Dawlatshāhī* written by another Samarqandī (see *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopiseĭ Instituta vostokovedeniia AN UzSSR* (Tashkent : Izd-vo Akademii nauk UzSSR), vol. I, 334–35).

[11] Referring to Muḥammad b. Khwāndshāh b. Maḥmūd, commonly known as Mīrkhwānd, author of *Rawżat al-ṣafā*'.

[12] *Kunūz*, 12–13.

[13] See John E. Woods, "The Rise of Timurid Historiography," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46 (1987), 81–107.

conflated or simply confused. However, it seems that the author actually had access to at least several of these historical chronicles, and that a number of them were in fact used, if only to embellish and aggrandize the legendary biographies. The register of mostly recognizable authors and texts attests to a direct relationship between them and the *Books of Tīmūr* and functions as a statement that conveys an air of historical authority. Even in chronicles that followed standard patterns of Islamic historiography, certainly in Central Asia between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it is not common to find such an explicit account of sources in the opening pages. At this stage in our inquiry, however, it is difficult to determine how much was borrowed from the chronicles. At times, such borrowing is made clear by the author himself, who does, occasionally, acknowledge other authors by name either as part of the text or as part of his interjections and commentary. In some cases, this interdependence is visible in a different manner. For example, I counted at least twenty-six chapter headings in Tīmūr's legendary biographies that are identical to chapter headings in Yazdī's *Ẓafar-nāma*.[14] Clearly, conferring an "official" heading to the different sections of the manuscript may have furnished greater credibility to the rest of the story, if not for the public then at least for the people who had been aware of the *Ẓafar-nāma* and its significance. It also affected the presentation of the manuscript by displaying the more florid language used by Yazdī, at least in the chapter titles.

The concrete recognition of the official chronicles in the introduction is important. It sets the work apart from other compositions and renders it more trustworthy, at least from the perspective of particular audiences. Moreover, by supplying a list of historical compositions, the author not only stated that he had access to a substantial amount of information but also suggested that he had shared in a position of power that allowed him to consult these manuscripts. Even if the author did not actually use all, or even most, of these works, he still boasted the kind of knowledge of Central Asian historiography that is bound to turn up with a certain level of erudition. We cannot discard the possibility that the author obtained access to the court or to ateliers, libraries, or treasuries of people of consequence. It is reasonable to assume that, if the author did consult the more official chronicles, he probably did so in a royal or relatively affluent setting. The types of literary sources that he cited were not usually part of the library holdings of low-level administrators or judges or the kind of literary assets owned by most Islamic institutions – *madrasa*s, for example – at the time.[15] Nevertheless, even if the presumed structure of the work and the manifest or implied claims of the author for historical authenticity followed those of the court chronicles, the content remained very different indeed.

[14] The replication of chapter headings was not acknowledged by the author.

[15] See the recent work by Stacy Liechti, *Books, Book Endowments, and Communities of Knowledge in the Bukharan Khanate*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2008.

Tīmūr's Genealogy

Tīmūr's genealogy, recorded already in the fifteenth century in court chronicles, charted in family trees, and engraved in inscriptions, has been a topic for scholarly investigations for some time.[16] In the introduction to the legendary biographies, the description of Tīmūr's lineage remains underdeveloped. Having presented the list of sources, the author then runs quickly through the genealogy, as follows: "Amir Tīmūr ibn Taraghāi Bahādur ibn Erkul Bahādur ibn Angīz Bahādur ibn Alhīl Noyān ibn Qārāchār Noyān."[17] The author ends with Qarāchār and does not recount further back – at least in the introduction – although the audience would encounter some of the figures that purportedly dominated Tīmūr's more ancient ancestry later in the body of the text.

In their attempts to reconstruct the lineage, scholars' interests in the parts of the genealogy leading up to Tīmūr's lifetime underlined three principal themes. First and foremost was the effort made in the different genealogies to establish Tīmūr's common ancestry with Chinggis Khan. Contrary to the sources that celebrated Tīmūr's shared origins with the famed Mongol ruler, the introductions to the legendary biographies usually do not extend past Qarāchār Noyān. Tīmūr's familial association with celestial origins, embodied by the illustrious legendary ancestress of the Mongols, Alan-qo'a, also attracted considerable attention. According to the *Secret History of the Mongols*, Alan-qo'a was impregnated by some "resplendent radiance,"[18] and the inscription on Tīmūr's tomb that featured Alan-qo'a as part of his lineage also added an 'Alid dimension to the story.[19] Yet again, these connections are missing from the biographies' introduction. Lastly, Tīmūr's more direct family ties with Qarāchār Noyān probably carried a more directly identifiable meaning. A commander of one of Chinggis Khan's *tümen*s (a unit of 10,000

[16] See primarily John Woods' analyses in his "Tīmūr's Genealogy" (in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, eds. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990: 85–125) and *The Timurid Dynasty* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1990. [*PIA* 14]). See also A. A. Semenov, "Nadpisi na nadgrobiyakh Tīmūra i ego potomkov v Gur-i Emire," *Epigrafika Vostoka* 2 (1948), 49–62; Bregel, "Tribal Tradition," 392–97.

[17] Cf. with Tīmūr's lineage in the *Mu'izz al-Ansāb*, the genealogical tree of the Timurids composed in the first half of the fifteenth century, probably under Shāhrukh's patronage. In this work, which of course included a much more extensive and branched genealogical tree, Tīmūr's line was as follows: Tīmūr, son of Taraghāi Noyān, son of Burgul Noyān, son of Aylangir, son of Ichil, son of Qarāchār. See Woods, *The Timurid Dynasty*, 9.

[18] As Alan-qo'a described it to her sons: "Every night, a resplendent yellow man entered by the light of the smoke-hole or the door top of the tent, he rubbed my belly and his radiance penetrated my womb. When he departed, he crept out on a moonbeam or a ray of sun in the guise of a yellow dog." *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, tr. Igor De Rachewiltz (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[19] Woods, "Genealogy," 88.

soldiers), Qarāchār was also regarded in Timurid histories as the ancestor of Tīmūr's tribe – the Barlas.[20]

The biographies' author, as we have seen, does not dedicate many words to the account of the lineage. For him, it seems, as for his audience, the names of Tīmūr's ancestors were not as important at this particular moment; perhaps the audience would not remember them anyway. The author did wish his readers and listeners to remember two names – Tīmūr's father, Taraghāi, and Tīmūr's ancestor, Qarāchār.[21] Interestingly, in the story that opens the biographical corpus, Tīmūr's father, Taraghāi Bahādur, is celebrated as the descendant of Qarāchār Noyān, who was, we are informed, Temujin's cousin (*amm-zāda*).[22] Qarāchār later performs an important role in bringing to Tīmūr's attention the covenant between his great ancestors, Qachulai and Tumanai.[23]

A Summary of Tīmūr's Life

Following the brief remark on the lineage, the author provides a sketch of Tīmūr's life and the history of the region that constitutes a convenient, if somewhat mechanical, chronological summary of the entire biography. The summary outlines Tīmūr's lifetime, encompassing, in order, all the major events as they would appear later in the work. By doing so, the author again emulates the court chronicles and portrays the biography as real and factual:

Ṣāḥib-qirān Amir Tīmūr *güregen* was born in the year 735 (A.H.)[24] – at the time of Bayān-Qulī Khan[25] and at the time of Shaykh al-ʿĀlam, that is Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn[26] – of his mother, Tegina[27] Khātūn, daughter of Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa,[28] who had suffered a great

[20] About Qarāchār Noyān and the place of the Barlas tribe in the Chaghatay khanate see Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 156–57; Woods, "Genealogy," 92–3.

[21] In the modern Uzbek version of the biography, the lineage was given as "Amir Tīmūr ibn amir Taraghāi Bahādur ibn Barkul bahadur ibn Ilongiz bahadur ibn Injil ibn Qorajor Noyon ibn Amir Sughuchin ibn Irimchi Zaloskhon ibn Qojuuli bahadur khan ibn Tarbon khan." See *Temurnoma: Amir Temur Kuragon zhangnomasi*, ed. P. Ravshanov (Tashkent: Chulpon, 1990), 35.

[22] Much like ʿAlī's relation to the Prophet.

[23] See Chapter 4.

[24] The date of birth usually ascribed to Tīmūr is the twenty-fifth of Shaʿbān, 736 (April 8, 1336).

[25] Historically, Bayān-Qulī Khan (or Buyān-Qulī Khan) was a Chaghatayid khan who had ruled in Mawarannahr from 1348 to 1358.

[26] That is, Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī (see Chapter 2).

[27] Or Takina.

[28] Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa is most likely identified with ʿUbayd Allāh b. Masʿūd al-Maḥbūbī (d. 1346), a famed Hanafi scholar and member of the Maḥbūbī family, chief administrators in Bukhara from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth centuries. This is probably the same "Sadr al-sharīʿa" whom the renowned traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa had met in Bukhara in 1333, interestingly, at the home of Yaḥyā al-Bākharzī, a descendent of Sayf al-Dīn and also keeper of his *khānqāh*. (Ibn Battuta, *Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354*, tr. and ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al., Hakluyt Society, 1958, 554.) Further corroboration for this identification is found in the introduction to one of the manuscripts of the biographies (*TN* 4890) where it is mentioned *en passant* that Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa was the

deal of misfortune, and after much toil his father[29] married her. From there[30] he came to Bukhara to the service of Bayān-Qulī Khan. Then Toqtemür Khan Jatta arrived (and at that time the Uzbeks were called Jatta).[31] Baraq Khan,[32] son of Bayan-Qulī Khan, escaped, and Amīr Tīmūr with the help of His Holiness Shāh Naqshband[33] went [to look for Baraq Khan]. Shāh Manṣūr, who was of the people of Muzaffar,[34] captured Baraq Khan and threw him in a well. Tīmūr rescued Baraq Khan. He expelled the Uzbeks from their lands, but the house of Baraq Khan put as its aim to kill Ṣāḥib-qirān. Tīmūr reached Mashhad to the vicinity of Shāh Shujā‘ Kirmānī.[35] Then, with his son Mīrzā Jahāngīr he seized Qarshi. Baraq Khan killed Mīrzā Jahāngīr in Balkh. Ṣāḥib-qirān arrived [in Balkh] and killed him. In 771 [A.H.] he was enthroned. He then went to Khorezm. He captured Ḥusayn Ṣūfī[36] and then rode to Khorasan in order to capture Shiraz and vanquish the people of Muzaffar. From there he returned to Dasht-i Qïpchaq and pushed the Uzbek army to the Crimea. Mīrzā Shāhrukh, Tīmūr's son, killed Toqtamïsh Khan Uzbek.[37] He (Tīmūr) proceeded to conquer the Russians. He then conquered Hindustan and from there returned once more to Khorasan and Iraq. He captured Baghdad, and appointed his son Mīrānshāh as governor. Tīmūr seized the whole of Mazandaran and Kurdistan; he captured Sham and Haleb and Damascus and advanced towards the emperor of Rum. He took Rum from the hands of Yïldïrïm Bāyazīd. Mīrzā Ulugh Beg b. Shāhrukh went to the west. The *khuṭba* was recited in the name of Ṣāḥib-qirān and coins were struck in his name.[38]

author of *Sharh al-Wiqāya*, a commentary on *al-Wiqāya*, which, in turn, was a commentary on al-Marghīnānī's *al-Hidāya*, the classic manual of Hanafi law. The *Sharh al-Wiqāya* was indeed attributed to al-Maḥbūbī.

29 That is, Tīmūr's father, Taraghāi, already identified in the brief chart of Tīmūr's lineage.

30 That is, Shahr-i Sabz.

31 Based on the sixteenth-century historian and official Mīrzā Ḥaydar Dughlat, the Jatta were peoples from the steppes who had invaded and settled in Moghulistan. The term was used derogatorily and implied "marauders" or "robbers" (C. E. Bosworth, "Yeti Su," *EI²* XI, 335). In the same manner, the Chaghatays referred to the Moghuls as Jatta. Bartol'd surmised further that, much like the meaning of the term *qazaq*, "Jatta" could signify "one who had broken off ties with one's kin" (V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia. Vol. I: A Short History of Turkestan*, tr. V. and T. Minorsky, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1956, 11). In a different context, *qazaq* was used also to imply a period of princely vagabondage (Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*, Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2007, 29–31).

32 The historical Baraq Khan (d. 1271) was one of the rulers of the Chaghatay khanate.

33 That is, Baha' al-Dīn Naqshband (1318–1389), eponymous founder of the Naqshbandiyya.

34 I.e., the Muzaffarid dynasty, one of several dynasties that emerged in Iran in the aftermath of the fall of the Ilkhanids. The dynasty was eventually destroyed by Tīmūr.

35 Shāh Shujā‘ (d. 1384) was a Muzaffarid ruler based initially in Kirman who had ruled different parts of Iran in the second half of the fourteenth century.

36 Founder of an independent Turkic dynasty (known as the Sufis or the Sufids) in Khorezm in the second half of the fourteenth century. Ḥusayn Ṣūfī was able to withstand Tīmūr's first attack on his domains but succumbed to his forces later in the 1370s.

37 Toqtamïsh Khan was ruler of the Mongol Golden Horde from 1378 to 1395. We will revisit the anachronistic treatment of the Uzbeks in Chapter 5.

38 The *khuṭba* (part of the Friday sermon that also extolled the ruler) and the *sikka* (the minting of coins in the ruler's name) were two of the most important royal prerogatives. See R. E. Darley-Doran, "Sikka: 2. Coinage Practice," *EI²* IX, 592–99.

Then in the year 807 [A.H.] he (Tīmūr) returned to Samarqand and sent his sons to [govern] the provinces. He sent Mīrānshāh and Mīrzā 'Umar to Baghdad and Iraq and kept Mīrzā Khalīl b. Mīrānshāh in Samarqand. Shāhrukh was sent to Herat. Mīrzā Pīr Muḥammad b. Mīrzā Jahāngīr was sent to Qandahar. He went to the border of his country and made a summerhouse in Otrar, where his soul traveled from the world of infirmity to Paradise. He lived seventy-two years, one month and eighteen days. He ruled for thirty-six years. His wife, Sarāy Khānïm, brought the amir's body to Samarqand and buried him.

Although this comprehensive chronology is given, in actuality the narrative is interspersed with numerous stories and anecdotes, seemingly less pertinent to the quasi-historical exposition, that placed emphasis on Tīmūr's character (and, to a certain extent, on his sons' and grandsons' characters), on models of conduct, on the relationship between Tīmūr and other family members, friends, and Sufi shaykhs, and on Tīmūr's upbringing and coming of age. Thus, for example, the history of Tīmūr's epic clashes with Toqtamïsh Khan of the Golden Horde actually began in the biographies when Tīmūr's son, Mīrānshāh, fell in love with Toqtamïsh Khan's wife.[39] Tīmūr passes tests, fights wars, destroys false prophets, and defends Islam. When his sons come of age, Tīmūr sends them to different corners of the world and some of their unusual experiences are related. The summary of Tīmūr's life also emphasizes the significance of Central Asia. The campaigns against Hindustan or in the Ottoman lands are comparatively glanced over faster, leaving more room to discuss events "at home."

A Short History of the Region Down to the Author's Time

The weight given to Central Asia continues also in what follows. Between the work's précis and the first episode (*dāstān*) that leads to Tīmūr's birth, the author recaps the region's history down to the time of the text's composition. The general scheme, similar in most manuscripts, includes mention of the rulers' names and the lengths of their reign. Occasionally, the author adds a short sentence that best describes, at least in his understanding, the most memorable feature of the ruler's time on the throne. Even more revealing is the association that the author makes between specific rulers and particular Muslim authorities, many of whom had been the most notable Sufi shaykhs of their time. This historical summary may also be understood, to some degree, as part of the attempt to ascribe to the work a measure of historical credibility. In doing so, the author complements his earlier assertions such as his announced dependence on formal sources, his summary of Tīmūr's alleged lifetime, and his general arrangement of the work within conventional principles of Islamic historiography.

The author begins this part of the manuscript's introduction by informing the reader that following Ṣāḥib-qirān's burial Mīrzā Khalīl was seated on the

[39] See Chapter 5.

throne in Samarqand. Later, Mīrzā Shāhrukh arrived, removed Mīrzā Khalīl, and he himself became king and ruled for forty years.[40] The author relates the succession of rulers, including Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim, who ruled for twelve years. About the next ruler, Mīrzā Sa'īd (better known to the modern reader as Abu Sa'īd), Tīmūr's great-grandson, the author relates that he became king with the help of Khoja Aḥrār.[41] He had ruled for twenty-three years and was killed by heretics (*rawāfidh*).[42] After that, it was Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Mīrzā's turn to be king.[43] He ruled for thirty-eight years. The author concludes with a brief comment that Bayqara was followed by Mīrzā Bābur, and that "for 130 years the rulers were the descendants of Amir Tīmūr." Because Bābur is included in this calculation, it seems that for the author it made little difference that by the time of Bābur's death he was already far from Mawarannahr. Equally interesting is the fact that the author does not include the Mughals in this scheme of rulers who were descendants of Tīmūr (although he later refers to them as continuing Bābur's lineage).

The historical summary, albeit brief, is still intriguing in what it chooses to exhibit and what it chooses to cast off. The author continues to relate that "in the year 900 of the hijra of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Shāh Ismā'īl Qïzïl-bāsh appeared and captured Iraq." In the year 904, Shïbānī emerged and "took the kingdom from Amir Tīmūr's descendants." Bābur fled to Hindustan where his children ruled. Shïbānī Khan was killed by the hand of Shah Ismā'īl Qïzïl-bāsh in Merv. He ruled for twelve years. The author notes that after Shïbānī's death there had been thirty years without order. After that, 'Ubayd Allāh Khan, Shïbānī Khan's nephew, took the kingdom with the help of Mir 'Arab, "whose origin was in Yemen."[44] We are told that the strongest ruler in

[40] Ulugh Beg, Shāhrukh's son, who had been appointed by his father to the governorship of Samarqand, is not mentioned at all in this list of rulers. Similarly absent is any mention of the historical existence of the two Timurid states, rather than one, that had been established in Samarqand and in Herat.

[41] Khoja 'Ubaydallāh Aḥrār was the most influential Sufi shaykh in Central Asia in the fifteenth century, a rich land owner and an effective mediator of conflicts. He has been a pivotal figure in most Naqshbandi chains of spiritual transmission.

[42] *Rawāfidh* (sing. *Rafidhi*), or heretics, referred mostly to Shi'ites in the Sunni world. The historical Abu Sa'īd campaigned in Azerbaijan in 1469, where he was captured by the Aq Qoyunlu (a Turkmen confederation) and executed. It is possible that in the author's memory, the Aq Qoyunlu had been associated, for some reason, with the Safavids. On the other hand, he may have confused different circumstances (that remained vague for the audience).

[43] Referring to Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bayqara. Although the focus of this work is Bukhara and Mawarannahr, Sulṭān-Ḥusayn, who did not rule the area, is recalled as a great king also in these regions.

[44] Mir 'Arab, a Naqshbandi leader and *Shaykh al-Islam* in the 1530s, was also the patron of a famous *madrasa*, named after him, in Bukhara. The author's emphasis on the origins of Mir 'Arab is one in many references to Yemen in the narrative. Yemen seems to have carried a symbolic significance in Central Asia, and the fascination with that faraway land and its representatives may have also been a part of a long tradition of pilgrimage to Central Asian locations of sites and tombs of biblical and Qur'anic figures; the Prophet's companions or early conquerors of the region all allegedly from Yemen. (See also in this regard, Aširbek Muminov, "Veneration of Holy Sites of the Mid-Sirdar'ya

Central Asia in the sixteenth century, 'Abdallāh Khan (r. 1583–1598), came from Karmina and ruled for thirty-four years with the help of Khoja Kalan Khoja Sa'd al-Dīn Jūybārī.[45]

Clearly, the biographies focused on the region of Mawarannahr and the dynasties that ruled first from Samarqand (until the sixteenth century) and later from Bukhara. The symbiotic relationship between the rulers and the Sufi shaykhs who aided their ascension to the throne, and by implication granted the rulers their sanction and approval, would persist also all through the biographies and serve to remind the reader of the significance of the duality of power alluded to in the earlier part of the introduction.

With 'Abdallāh Khan's son, 'Abd al-Mu'min Khan, came the official end of the Shibanids. The author lists the names of the Janid rulers that followed, although he does not seem to lay much emphasis on the standard dynastic distinction between the Shibanids and the Janids. He mentions, correctly, that both Imām-Qulī Khan and 'Abd al-'Azīz Khan concluded their terms in office by performing the *ḥajj*, and that 'Ubayd Allāh Khan was assassinated (literally, "forced to attain martyrdom"). The author mentions that in the year 1122 A.H. (1711 A.D.), "Abu'l-Fayż Muḥammad Bahādur Khan sat on the throne of the sultanate of Bukhara."

Two Manuscript Cycles and the Continuity of Production

It is at this point that two distinct manuscript cycles emerge. According to one manuscript cycle, the work was written in the beginning of Abu'l-Fayż Khan's reign. The manuscripts belonging to this cycle (either originating in the 1710s or copied based on manuscripts from that era) clearly state that the work was written in the year 1024 A.H., two years after Abu'l-Fayż Khan's inauguration.[46]

The second manuscript cycle is essentially similar to the first in every way save for its assertion of the time of authorship, which is traced back to the end of the eighteenth century, presumably in the early 1790s. The manuscripts that had been written in that era, or copied from earlier manuscripts, continued the story of Bukhara's rulers down to Shāh Murād (r. 1785–1800): Accordingly, Abu'l-Fayż Khan reigned for thirty-eight years. He was

Valley: Continuity and Transformation," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, edited by Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen, and Dmitriy Yermakov, Berlin: Schwarz, 1996, v. 1, esp. 355–61.)

[45] The Jūybārī khojas were particularly prominent in the ascent of 'Abdallāh Khan to power. The author's calculation of 'Abdallāh Khan's reign probably takes into account the period before 1583, when Abdallah's father, Iskandar, was officially on the throne, but the son was the de facto ruler of Bukhara. See B. A. Akhmedov, "Rol' dzhuĭbarskikh khodzheĭ v obshchestvenno-politicheskoĭ zhizni Sredneĭ Azii XVI-XVII vekov," in *Dukhovenstvo i politicheskaia zhizn' na Blizhnem i Srednem Vostoke v period feodalizma* (Moscow: Nauka, GRVL, 1985), 16–31.

[46] See for example, *Kunūz*, 17; *TN 699*, f. 4a; *TN 4890*, f. 4b.

murdered by "Raḥīm Atalïq Manghït,"[47] who was responsible for two additional killings of Chinggisids and then took the throne for himself. He was followed by Dāniyāl Biy Atalïq and finally by Dāniyāl's son, Shāh Murād Biy. This group of manuscripts ascribes the date of the work's composition to Shāh Murād's time in power, concluding with a statement that during his period in office many mosques and *madrasa*s had been built – a token to that ruler's renowned devotion to Islam, to its institutions, and perhaps also to his reputed fiscal reforms[48] – and that the text had been written in the year 1207 A.H., that is, 1792–1793.[49] No further explanation is given, and thus the introduction ends and the story of Tīmūr's life begins. From this relatively dry (yet still interesting) account, full of names and dates mostly anchored in chronological certainty, the work moves, with no interval or segue, into the land of apparent fantasy.

The distinction between the two manuscript cycles that stems from a different attribution of the time of composition seems to hint to some type of "revival" in the interest in Tīmūr's biographies during Shāh Murād's reign in Bukhara.[50] The authors or copyists of manuscripts from Shāh Murād's era praise the ruler for his rebuilding efforts of the devastated parts of Central Asia, a praise that is echoed in many sources from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.[51] Does the overt emphasis on Shāh Murād's piety imply that he had been involved at all in the text's production? Further study of these manuscripts may yield a more definitive answer, but at present we have no reason to assume that Shāh Murād contributed to or sponsored the copying of the manuscript.[52] Given the information that we have at present, we may divide the "life" of the text into several periods: The first spanned most of the eighteenth century; the second lasted for about 120 years from Shāh Murād's reign until the onset of the Soviet era. Did these "life cycles" somehow mirror the break in Bukharan politics? It appears that the first cycle of manuscripts were composed during the reign of the last Janid khan of consequence, and a second cycle may have been promoted under the governance of one who is sometimes considered the founder of the Manghït dynasty.[53] Nevertheless, we

[47] See fn. 53 to this chapter.

[48] See R. Burnasheva, "Moneti Bukharskogo khanstva pri Mangitakh (seredina XVIII – nachalo XX v.," *Epigrafika vostoka* 18 (1967), 113–28.

[49] For example, *TN 1501*, 206a; *TN 4436*; *TN Kulliat*.

[50] On the prevailing perceptions on Shāh Murād's time in power, see the excellent study by Anke von Kügelgen, *Die Legitimierung der mittelasiatischen-Mangitendynastie in den Werker ihrer Historiker* (Istanbul: Orient-Institut; Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 337–67.

[51] Such persistent praises constitute further testimony to the crisis that Central Asia was facing in the eighteenth century. If the country had not been devastated, there would not have been a need to rebuild it.

[52] It is clear that the biographies had been written in the beginning of the eighteenth century and only received further impetus for production toward the end of the century.

[53] Although Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan, who ascended the Bukharan throne in 1756, is often regarded as the founder of the Manghït dynasty, in the introduction to these texts he is referred to as "Raḥīm

have no concrete evidence for any direct political involvement in the manuscript's production, and both "periods" appear to be similar as far as the manuscripts' contents are concerned. The final period began in the early 1990s with the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Although the reception of these stories still requires further identification, it seems that the content of the manuscripts did not alter significantly throughout their different life cycles.

Before we proceed to describe the work's substance, we should bear in mind two crucial facts: first, all the manuscripts of the *Tīmūr-nāma* were copied in Central Asia, mostly in Bukhara and Khiva and once in Merv[54] or in other unidentifiable locales in Central Asia, which makes the work (in addition to other factors discussed later) distinctly Central Asian. Secondly, all the manuscripts preserved in Central Asia and elsewhere are from the eighteenth century and onward. We have no such manuscripts prior to the eighteenth century, and the compilers of the works do not claim that they had copied these works based on a pre-eighteenth-century model.

As mentioned, Tīmūr's biographies continued to be copied and recopied throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, or more precisely, in 1913 (1331 A.H.), the work was published in Tashkent in a lengthy lithograph (441 pages, on average twenty-seven lines per page) under the title *Tīmūr-nāma*. *Kullīyāt-i fārsī*. The editor, Mīrzā Muḥammad Qāsim ibn Mīrzā 'Abd al-Khāliq Bukhārī, based the lithograph on a Persian manuscript copied in 1792–1793 (1207 A.H.) in Bukhara under the reign of the Manghït Amir Shāh Murād.[55] Although the quality of the script is not very good, this version is extensive and valuable.

A newer edition of the Turkic adaptation of the work was recently published in Tashkent under the title *Temurnoma: Amir Temur Kuragon zhangnomasi*.[56] The editor Ravshanov, who described the text as "a combination of the *Bāburnāma* and the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets)," attributed the work to one Mullā Salah al-Dīn Khoja ibn Mullā 'Ala' al-Dīn Khoja, also known as Salah al-Dīn Tāshkandī, who had originally published the text in 1908 (1317 A.H.) in the I'lin publishing house in Tashkent. Not much is known about Tāshkandī or about the circumstances of his publication, save for the fact that he apparently stated that there were numerous copies of the *Tīmūr-nāma* in Persian, but that his had been the first translation of the work into Turkic. Perhaps Tāshkandī was unaware of the earlier versions of the biographies in Turkic (such as the *Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr*), or perhaps he simply

Atalïq Manghït." Shāh Murād, the one who had adopted the title *amīr* for the dynasty, seems to be credited with more independent power. His rise to the throne is not described here as accompanied by multiple murders, adding to the sense of his piety. On the rise of the Manghïts to power, see Yu. Bregel, "Mangits," *EI²* VI, 418–19.

54 Apparently following Shāh Murād's conquest of the city in the early 1790s.

55 *TN Kullīyāt*, 8.

56 See *Temurnoma* (ed. Ravshanov). The editor traced the origin of the text back to 1908, not realizing that his was just another version of these biographies in a 300-year-old tradition.

ignored them.[57] In any case, the recent rendering of a *Tīmūr-nāma* in Uzbek (with a glossary for some of the Arabic and Chaghatay words in the text – by no means all of them) is a much abridged version of earlier *Books of Tīmūr*.[58] The work was published in Tashkent in modern Uzbek, in Cyrillic script,[59] in 1990, just before the emergence of the Republic of Uzbekistan as an independent state.[60] Printed in the Chulpon publishing house[61] in 200,000 copies, a very large number by all accounts, this Uzbek edition was sold for a very affordable price, also by Uzbek standards, of seven hundred *som* (about twenty American cents at the time), and its wide circulation clearly intended to inform Uzbekistan's younger readers. The work's title in Uzbek emphasizes the story of Tīmūr's heroic battles (*dzhangnoma*), as does the drawing on the cover of an imposing, sword-wielding, helmet-wearing Tīmūr seated on the back of his charging horse. Conversely, the book's Russian title – appearing, in accordance with Soviet practice, in small print on the bottom of the very last page – is considerably different from its Uzbek counterpart. The title, *Timur, prichti dliia deteĭ* (or, *Timur: legends for children*), spells out that the work was designed to suit youthful audiences. Nonetheless, although portions of the text may appeal – or at least be somewhat comprehensible – to children, much of the content and language probably would remain beyond their understanding. The book even occasionally includes entire passages in Arabic, sometimes in the original Arabic script with no Uzbek translation, and this arrangement would be entirely inaccessible to children and adults alike without proper instruction and guidance.

The Lacuna

Returning to the manuscripts, following the introduction the rest of the lengthy text is divided into chapters, whose headings are titled *dāstān*, *goftār*, or *dhikr*, depending on the manuscript.[62] The number of chapters changes according to the manuscript. Although most manuscripts and renderings of the work that I have examined seem to follow a more or less similar sequence of chapters,

[57] I was unable to find Tāshkandī's work (or any other reference to it) in recent visits to Uzbekistan. For an example of a Turkic text, see Sayyid Muḥammad Khoja b. Ja'far Khoja, *Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr* and its description in the Uppsala catalog (K. V. Zetterstéen, *Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek zu Uppsala*. Upsala, 1930, 382, item no. 563).

[58] Still, the book is 350 pages long. It has no index or an acceptable scholarly apparatus, and unfortunately it also contains numerous errors in transcription (for example, rendering Donboi Bahadur for the correct Dunya Bahādur, *amir un-nos* for *amīr al-ulus*, and so forth).

[59] It will have to be altered and reprinted in Latinized script if the publishers desire youth in contemporary Uzbekistan to continue reading it.

[60] Although it must have been in the planning stage for some time.

[61] The publishing house was located on what used to be the Pravda Newspaper Street (Pravda gazeta kochasi).

[62] All three headings may appear in the same manuscript.

sometimes there are additions or omissions of certain chapters or a change in their order in the narrative. It is clear, however, that the intention of the compiler of these anecdotes was to bring them in a relatively orderly fashion that would follow the protagonist's lifetime, or at least what the author imagined his lifetime to be. We should note also that there are anecdotes that seem to have little to do with Tīmūr directly, but that have found their way into the overall compilation.

The reader may have noticed by now the absence of any statement of purpose in the introduction to the manuscripts. The author did not declare any reason for the writing of the work or its proposed intentions; He did not explain the circumstances under which the biographies had been written or the identity of the person or persons who had commissioned the work. In many of the manuscripts, including the lithograph and the modern Uzbek rendering of the text, there seems to be a discontinuity, typically found on the third or fourth page, between the early sections (especially the doxology) and the ones that follow (the summary of Tīmūr's life). This discontinuity is sometimes complemented with a noticeable change in handwriting (either a different pen or a different scribe) and is glossed over with no explanation. The only exception is a manuscript kept in St. Petersburg that will be discussed in the next section.

The Manuscript Tradition and its Discovery

Tīmūr's legendary biographies occasionally have been registered in the different manuscript catalogs under the label *Tīmūr-nāma*. However, this was not the only title, and part of the difficulty in evaluating the number of manuscripts in existence was also caused by their range of titles, among them one may find *Kunūz al-aʿẓam*, *Tārīkh-i Sāhib-qirān*, *Tārīkh-i Tīmūrī*, *Tārīkh-i Sāhib-qirān Amīr Tīmūr Gurgān*, and so on.[63] Of the Persian manuscripts that clearly belong to Tīmūr's heroic apocrypha, we can identify at this stage at least five in St. Petersburg,[64] at least three in Dushanbe,[65] and a couple in Europe (namely, in Berlin and in Budapest).[66] The largest collection – at

[63] As mentioned in the introduction, these should not be confused with many other works bearing similar titles. The *ṣāḥib-qirān-nama* that circulated in Iran in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, for instance, is an anonymous, versified "epico-religious saga" that has been concerned only with pre-Islamic heroes and has nothing to do with Tīmūr. (Jean Calmard, "Popular Literature under the Safavids," in *Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*, ed. Andrew J. Newman, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, 326.)

[64] See N. D. Miklukho-Maklaĭ, *Opisanie tadzhikskikh i persidskikh rukopiseĭ Instituta vostokovedeniia. Vyp. 3 (Istoricheskie sochineniia)* (Moscow, 1975), 279–94 (items no. 420–25).

[65] For descriptions of the manuscripts in Dushanbe (formerly Stalinabad), see A. M. Mirzoev and A. N. Boldyrev, *Katalog vostochnykh rukopiseĭ Academii nauk Tadzhikskoĭ SSR* (Stalinabad, 1960), items 51, 52, and 53 (and possibly 54 and 55).

[66] MS of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS Or. Quart. 1231. For the description of the manuscript, see *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in*

least twelve Persian manuscripts – is in Tashkent at the al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences.[67] The collections include manuscripts of different lengths and sizes, copied throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some seem to have been heavily used.[68] Having reviewed most of the manuscripts at al-Biruni, it seems that the speculation – that will be discussed shortly – that the text may have been an attempt to construct a "real" history of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty as a "General History" genre is difficult to support. If indeed this were the case, very quickly the original aim was abandoned, perhaps in favor of constructing a "popular history" of the region by concentrating on Central Asia's most compelling indigenous hero. It is also clear that most renditions of the text are very similar and are, in essence, copies (with variations) of one another. The author's identity, for the most part, is not disclosed. Later manuscripts, depending on their standing and availability of a colophon, sometimes provide the names of the scribes who had copied the text.

As noted, there seem to be several renderings of the work in Turkic, and I would not be surprised if more turned up.[69] The quantity of manuscripts and their diversity suggests that the *Tīmūr-nāma* enjoyed a vigorous presence in Central Asian literature that began in the early eighteenth century and has maintained a high degree of popularity through the nineteenth century and late into the twentieth century.[70]

Because of the generic title and the relatively limited information in the catalogs, let us examine first a work bearing the title *Kunūz al-a'ẓam* that had been identified more clearly and that may shed light on the original intent in the biographies' creation. This title is mentioned in one of the manuscripts kept in St. Petersburg, which, according to Story-Bregel (still the most useful point of departure for many explorations into Persian historiography), was written by one 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sīrat, in Bukhara, during the early reign of the Ashtarkhanid ruler, Abu'l-Fayż Khan (r. 1711–1747).[71]

According to the St. Petersburg catalog, the work was supposed to have been a dynastic history, apparently dedicated to the Ashtarkhanids, rulers of

Deutschland, Bd. 14 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1968), 88. There are probably more manuscripts that I failed to mention. Many of the Persian manuscripts are cited in Storey-Bregel.

67 For the manuscripts in Tashkent consult the *SVR*, vol. I, items 185–88 – all catalogued under the rubric "history" – and also *SVR*, vol. I, items 1526, 699, 1502/II, 1502/I; *SVR*, vol. X, items 6761–67, 1501, 2602, 4818, 4436, 6768.

68 Like *TN 1526*.

69 Although I still have to check whether all the titles correspond to the same work. It appears that they do, based on their catalogue descriptions.

70 We will return to the question of popularity later.

71 C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey*, translated into Russian and revised, with additions and corrections, by Yu. E. Bregel (Moscow, 1972), II: 812–15. In fact, the author notes that "in the year 1122 (1711) Abu'l Fayż Muḥammad Bahādur Khan was established upon the throne of the sultanate of Bukhara. In the year 1124 (1713), two years after the khan's enthronement, this work was composed." (*Kunūz*, 17).

Bukhara and Balkh from 1599–1756 (or 1785), and to have had two volumes: the first from Tīmūr's birth to the ascent of the Shïbanid ruler 'Abdallāh Khan (r. 1583–1598) and the second from 'Abdallāh Khan down to the author's time. The aim was, of course, to highlight and celebrate the rulers of the Janid dynasty, presumably ending with the ruler that may have sponsored this endeavor, the newly crowed Abu'l-Fayż Khan. This plan,[72] if indeed there even was such a plan, probably never materialized, and no such continuity to the manuscript was ever recorded. All the manuscripts that we have at our disposal tell the story of Tīmūr exclusively and do not venture to deal with other rulers. In all the manuscripts that I examined, I found no hint at any intention by the authors to write about anything other than Tīmūr himself.[73] Bregel is probably correct in his postulation that the second part was never actually written.[74]

If indeed there was a design to write the history of the Ashtarkhanids with Tīmūr as its starting point, this would be, in and of itself, a rather significant development and would seem to be in line with other early eighteenth-century Tīmūr-related developments. However, most other Central Asian dynastic histories from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries typically adhered to common Islamic historiographical principles, tracing their subject matter's origins back to Creation or to the story of Noah (Nūḥ), the Flood, and the reemergence of mankind, inevitably descended from one of Nūḥ's three sons. Several dynasties, particularly those led by Chinggis Khan's descendants, traced their origins back to Chinggis Khan or to his eldest son, Jochi. Others concentrated solely on the history of one specific ruler. In short, I know of no other Central Asian work in this time frame that began with Tīmūr, and I see no reason why the Janids, and especially Abu'l-Fayż Khan, would seek to be a part of a trend (Tīmūr's revival) that would be aimed against them.[75]

The understanding that this "history" was to have had two parts relied on the observations of the renowned Russian orientalist Valentin Alekseevich Zhukovskiĭ (1858–1918) and the noted Bashkir Turkologist Zeki Velidi Togan (1890–1970), both of whom showed interest in these materials. Zhukovskiĭ even translated, but never published, an anecdote from these biographies about Tīmūr and Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in which the latter was identified in the manuscript with al-Muqanna', the eighth-century leader of the "wearers of

[72] Curiously, the plan to have two volumes on the history of the region is mentioned only once and very late in one of the manuscripts in St. Petersburg, in folio 234a. See Miklukho-Maklai, *Opisanie*, 282.

[73] Miklukho-Maklai writes that the second volume was never discovered.

[74] Story-Bregel, II, 813. I would add that even the first part does not seem to support the alleged plan.

[75] Tīmūr is not even mentioned in Abu'l-Fayż Khan's official dynastic chronicle. See Abdurrakhman-i Tali', *Istoriia Abulfeĭz-khana*, tr. A. A. Semenov (Tashkent: Akademiia nauk Uzbekskoĭ SSR, 1959).

white."[76] Zhukovskiĭ was the first to posit that the work was called "Kunūz wa-l-aa'ẓam" and also identified a certain 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sirat as its author.[77] Probably following Zhukovskiĭ's lead, Togan attempted to identify a related manuscript in the summer of 1914. Journeying through the territory of the khanate of Bukhara, still a Russian protectorate at the time, Togan reported an interesting finding. Apparently, he was told that in Shahr-i Sabz, several men, including a teacher in the *madrasa* of "Maliki Ajdar,"[78] were in possession of a library "rich in manuscripts" that also held a copy of a history of Tīmūr, ostensibly named *Kunūz al-A'ẓam*.[79] This intrigued Togan. He arrived at the Shahr-i Sabz library in late June 1914, was able to meet the manuscript holders, and was shown several manuscripts for him to purchase (including copies of works by Timurid authors such as Yazdī, Samarqandī, and Mīrkhwānd). However, according to his report, he was interested particularly in the copy of the *Kunūz*, which Mullā Muḥammad Rajab, the aforementioned teacher, had in his possession. Togan realized that this manuscript had some commonalities with so-called *Tīmūr-nāma* manuscripts described in Kal's 1889 catalog.[80] He wrote that the manuscript's author had stated, in the first-person singular, that he had compiled the history of Tīmūr from his birth until the reign of 'Abdallāh Khan in one volume and named the volume "*Kunūz wa al-a'ẓam*." A second volume was to be dedicated to the history from 'Abdallāh Khan down to the author's time (1125/1713), namely, to the reign of Abu'l-Fayż Khan, whom the author, according to Togan, exalted and praised. Togan mentioned that he was unable to locate the second volume of the work and that he gave the first volume to the Asiatic Museum (in St. Petersburg).[81] Although I have been able to identify, based on Togan's description, the exact place in the introduction to the *Books of Tīmūr* where the author's professed intentions might fit, in all the manuscripts that I have seen, such claims do not exist. Moreover, the texts that I examined were not written in the first person.

Both Zhukovskiĭ and Togan, as well as Semenov later on, realized that this "*Kunūz wa al-a'ẓam*" held some sort of a relationship with other works about Tīmūr, works ostensibly labeled *Tīmūr-nāma*. However, they did not seem

[76] We will revisit this story in Chapter 5.

[77] On Zhukovskiĭ and his comments, see Yu. E. Borshchevskiĭ, "K kharakteristike rukopisnogo naslediia V. A. Zhukovskogo," in *Ocherki po istorii russkogo vostokovedeniia, Sbornik V: Pamiiati V. A. Zhukovskogo* (Moscow, 1960), esp. 11–13.

[78] Apparently adjacent to the fifteenth-century Malik Ajar mosque.

[79] A. Z. Validov, "O sobraniiakh rukopiseĭ v Bukharskom khanstve," *Zapiski Vostochnogo otdeleniia (Imp.) Russkogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva* 23/3 (St. Petersburg, 1916), 245–62. Togan's research was often published in Russian under the name A. Z. Validov (A. Z. standing for Aḥmad-Zaki).

[80] E. Kal', *Persidskiia, arabskiia i tiurkskiia rukopisi Turkestanskoĭ Publichnoĭ Biblioteki* (Tashkent, 1889), items no. 18–20, pp. 17–18.

[81] Validov, "O sobraniiakh rukopiseĭ," 246.

to pursue their initial observations.[82] The most elaborate description of the *Tīmūr-nāma* to date was provided by N. D. Miklukho-Maklaĭ in the volume on historical sources, part of the catalog "Description of the Tajik and Persian manuscripts at the Institute of Oriental Studies" in St. Petersburg.[83] As cataloger of manuscripts, Miklukho-Maklaĭ's primary goal was to establish the essential information about each manuscript, including authorship, date and location of authorship, the very basic structure of the work, information given in the text's introduction, and various technical details (size and type of paper, type of ink, number of folios, date and location of copying, identity of the scribe, and the type of script). Miklukho-Maklaĭ, following Zhukovskiĭ, mentioned the author of at least one manuscript of the five or six Persian manuscripts in St. Petersburg as ʻAbd al-Rahmān Sīrat.[84] However, the cataloger reported that in other manuscripts the name of the author appears as Mīrzā Rumūz. Nothing is known about either of these individuals, and there is no explanation in any of the manuscripts of the circumstances under which they had been written. Miklukho-Maklaĭ accepted Zhukovskiĭ's first impressions of the work and continued his line of reasoning. Because both scholars determined that the author's intention was to compose a so-called general history, the cataloger decided to register the work as a "historical text" in the History section. Yet, he expressed his doubts about the decision because the work contained a good deal of "folkloric material" and had a "fantastic, legendary character." Such attributes made the *Tīmūr-nāma*, Miklukho-Maklaĭ argued, a literary work rather than a historical one, and he cautioned his readers to treat it accordingly.

Herein lies the problem, because such a statement immediately rendered the work worthless in the eyes of most historians. This way of thinking was obviously supported or even encouraged by other statements (in the vein of Semenov's comments, noted later), and therefore there were almost no attempts to actually deal with the text at any level. Not surprisingly, many Central Asians remained unaware of the professional evaluations of the work as they continued to copy and recopy the text for generations, read it, and be captivated by its contents, probably more so than many other works in the history of "early modern" Central Asia.

In addition to the curious gaps in the author's identification, scholars also did not try to solve the problem of patronage and sponsorship of the biographies. After all, the production of such lengthy manuscripts required resources, and the texts did have some value as material objects. The manuscripts vary in their appearance and condition – some are rather fancy copies, written in a variety of inks and gilded marks (although all the texts lack illumination and paintings) while others look well-used and run down. One extravagant

[82] Zhukovskiĭ may have, but he never published his findings.

[83] Miklukho-Maklaĭ, *Opisanie*.

[84] He indicates three occurrences of the name in the text.

manuscript (*TN 4436*) was even endowed as *waqf*. In the absence of any clear acknowledgment of patronage by the authors, the question of the text's popularity becomes even more difficult to explain. After all, patronage could influence the status, reputation, and circulation of literary works. The author of the *Kunūz al-a'ẓam* only stated that the work was written during Abu'l-Fayż Khan's reign and did not acknowledge the khan's patronage or even express gratitude to him. Abu'l-Fayż also was not described in any lofty terms and received no special consideration from the author – something that one would expect in a sponsored work.[85] Even if there had been any involvement by the khan's office in the initial planning and production of the work, is it possible that the original plan had been neglected, perhaps for lack of resources, and the manuscripts were "free" to be utilized in a different fashion?

Regrettably, we have no information about the author. We do not know if he held any official position, whether at the court or in other institutions. This too may be discovered with further exploration. However, it is safe to assume that the author had access to many different sources (both textual and oral), some of which may had been preserved at the court. Not only that, he probably had access to ideas of political authority discussed at the court and to the "exercise of power."[86] He was clearly "in the know," aware of not only a range of political and ideological considerations but also of many characteristics of Sufism in Central Asia. For now, we would reserve answers to questions on the possible identity of the author and on who would have to gain from such a composition until our more elaborate analysis of the biographies themselves.

Scholarship (or lack thereof) on *Books of Tīmūr*

The *Tīmūr-nāma* was probably one of the most familiar works to Central Asian audiences in the history of the region in the so-called early modern era, but despite the continuity in its copying from the eighteenth century until the present, it has attracted very little scholarship. *Books of Tīmūr*, on their numerous copies and renditions, are not even mentioned in important codices of Persian or Turkic literature such as Rypka's *History of Iranian Literature* or the *Philologiae Turcicae fundamenta*.[87] They are not referred to in surveys of Central Asian literary history;[88] they remain equally ignored in bibliographical

85 One still needs to ascertain whether the *Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr* (in Turkic) may have received the patronage of Yār-Muḥammad Bahādur Khan.

86 Cf. with Gril's assumptions about the author of the *Sīrat Baybars*. Denis Gril, "Du sultanat au califat universel: le rôle des saints dans le Roman de Baybars," in *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*, ed. Jean-Claude Garcin (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2003), 196.

87 For example, Jan Rypka (ed.), *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, 1968); Jean Deny, ed., *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta* (Wiesbaden, 1959–1964).

88 See for example, M. Bogdanova, *Istoriia literatur narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* (Moscow, 1960).

surveys devoted to Tīmūr and to his legacy.[89] There have been almost no scholarly treatments of the *Tīmūr-nāma*, not even a scholarly edition of the text. The only author of a biobibliographical survey who had mentioned the text, in addition to its description in Storey-Bregel noted previously, was H. F. Hofman in his extensive survey of Turkish literature. Hofman was aware of the textual tradition surrounding Tīmūr's biographies and promised to discuss what he referred to as the "Tīmūri vitae" in a section devoted to motifs in Turkish literature, which, apparently, he never completed.[90]

In 1897, the renowned Hungarian scholar and traveler Arminius Vámbéry (d. 1913) published short fragments of a manuscript of, apparently, one of the *Books of Tīmūr*. The publication, titled "Eine legendäre Geschichte Tīmūrs," presented three previously unknown (to Europeans, at least) stories about Tīmūr. The first related Tīmūr's campaign to Dasht-i Qïpchaq to fight Toqtamïsh Khan; the second described how Tīmūr came into possession of the Christian Gospel, a gospel written, as it were, by Jesus himself; and the third recounted Tīmūr's conquest of Moscow. Vámbéry published only fragments of these stories (by no means the full stories, which in the manuscript would be much longer). He treated the accounts with a degree of amusement and did not identify them as part of the much larger textual tradition. Part of his mistrust of the work may have stemmed from the confusion about the time of composition of the narratives because the copier apparently got the dates mixed up.[91] Vámbéry edited and translated the three excerpts, which he only identified as legends of a fantastic nature about Tīmūr. He offered no commentary to the stories and, as far as I know, did not pursue the matter elsewhere.

The next to engage the corpus was V. Klemm when, in 1900, he translated into Russian the story of Tīmūr's birth as it appeared in a manuscript titled *Tarikh-i Tīmūri*. According to Klemm, the manuscript was written in 1712 by a nameless "Bukharan Tajik" who had compiled his account based on various historical works. Klemm's translation was a contribution to a book that

[89] See for example, Lucien Bouvat, *Essai sur la civilisation timouride* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1926); Marcel Brion (ed.), *Tamerlan* (Paris: A. Michel, 1963); Michele Bernardini, "The Historiography Concerning Tīmūr-i Lang: A Bibliographical Survey," in *Italo-Uzbek Scientific Cooperation in Archaeology and Islamic Studies: An Overview*, ed. Samuela Pagani (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2001), 137–96.

[90] H. F. Hofman, *Turkish Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey* (Utrecht, 1969), 14–15.

[91] From the preface to the manuscript, Vámbéry was given to understand that the work was copied during the "21st year of reign of Abu'l-Ghāzī Khan, under the governorship of Muḥammad Dāniyāl Biy Atalïq in the year 1024 A.H." Vámbéry knew that the year 1024 preceded Abu'l-Ghāzī's (the famous Khan of Khiva) reign by approximately 30 years, whereas Dāniyāl Biy Atalïq ruled approximately 110 years after Abu'l-Ghāzī had died (it did not occur to Vámbéry that the Abu'l-Ghāzī in question may have been the puppet khan Abu'l-Ghāzī who was khan during some of Dāniyāl Biy's tenure, although he did not rule for 21 years). The scribe further explained that since Tīmūr's death 399 years had passed, and that he copied the work around 1092 A.H. All the dates, of course, do not make much sense (H. Vambéry, "Eine legendäre Geschichte Tīmūrs," *ZDMG* [1897], 216.)

featured a collection of "Turkestani" tales. Again, Klemm did not attempt to analyze any aspects of the story and merely provided a translation.[92]

During his expedition in Central Asia in the early 1920s in order to catalogue manuscripts in Bukhara, the Russian orientalist A. A. Semenov encountered a significant number of literary productions consisting of stories and narratives about Tīmūr. Semenov dismissively associated these tales with the "typical chatter that dominates idle conversations in tea-shops and guest-houses" (*choikhona*s and *mihmonkhona*s).[93] Nevertheless, in his efforts to identify the origins of these *Tīmūr-nāma* manuscripts, Semenov came to the conclusion that they were based on a late fifteenth-century poetic work titled *Tīmūr-nāma*, authored by ʿAbdallāh Hātifī, the celebrated poet of the Safavid court who had worked for a while under the patronage of Shāh Ismāʿīl Safavi.[94] However, it seems that the connection is not strong. Hātifī's *Tīmūr-nāma* is a long poem, whereas the biographies in question are in prose. Although the rendering of poetry into prose was a rather commonplace phenomenon in the Muslim world, the problem lies elsewhere. First, although authors of *Tīmūr-nāma*s acknowledge – already in the introduction, as we have seen – Hātifī as one of their many sources, his poem is not prominently featured in the legendary biographies and is relatively insignificant. Almost all the anecdotes and stories reported in the *Books of Tīmūr* are not found in Hātifī's *Tīmūr-nāma*. In fact, the compilers of Tīmūr's biographies probably copied verses from Hātifī and inserted them every once in a while into the text.[95] Semenov's comments from the early 1920s were, for several decades, the only reference to the *Tīmūr-nāma*, notwithstanding descriptions in other catalogues and bio-bibliographical surveys.

In the mid-1990s, Devin DeWeese used the *Kunūz al-aʿẓam* as part of his extensive study of the Islamization of the Golden Horde, the westernmost part of the Mongol Empire, and the narrative cycle about Sayyid Ata and his descendants. Sayyid Ata fulfilled a crucial role in the conversion to Islam of the peoples of the Golden Horde, and his reputation in the region is still present today. He was described in different sources as occupying the position of *naqīb*, a military rank carrying special administrative duties and ceremonial

[92] V. Klemm, "Predanie o rozhdenii Tamerlana," in *Turkestanskiĭ literaturnyĭ sbornik v pol'zu prokazhennykh* (St. Petersburg, 1900), 304–14. Much like the modern Uzbek rendition, this translation, too, has many errors in transcription: Amir Qazaghan is introduced as Amir Karagan, Mount Ghazgham as Mount Karagan, Tegina Begïm as Neki Bigim, and so forth.

[93] A. A. Semenov, *Katalog rukopiseĭ istoricheskogo otdela Bukharskoĭ Tsentral'noĭ biblioteki* (Tashkent, 1925), 26.

[94] See Abdallāh Hātifī, *Tīmūr-nāma*, ed. Abu Hashim Sayyid Yusha' (Madras: University of Madras, 1958). On Hātifī's work, see Michele Bernardini, "Hātifī's *Tīmūrnama* and Qasimi's *Shahnameh-yi Ismāʿīl*: Considerations towards a Double Critical Edition," in *Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Andrew J. Newman, 3–18; and more recently by the same author, *Mémoire et propaganda à l'époque Timouride* (Paris, 2008), 127–44.

[95] Miklukho-Maklai reported that verses from Hātifī were interlaced in the beginning of one of the St. Petersburg manuscripts.

functions, in the army of Özbek Khan, leader of the Golden Horde (r. 1313–1341). In one of the stories featured in Tīmūr's legendary biographies, the khan vowed to assign the office of the *niqābat* to Sayyid Ata's descendants. DeWeese was justifiably reluctant to try and define the *Kunūz*, but he did point out correctly that although the work seemed to be fraught with "considerable problems," it had been unduly denigrated by historians.[96]

Popularity, Orality, and Genre

While discussing the narrative cycle of Edigü, the powerful military commander of the Golden Horde and celebrated founder of the Noghay state, DeWeese noted the "remarkable persistence and widespread popularity of tales and legends" about Tīmūr. The most prevalent feature that both Edigü and Tīmūr shared was their status as tribal leaders who successfully challenged the power of the khans. This recognition, according to DeWeese, continued to "dwarf any popular literature devoted to Chingisid khans."[97]

In other words, evaluating this body of literary works as "popular" should take under consideration not only its considerable production, its continued circulation, its relatively straightforward language, and its oral dimension, but also its distinct standing as providing a voice for the "tribal" element. The contents of Tīmūr's biographical corpus were, in fact, positing an alternative to the *aq-süyek* (the "white bones") or *altan urugh* (the "golden clan"), that is, to the elite of the originally steppe-born hierarchies that elevated the descendants of Chinggis Khan to the position of exclusive claimants to legitimate monarchy, a claim that they (or their ancestors) initiated, fashioned, and perpetuated. Of course, the Chinggisid ideal was so potent, so well-engrained in society and principles of governance, that it was not easily dismissed (or even necessarily desired to be dismissed). The pressure for a new vision for state and society that emerged in Central Asia in the eighteenth century certainly also came into play in Tīmūr's biographies.

The popular standing of *Books of Tīmūr* – that we have labeled the "popular history" of Central Asia – is naturally difficult to determine. Popularity has been always a rather vague term, and the tools that we posses to measure it in eighteenth-century Central Asia are far from ideal. As outlined previously, one may argue that what made *Books of Tīmūr* popular are the sheer number of surviving manuscripts when compared to other works from the era; the continuity in production and copying of the biographies, almost without

[96] Devin DeWeese, "The Descendants of Sayyid Ata and the Rank of *naqīb* in Central Asia," *JAOS* 115/4 (1995), 613. Elsewhere, DeWeese referred briefly to the *Kunūz* as a "legendary history" of Central Asia. (Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, 228, n. 155.)

[97] DeWeese, *Islamization*, 340.

interruption, from the eighteenth century down to the present; the notion that parts of the work began as oral traditions that were ultimately put into writing; the unclear provenance and the absence of apparent official patronage that would have dictated a clear agenda for the texts (and the fact that the work survived despite not having clear patrons); and finally, the language used in the text that has been clearly modified to accommodate a more "ordinary" audience. We will revisit some of these criteria next.

In his work on the *Sīrat 'Antar*, the well-known epic of the pre-Islamic Arab poet 'Antara ibn Shaddād, Peter Heath designed a scheme to help define the characteristics of popular literary works. He made several distinctions between "elite," "popular," and "folk" compositions by following several categories of assessment: the qualifications of the text's author or creator,[98] the venue of performance or publication, the accessibility of the text, the audience, the aesthetic goals of the text, the social and geographical circumstances, and the context. To be considered "elite," a text would be characteristically produced by a professional, namely one who was explicitly compensated for his work and also may have belonged to a certain social or economic class. The venue for the performance or publication of "elite" texts would be restricted and unique, inaccessible to the general public. The audience would be educated, adult, and "hierarchical" (particularly by status). Furthermore, the text itself would tend to be, in Heath's words, "restricted, set, unique and equivocal," emphasizing the significance of its integrity and complexity. The text's aesthetic goals would aim for "edification and singularity," and its social/geographical setting would be city-oriented. Based on these criteria, most of the official court chronicles from Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would easily be classified as elite.

The picture changes somewhat with Heath's introduction of "popular" texts. Although most also seem to have been produced by professionals or specialists, the venue for their performance was more public and less restricted, inviting diverse audiences, including "elite" audiences, to attend. Audiences were not necessarily specialist and educated, but more broad and diverse, including both urban and rural spectators and listeners. Significantly, the audience in this grouping was not limited to adults.[99] The texts were not as constrained by certain forms and content, but, in Heath's words, remained "accessible, variable, formulaic and univocal." One of their aesthetic goals, in addition to their didactic aspirations, was clearly to entertain, and their contexts were "transportable." The main difference between "popular" and "folk" in Heath's categorization seems to be the emphasis in the latter group on the works' very

[98] Whom Heath referred to as the text's "producer."

[99] The idea that orientation toward the younger members of the audience was one of the ways to measure the text's popularity supports our consideration of *Books of Tīmūr* as popular, particularly given the recent edition of the text published in Uzbekistan.

local, communal, and regional appeal that may imply fairly restricted geographical and social settings.[100]

If we follow Heath's classification, Tīmūr's heroic apocrypha appear to have embraced the first two levels of production and performance ("elite" and "popular"). Nevertheless, before jumping to conclusions let us examine more ways to assess popularity. Efforts to identify and characterize popularity of written works in different parts of the Muslim world also pointed to more culture-specific and less thematic criteria. Most of these efforts were attempted with a certain degree of reluctance due to the illusive nature of the evidence. Jean Calmard, for example, recognized two decisive factors for the classification of "popular literature" in Safavid Iran:[101] On the one hand, he considered popular the literary works that were recited by professional storytellers (*qisseh-khvān*, *daftar-khvān*, *naqqāl*, *ma'rakagīr*, and so on), a surprisingly poorly researched topic in Central Asian history. On the other hand, Calmard considered popular those literary creations that were banned by religious decrees, mostly issued by Twelver Imami *mujtahid*s. Calmard claimed that such banned texts were either inevitably popular or had the potential of becoming popular, otherwise there would be no need to outlaw them. I am unaware of similar Islamic rulings against particular stories or storytelling in Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even if they did exist (in a counter-Shi'ite, Sunni context), they probably would not apply to Tīmūr's biographies.

The Persian folklorist Mohammad Ja'far Mahjub suggested the following, content-based groupings for popular literature during Iran's Qajar era: stories that emanated from the storytellers' imagination; stories that somehow related to historical figures (here he lists such texts as the *Eskandar-nāme* and *Rostam-nāme*); stories that centered on illustrious religious figures; stories that "embellished the historical role of religious characters (such as the *Moxtār-nāme*)"; stories about romantic adventures (here he lists *Haft paykar-e Bahrām-gur*, *Čahār darviš*, *Sendebād-nāme*, and so forth); stories focusing on animal actors; and also "minor works of classical Persian poets in popular editions."[102] Interestingly, this division was not necessarily the division that the Iranians themselves made at the time. For instance, in Hājji Musā's catalogue of printed books dated to the middle of the nineteenth century, we

[100] Peter Heath, *The thirsty sword: Sīrat Antar and the Arabic popular epic* (University of Utah Press, 1996), 47. Heath cautioned that the picture that he painted was not a pure and simple elite/populace dichotomy.

[101] Calmard admitted that the concept of popular literature was "difficult to delineate." In the end, he did not, in fact, define popularity (Calmard, "Popular Literature").

[102] Cited in Ulrich Marzolph, "Persian Popular Literature in the Qajar Period," *Asian Folklore Studies* 60/2 (2001), 217. Marzolph explained that this categorization applied to the late Qajar era, and that the popularity of these works also depended heavily on their distribution in the advent of print and therefore tended to ignore their oral heritage. (Work titles are given here in Marzolph's transcription.)

find a different kind of classification of literary works. This included books, mainly texts on historic people and events as well as many works that we would probably label "hagiographies," texts on Shi'i materials such as Ḥasan and Ḥusayn's martyrdom, collections of poetry, tales and stories, and readings for children.[103] In the group classified as tales and stories (*qesse ve hekāyāt*) we find, among other works, the Alexander Romance, *One Thousand and One Nights*, *'Ajā'eb al-maxluqāt*, *Rostam-nāme*, and the *Anvār-e Sohayli*. This grouping would clearly be at odds with the division of popular literature in the late Qajar era outlined by Mahjub or even with our understanding of the history of Persian literature today. In the books for kids (*BaččE-XvĀNI*, in Marzolph's unusual transcription), the catalogue's compiler also listed works that had been considered an essential part of the canon of popular literature in many parts of the Muslim world, such as *Layli va Majnun*, *Širin va Farhād*, *Čehel tuti*, and *Yusof va Zolayxā*.[104]

In contrast with Iran, the study of institutions of professional storytellers in Central Asia in comparable eras is still in its infancy. There seems to be enough indirect evidence in Tīmūr's biographies to suggest that they formed an essential part of the repertoire of storytellers in Central Asia; and the chapbook-like features of the biographies, albeit rather modest and sometimes ambiguous, may bear a distant resemblance to the *ṭumār*, the outline in prose of the more developed narrative or epic poem that the storyteller used in order to help him memorize and improvise upon the original text.[105] In some cases, the *ṭumār* is reputed to have been as long as the text it was purported to represent.[106] Although *Books of Tīmūr* do not feature the same *ṭumār*esque markers that storytellers used, for example, to indicate a variety of interjections and sequences, the language of the biographies is abundant with expressions that reveal a clear function for a storyteller (such as "the storyteller says that," "now let us hear about," "we have now arrived at the story of," or "listen to" this or the other). This would indicate a performative aspect for our texts and also perhaps serve as evidence that some of the stories were pulled from a reservoir of tales that fit the general premise of the biographies.[107] It is fairly clear that among the host of sources used by the author of the *Tīmūr-nāma*, a

[103] Ibid., 223.

[104] Marzolph argued that one of the guidelines that seemed to inform the compiler had been the length of the text – the "children books" were generally much shorter than their counterparts in other sections. (Marzolph, "Persian Popular Literature," 231.)

[105] See also Mary Ellen Page, "Professional Storytelling in Iran: Transmission and Practice," *Iranian Studies* 12/3–4 (Summer-Autumn, 1979), 198.

[106] See for example, Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 29.

[107] We should add that, as opposed to most (by no means all) oral epic poetry in Eurasia, the hero of the *Tīmūr-nāma* was a real, historical figure. Whether or not it made a difference for the audience is unclear.

special place was reserved for oral traditions, again judging by the language of the text. Nevertheless, with no access to the original "oral tradition," many questions are left unanswered: What exactly happened to the oral tradition part of the narrative once it was put into writing? Was this a genuine turning point in the history of the "work"? Was there a change in language from oral usage to literary usage? Has the language become more simplified or more embellished for the readers? And how does the oral tradition function alongside the written text?[108]

Orality has always been important in Central Asia, in both official and unofficial capacities.[109] Under certain circumstances, formal records (not only popular tales) also required public recitation. The stipulation for public readings or reenactments of a document (for example, on the occasion of its renewal or on a periodic basis) was often specified in the documents themselves. Consequently, the act of announcing a document's contents or the reading of the paper out loud for the purpose of its public confirmation helped maintain, as Florian Schwarz convincingly suggested, "the integrity of the community" in what became a genuine communal ritual.[110] Although the oral dimensions of the *Books of Tīmūr* were clearly important, we have no direct evidence, beyond our earlier suggestions, that these texts were actually performed and served in a similar capacity as, for example, the aforementioned formal document. Besides several clues in the language of the biographies, all other evidence that points to the public retelling of Tīmūr's life story remains fundamentally circumstantial.

The existence of storytellers in Central Asia in the eighteenth century, whether as individuals or arranged in guilds, is assumed but not confirmed as they emerge more compellingly in the sources only later. Arminius Vámbéry, for example, reported that during his visit to Bukhara, he saw in front of the mosque and the palace, "dervishes and meddahs (storytellers) recount the heroic deeds of renowned prophets and warriors, distorting their features in every possible way as they do so, to a large and curious audience."[111] By the end of the nineteenth century, Ole Olufsen, a Danish officer and explorer, reported that

[108] See also the previously mentioned recent work on the interaction between oral and written traditions in the *Shāh-nāma* (Yamamoto, *The Oral Background*).

[109] A general discussion about orality and textuality in Central Asia, primarily in the realm of Islamic education, may be found in Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 22–25. In this part of his study, Khalid relied primarily on the memoirs of Sadr al-Din Aini (1878–1954), one of Central Asia's most prominent Tajik authors.

[110] Florian Schwarz, "An endowment deed of 1547 (953 h.) for a Kubravi khanaqah in Samarkand," in *Die Grenzen der Welt: Arabica et Iranica ad honorem Heinz Gaube*, eds. Lorenz Korn, Eva Orthmann, and Florian Schwarz (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2008), 195.

[111] Arminius Vámbéry, *Arminius Vambery: His Life and Adventures, written by himself* (London, 1884), 224.

> "Public readers are seen everywhere, especially in the larger towns. Outside the mosques or medresses they take their stand on the pavement where they begin their recital of Persian fables, Persian poets or the like, sometimes they also read a section of the history of Bokhara, Samarkand or Tīmūr or some saint's legend. Sitting on a small carpet or a mat they deliver their subject in a monotonous voice and pray Allah to yield the number of Puls which have to be thrown to them during the recital. Nearly every afternoon such recitals take place at Bokhara and the larger towns; in the villages the public readers are often itinerant mullahs."[112]

The Danish officer's useful account of the "public readers" was immediately followed by a description of "bear-leaders," "itinerant jugglers with monkeys," "performing goats, civets or venomous serpents," and the like. Olufsen clearly assigned to the entire range of these "folk-arts" a primarily entertaining component, even if he seemed to consider storytelling the least entertaining medium, at least with respect to the performers that he had seen.

Similar descriptions, perhaps with more appreciation for the storytellers, were provided by other visitors to the region, among them also Olufsen's contemporaries, Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross. They stated that "the Rigistan[113] is a happy hunting-ground for the ethnologist. Here one may listen unmolested to the professional storyteller, who holds his audience enthralled by oft-repeated tales of ancient chivalry."[114] They mentioned the *maddāh*, "who stands while he relates edifying or amusing anecdotes," and the *risālachi*, "who, seated on the ground, recites tales and legends in verse to a monotonous accompaniment on the two-stringed lute."[115] The storytellers were attended by an audience, some of whom came for the story and others who were helping the storyteller achieve his goal: "Two or three men or boys sit down at a distance of some ten yards facing the story-teller, and, throughout the entertainment, ejaculate at fixed intervals (as it were punctuating the commas and full stops in the story) such words as *hakkan*, 'of a truth,' and *khūsh*, 'bravo,' etc."[116] Among the repertoire of stories that they heard, Skrine

[112] Ole Olufsen, *The Emir of Bokhara and His Country: Journeys and Studies in Bokhara* (1911), 434.

[113] The main square in Samarqand.

[114] Henry Francis Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, *The Heart of Asia: A History of Russian Turkestan and the Central Asian Khanates from the Earliest Times* (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 401. Nicolai Khanykov reported in the early 1840s that the places for performances often were large spaces in front of religious and administrative institutions, town squares, and special areas in markets. Apparently, during holy days people would gather in the courtyards of the great mosques in Bukhara "for amusement." Unfortunately, Khanykov was not specific about the types of said amusements. (N. Khanykov, *Bokhara; Its Amir and Its People*, tr. Baron Clemet A. de Bode, London: J. Madden, 1845, 120.)

[115] On the terminology of the different performers in Central Asia, see later in the chapter, and also Karl Reichl, *Turkic Epic Oral Poetry: Traditions, Forms, Poetic Structures* (New York: Garland, 1992), 57–91.

[116] Skrine and Ross, *The Heart of Asia*, 401.

and Ross mentioned only one, a story about a certain Bukharan amir named 'Abdullah.[117]

As mentioned, we have little research on storytellers in Central Asia, even if Semenov gave the impression that the *Tīmūr-nāma* was the topic for countless exchanges in tea shops and guest houses almost a century ago.[118] It is safe to say that most attention in this regard has been directed to the study of similar institutions of singers and reciters of epic tradition among Central Asia's nomads.[119] Although there is some overlap between the different traditions and their presentations, it seems that this study deals with a different type of story and context and with performers and singers in the khanates' more urban centers, who had served a different function and performed an entirely different repertoire.[120] There is also a difference between the professional storytellers of Iran and those of Central Asia.

Probably the most useful anthropological study on this subject was conducted by A. L. Troitskaya. Focusing primarily on Samarqand, Tashkent, and Qoqand, Troitskaya maintained that by the end of the nineteenth century most *qalandar*s (itinerant dervishes) in the areas under Russian rule could be found in Samarqand.[121] In addition, according to Troitskaya's informants, in late-nineteenth-century Tashkent there were approximately two hundred storytellers (*maddāḥ*) and their families organized in corporations – in Tashkent the corporation maintained close ties with guilds of *qalandar*s.[122] Often the *maddāḥ*s would walk around the city in small groups that included students or followers, and once they arrived at their designated place, the students would begin to attract the audience with singing and acting. When enough audience had gathered, the storyteller would begin his recitation.[123] In Qoqand during the colonial era, the *maddāḥ*s had gathered around the great mosque on Fridays. Some recited verses by Sufi poets; others recited *hadith*s or Qur'anic

117 It is unclear whether the two authors witnessed these performances together or independently.

118 See Semenov, *Katalog*, 26.

119 For general references on the significance of oral epic poetry in the region see DeWeese, *Islamization*, 517, n. 27.

120 See for example, Karl Reichl, "Oral Tradition and Performance of the Uzbek and Karakalpak Epic Singers," in *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung. Teil III* (Vorträge des 4. Epensymposiums des Sonderforschungsbereiches 12, Bonn 1983), ed. W. Heissig (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985), Asiatische Forschungen, Bd. 91/III, 613–43. I am also unaware of the historical continuity of institutions of reciters of religious works, such as Dr. Kleinmichel describes in her study about the twentieth century. See Sigrid Kleinmichel, *Halpa in Choresm und Atin Ayi im Ferghanatal, Zur Geschichte des Lesens in Usbekistan*, *ANOR* 4 (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2001).

121 A. L. Troĭtskaia, "Iz proshlogo kalandarov i maddakhov v Uzbekistane," in *Domusul'manskie verovaniia i obriady v Sredneĭ Azii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 192. See also E. Allworth, "Masraḥ. 5. In Central Asia and Afghanistan," *EI²* VI, 764–72.

122 The *maddāḥ*, sometimes pronounced *maddakh* in Central Asia, originally signified a panegyrist but came to be known as a storyteller in the Turkic world. See also P. N. Boratav, "Maddāḥ" *EI²* V, 951.

123 Troĭtskaia, "Iz proshlogo kalandarov," 199.

passages. Typical performance places used to be the open courts in front of mosques, particularly after the midday prayer, or in town squares, and during holidays also in tea shops and in bazaars. Their repertoire, once they started their performance, would be composed of *dāstān*s.[124] As examples for popular tales, Troitskaya mentions stories about Baba Raḥīm Mashrab[125] or Mulla Nasradin Effendi,[126] or even stories about Bāyazīd Biṣṭāmī and ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.[127] One famous personality, the subject of numerous heroic tales, that is missing from Troitskaya's report is Tīmūr. Granted, Troitskaya did not conduct her research in Bukhara, seemingly the capital of the Tīmūr-related stories that are the subject of this study, but she did visit Samarqand. Her research, as revealing as it was, was conducted in the 1940s and was undoubtedly burdened with restrictions, whether placed directly by Soviet academic standards or by implied understanding of the populace of their required degree of cooperation. Could it be that this is why she did not report any Tīmūr-related stories as part of the storytellers' repertoire? We have little indication of the performance of these or related stories also before Soviet rule. Neither earlier scholars who had excelled in the collection of folkloric materials (such as Wilhelm Radloff and Chokan Valikhanov) nor more recent specialists on Central Asian epic traditions (such as Victor Zhirmunsky and Karl Reichl) reported witnessing or collecting any Tīmūr-related materials.[128] The same is probably true for the more "national" phase under Soviet rule. The type of materials that the Soviets encouraged to collect regarding the "national" folklore of the different Central Asian groups did not include *Books of Tīmūr*. This lack of registration of such materials may be due to scholars' concentration on the more nomadic populations of the region and may provide further evidence that Tīmūr's reputation was both more limited to Central Asia's urban parts and may have been less "folkloric" than other materials.

[124] The *dāstān*, in its Uzbek context, was a written version of an oral epic, typically a mixture of verse and prose. The first versions of *dāstān*s that we have date to the late nineteenth century, although many had been collected later by the Soviets. On the variations of the term, see Reichl, *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, 124. See also Dan Prior's recent introduction to Central Asian folklore (D. Prior, "Folklore – Central Asia," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, eds. David Levinson and Karen Christensen, New York: Charles Scribner, 2002, vol. 2, 392–95).

[125] Baba Raḥīm Mashrab (or Shah Mashrab), nicknamed *dīvāna* (the madman), was a poet and an itinerant dervish in early eighteenth-century Central Asia (he was executed in 1711) who composed poetry that has been usually interpreted as criticism of the upper echelons of society. Mashrab became a popular folkloric figure in Central Asia in later centuries.

[126] Mulla Nasrudin is a legendary folkloric figure, often comical, whose tales and jokes served (and still serve) audiences across the Middle East and Central Asia as a source of entertainment and instruction.

[127] Bāyazīd Biṣṭāmī was one of the most well-known early Muslim mystics (d. 874) who had spent most his life in Khorasan and whose sayings have been celebrated throughout the Muslim world. ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166) was a Hanbali scholar and eponymous founder of the Qādiriyya, one of the oldest Sufi orders.

[128] Nora K. Chadwick and Viktor M. Zhirmunskii, *Oral epics of Central Asia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

Therefore, if we accept Heath's classification of the elite, popular, and folk repertoire, although Tīmūr's biographies may carry folkloric elements, it seems that they primarily matched both elite and popular standards. The texts probably emerged within an elite setting, perhaps with different goals than what they had later become, but made their way beyond the elite to other segments of the population. They were supported and sponsored – as an expensive production – by donors of means. We may assume also that stories in the biographies had survived in oral tradition, even if the bulk of evidence supports their preservation in written form, having been copied painstakingly in lengthy oeuvres. Although we can acknowledge or identify the oral dimensions or motifs in the prose, some of them clearly manifested in the language of the text, it is hard to apply the same judgment that folklorists would to a performance of a tradition that they observe, record, and collect testimonies about.

Returning to the questions of genre and genre boundaries, the exclusion of the biographies from the registry of the Central Asian epic repertoire adds to all the other factors (language, style, presentation, and so forth) that rule out the consideration of the *Books of Tīmūr* as epics. We refrain from labeling Tīmūr's legendary biographies as "hagiographies" even if they carry hagiographical properties and even if shaykhs and mystics played very important roles in them. The *manāqib* genre, too, is inappropriate, as this is not really the kind of an exemplary biography "of a laudatory nature," and the main character (Tīmūr) does not perform miraculous deeds, even if he is surrounded by Sufis and holy men who accomplish such feats on a regular basis.[129]

The biographies bear some resemblance to the *sīra* (biography) genre, particularly to the later segments of the genre that had been dedicated mostly to heroes and rulers. Possible insights into the world of the *Books of Tīmūr* may be gained by comparing them – guardedly – with the *Sīrat Baybars*, one of the great sagas of the Arab World.[130] This narrative cycle about the Mamlūk sultan al-Ẓāhir Baybars (r. 1260–1277) seems to have been a collection of stories – mostly oral traditions, it is assumed – that were remembered and performed in front of an audience and continue to serve in this very capacity today. The comparison with Tīmūr's biographies is worthwhile, not only because the works have much in common, but also because the state of research on the

[129] See Ch. Pellat, "Manākib," *EI²* VI, 349.

[130] For the purpose of this study I used the French translation of the *sīra*. See *Roman de Baïbars*, traduit de l'arabe et annoté par Georges Bohas et Jean-Patrick Guillaume (Paris: Sindbad, 1985), 4 vols. On the history of the *Sīra*, see Thomas Herzog, "La Sîrat Baybars, histoire d'un texte," in the recent valuable collection of articles on the work under the editorship of Jean-Claude Garcin (ed.), *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*, 31–60. This collection features thirteen articles about the *sīra* and its implications, from a history of the text itself, a history of research, the placement of the text within certain literary and folkloric traditions, the implications of the text for today's Arab world, and so forth. One can only hope that Tīmūr's biographies will receive similar attention in the future.

sīra is much more advanced than the research on the *Books of Tīmūr*. Similar to Tīmūr's legendary biographies, the *sīra* was also put into writing several centuries after the ruler's death, although almost all of the existing manuscripts of the work are from the nineteenth century.[131]

The *sīra* begins with the story of Baybars' climb to kingship in accordance with an ancient prophecy that would coincide with bringing about the final victory of the Muslims over their great rivals – the Christian Franks and the "fire-worshipping" Mongols. *Sīrat Baybars* tells the story of the young prince who was betrayed by his brothers and thrown in a pit only to be rescued by a passing caravan of merchants who then sold him to slavery.[132] He subsequently fell gravely ill. More or less at the same time, the Ayyūbid Sultān of Egypt, al-Sālih Ayyūb (r. 1240–1249) had a forceful dream in which he was attacked in the desert by a band of ferocious hyenas. As he was on the verge of losing the battle, he was rescued by a group of lions, led by a most formidable large lion. After consulting with his astrologers and dream interpreters, the Sultān decided to purchase Turkic *mamlūk*s to help him withstand a potential onslaught. Among these *mamlūk*s one was supposed to possess extraordinary qualities. The Sultān sent a merchant to Asia Minor to purchase the slaves and among them was young Baybars who was then seriously ill. He was so ill that the merchant was forced to leave him in Damascus on his way to Cairo. It is in Damascus that Baybars would begin to acquire a reputation for being the shield of the poor, the companion of the high and mighty, and the protector of Islam. He eventually moved to Cairo, where his adventures continued. Reminiscent of Tīmūr's biographies, the *sīra* is a collection of half-historical tales brought to the reader (or listener, or spectator) in a chronological order, from the hero's birth (or rather, the prophecy of his imminent birth) to his death. Because each tale is complex and, to some extent, independent, the stories could be read separately. In other words, there was no real need to read (or recite) those stories from the beginning of the narrative to its end. It sufficed to join the text at some point and assume that matters would become clear independently of the other stories. One may assume that the stories gradually became familiar to the audience, and they already knew what to expect. For the most part, Tīmūr's biographies seem to offer more continuity than the *sīra*.

Why was the *sīra* written? Similar to the *Books of Tīmūr*, *Sīrat Baybars* also offers no explanation regarding the circumstances of its composition. Perhaps surprisingly, there have been hardly any attempts to examine the

[131] But even after 180 years of scholarship (by no means extensive) on the work, scholars are still incapable of finding the "mother" copy of the text. Our earliest copy (merely a few fragments) of the work is from the seventeenth century, although it seems likely that some version of the *sīra* existed in the sixteenth century and even earlier. See Jean-Patrick Guillaume, "La Sîrat Baybars et la tradition du roman épique Arabe," in *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*, 62–63.

[132] Echoing the story of the biblical Joseph.

reasons for the production of *Sīrat Baybars*. Recently, Jane Hathaway raised the possibility that the *sīra*, as well as other folkloric materials, were used for the indoctrination of various "grandees" who came from many different backgrounds to Ottoman Egypt. Thus, the work complemented the sources of knowledge of the Ottoman rulers of Egypt when they came to administer the territories that had previously been under Mamlūk rule.[133] Hathaway claims that nostalgia to the Mamlūk era was "nurtured by folkloric presentations of key sultans" and that "the transmission of such stories was part of the future grandee's education and acculturation."[134]

It seems more plausible that the *sīra* served initially as a counteraction against external threats or internal predicaments.[135] In *Sīrat Baybars*, the Franks, the Mongols, and sometimes the Ismāʿīli assassins serve as the personification of a menacing Other. While fighting them together, Baybars and the Mamlūks also reinforce their own identity. As we will see later, in Tīmūr's biographies Central Asia is constantly challenged, from within and from the outside, and the challenges often reach apocalyptic dimensions. There is no single entity that acts as the Other: The hero, Tīmūr, fights against corrupt kings, against false prophets, against external enemies (invasions of Qalmuqs, for example), and against the collapsing world around him. Tīmūr fulfils his destiny, decreed by the divine, to conquer the world (even if he does not betray a clear desire to do so) and thus prevent its downfall. Moreover, the legendary biographies presented an ethos, a moral code and a set of guiding principles for Islamic communities in Central Asia at a time of crisis (and did so while providing some entertainment as well). This new ethos called for a collective effort and for an understanding of the individual's place in the Islamic society. At the same time, another message was clearly articulated: the codependence of ordinary people and "men of God." As Gril put it, "the government of ordinary man depends entirely on the government of the men of God, even if the latter remain hidden."[136] This vision served different purposes for different constituencies.

[133] Jane Hathaway, "Mamluk 'Revivals' and Mamluk Nostalgia in Ottoman Egypt," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, edited by Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni (London: Brill, 2004), 387–406 (387).

[134] Hathaway, "Mamluk," 389. Hathaway maintains that the construction of an "idealized vision" of the past and the "exploitation" of the pre-Ottoman past in the provinces served as a source of the grass-roots authority far from the center and enhanced the grandees' status within their respective localities. She further argues that the *sīra* reflected "Ottoman-era popular memory of the events of the early Mamluk sultanate, embellished with stock elements of shape-changing wizards and damsels in distress." (Ibid., 401.) We have no proof that any "grandees" actually read this material, and we have no explanation of the transition of the work from a manual for administrators (one might assume that such a "manual" would enjoy official patronage and we have no evidence of patronage of any kind) to a popular, public narrative.

[135] As hinted by Herzog in "La Sîrat Baybars."

[136] Gril, "Du sultanat au califat universel," 180.

CHAPTER 2

Tīmūr's Birth and Childhood

Timurid historiography from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries offered almost no details regarding many aspects of Tīmūr's private life. We seem to have no official stories about the ruler's birth and youth or about his parents. The earliest developed account concerns Tīmūr's struggle for power in Mawarannahr when he was already in his twenties and possibly in his thirties.[1] Stories in outside sources, either contemporaries such as Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo (ambassador to Tīmūr's court of Henri III, king of Castile and León) or the historian Ibn ʻArabshāh (d. 1450), provided a few more details, albeit briefly, concerning Tīmūr's humble economic origins – even if his father did serve in some function at the court of a local amir – and his early career in sheep stealing and brigandage.[2]

The story that begins the biographical cycle details the circumstances surrounding Tīmūr's birth and his early childhood. The city of Bukhara emerges as the seat of power of the Chaghatayid realm. Parts of the Chaghatayid lineage, as perceived by the storytellers of the eighteenth century, are introduced, as well as the connection to Chinggis Khan. They explain the claim to the kingship of Central Asia not only of the Chaghatay khans but also of the Barlas tribe. As they treasure Bukhara's prominence, readers and listeners become acquainted with one of the pivotal figures in the city's history and in Tīmūr's early life, Sayf al-Din Bākharzī, who performs a commanding role as the formidable Central Asian Sufi shaykh. He is a spiritual leader but also a man of means, a mediator between the people and the authorities, and a possessor of hidden knowledge communicated to him by the divine. He is the true king maker in the initial story. The Chinggisid khans, with the exception of Bayān-Qulī Khan's three-year reign, are portrayed as heartless, brutal, and corrupt. Their destructive traits and malevolent conduct even engender an alliance of ordinary folk, Sufis, and amirs (the military commanders) against the

[1] Beatrice F. Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21/1–2 (1988), 115–16.

[2] Ibid., 116.

Chinggisid stratum, and time and again the storytellers depict the decline of the Chinggisid house down to its near-final demise.

Owing to the mediation of the shaykh, who is aware of the divine backing for Tīmūr's eventual rise to prominence, Taraghāi Bahādur, the Barlas chieftain destined to become Tīmūr's father, encounters Tegina Begïm, a daughter of a prominent legal scholar, destined to become the hero's mother. This blessed union is achieved with some difficulty, as there are many constituencies in Bukhara – and throughout the rest of the known world of the time – who are unhappy with the emergence of a new world conqueror. Following Tīmūr's birth, a birth that Tīmūr's father (away in battle at the time) was unable to witness, the mother and infant find refuge in the estate of Amir Chāku, another prominent member of the Barlas. News of the birth of the ordained child spreads far and wide, and the rulers of the known world send their representatives to assassinate him. Tīmūr is saved through the intervention of Shaykh Bākharzī (by then already deceased), and the end of the chapter witnesses the final reunion of the family.

Account of the Birth of Ṣāḥib-qirān, Conqueror of the World[3]

The storyteller narrates that Ṣāḥib-qirān's father was Amir Taraghāi Bahādur, a descendant of Qarāchār Noyān,[4] who was a relative[5] of Temüjin, who is now known as Chinggis Khan. When Chinggis Khan returned from the annihilation of Iran[6] to his capital Qaraqorum in Moghulistan, he summoned his beloved son whose name was Chaghatay Khan and appointed him governor of Mawarannahr and Ferghana. Chaghatay made his vizier Qarāchār Noyān accompany him,[7] and made representatives of the thirty-two tribes go with him as well, and now they are called Aimāq.[8] Chaghatay Khan made the city of Kashghar his capital and gave Mawarannahr to Qarāchār Noyān.[9] Chaghatay's descendants became the kings of Mawarannahr and Ferghana

[3] *Kunūz*, 17–50. The manuscript has two systems of pagination (pages and folios). I refer to the page system.

[4] Noyān was a Mongol military rank, by and large meaning "commander."

[5] *Amm-zāda*. Literally, a paternal uncle's son.

[6] Probably a reference to the famed devastation in Khorasan after the Mongol invasions in the early 1220s.

[7] Qarāchār was Chaghatay Khan's head of the *keshik* (imperial household guard).

[8] Cf. with *TN Kullīyāt*: "… and made the thirty-two tribes go with him as well, and so the people of Chaghatay were formed." The term *aimāq*, as it appears in the *Kunūz*, seems to mean only a loose confederation of mixed tribes and not a specific group. Since the sixteenth century, various traditions ascribed different numbers for the Uzbek tribes. The most common were either thirty-two or ninety-two. See also Wolfgang Holzwarth, "The Uzbek State as Reflected in Eighteenth-Century Bukharan Sources," *AS/EA* 60/2 (2006), 342–46.

[9] This grant would serve to facilitate Tīmūr's claim to the throne of Mawarannahr as Qarāchār Noyān's descendant.

one after the other, until the turn of kingship reached Bayān-Qulī Khan ibn Dūrān Khan.[10]

Such was the turn of events that in the year 720 Qazān Khan (known as Malikshāh) sat on the throne in Bukhara.[11] And at that time the axis of holy men, His Holiness Shaykh al-ʻĀlam, that is, Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn[12] came to Bukhara.[13] The people of Bukhara became his loyal disciples. Such was the grace of God on the shaykh that he had in his possession seven hundred fine horses. Qazān Khan was such a tyrant that whomever he summoned, whether he was of the amirs or of the ordinary folk, had to come to him and, together with his wife and children, became his property. When the men came to the shaykh to complain he told them to be patient. Malikshāh heard that the shaykh had excellent horses and ordered the mounts to be brought to him. "What's the use of so much fortune to such a beggar?" he wondered.

He sent a man to the ishān[14] to tell him. The shaykh became angry and wrote an insulting quatrain (*rubāʻī*) and sent it to him,

How much longer will you spread your tyranny?
Your virtues could have united the hearts of men.
O tyrant, renounce your intention, abandon oppression.
We have told you that you are inducing your own blood.

That man took the *rubāʻī* and gave it to the khan. The khan studied it and became angry.

"This man has such nerve to write something like this to me," he thought.

He mounted his horse and prepared to leave with the intention of killing the shaykh, while his amirs tried to detain him.

News reached the shaykh that the khan was on his way. The shaykh took an apple and threw it up in the air, saying, "By the time it reaches the ground God will advise me how to act." Then he went into meditation. After a while he said: "*Allāhu akbar*," and raised his head.

When Qazān Khan arrived in Qalʻa-jui a farmer gave him an apple as a gift. The khan took the apple as he was riding, and started playing with it, tossing it up in the air. Suddenly, he missed and the apple struck the drum that was hung at the saddle, making such a noise that the horse threw the khan to the

[10] Bayān-Qulī Khan (or Buyān-Qulī Khan) was in fact the son of Surughu Oghul, son of Du'a (r. 1282–1306).

[11] Qazān Khan, son of Yasa'ur, son of Du'a, was ruler of the Chaghatayids from 1343 to 1346.

[12] Shaykh al-ʻĀlam was the appellation of Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī (who was known by this appellation also in the sixteenth-century work by Öttemish Ḥājjī). See Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 357, n. 87.

[13] Bākharzī is reputed to have arrived in Bukhara from Khiva, having studied there with Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, the eponymous founder of the Kubravi order (Kubrā is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4).

[14] That is, to the shaykh.

ground and his neck broke. Everyone realized that this was the miracle of His Holiness the ishān. The amirs and the rest of the people came and stood before the shaykh. Now the people wondered who would be king.

Someone suggested: "The shaykh is worthy to be the king." But the shaykh refused. The people kept coming for a whole year to the shaykh's *khānqāh* in the east of Bukhara to seek his just council.[15]

One day the shaykh said: "Take this staff of mine. He who suits this staff can be king even if he appears to you to be a wretched fellow."

The people returned to the shaykh asking for further explanation and he said: "Go and call out loud the name of Bayān-Qulī Khan. Go to the direction of Kuhinor. Whatever happens, this staff should fit his stature."

After that, the people of Bukhara, full of enthusiasm, took the staff and left. They measured the staff against every man they met, but no person suited the staff until they reached Bayān-Qulī Khan.

[The story of Bayān-Qulī Khan]

When his uncle Malikshāh was sitting on the throne of kingship, Bayān-Qulī Khan was eighteen years old. His uncle had ordered him killed, but the amirs secretly bribed the executioner and put him to flight. Since then he had been roaming the land in the vicinity of Kuhinor. At that time, the people of Arlat were settled there.[16] One day, he looked to the sky and was watching a bird of prey[17] when something fell from its beak. He came closer and realized that it was a money-belt full of gold coins. He took it and went to the residence of the Arlat. Someone saw him and recognized the belt and went to Amir Mu'ayyad Arlat (the gold belonged to Amir Mu'ayyad).[18] He accused the khan of stealing the money. The khan tried to explain what had happened but he did not believe him and imprisoned him. The khan never told him that he was actually a prince.

At night he saw Shaykh al-'Ālam in a dream. When he woke up he managed to break his chains. He fled, pretending to be a beggar, and reached Mount Ghażghām.[19] He hid in caves and lamented his misfortune until an old woman and her husband, a shepherd, found him and adopted him as their son. The shepherd trained him for one year, and he worked as a shepherd until the group of men from Bukhara happened upon him. He saw them walking around shouting, "Bayān-Qulī Khan."

"Young man," they asked him. "Did you see Bayān-Qulī Khan?"

"What do you want with him?" he asked.

[15] On the shaykh's *khānqāh*, see fn. 23 to this chapter.

[16] On the Arlat, described by Ibn 'Arabshāh as one of the four main tribes in the *ulus* Chaghatay, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 155–6.

[17] Most likely, a kite.

[18] The historic Amir Mu'ayyad was Tīmūr's brother-in-law and one of his close companions.

[19] A mountain in the vicinity of Samarqand.

The men explained the situation. Then they placed the staff in his hand and saw that it was exactly his height.

They were all amazed, thinking, “How can this miserable fellow be our king?” One of them recalled that the shaykh had said that even a beggar might be king. They brought Bayān-Qulī Khan to the city of Bukhara and the shaykh came immediately to greet him. The city was adorned and they seated the khan on the throne of Bukhara. He ruled for three years and was known to be a just ruler.

[The story of Taraghāi Bahādur]

(And so we arrived at the story of Taraghāi Bahādur.) He was of the descendants of Qarāchār Noyān, and at that time the commands of council used to come out of his house. He was a rich man and the people showed him much respect. His house was in Shahr-i Sabz (which today is known as Taraghiyya). At that time in Bukhara lived Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a.[20] One day, as he was teaching, a dervish entered the classroom, saying, “Your daughter Tegina will soon be wed and give birth to the conqueror of the world!”

Ṣadr asked: “You madman. Do you think you have knowledge of the secrets of the unseen?”

“I do,” said the dervish.

Ṣadr ordered him locked up in his house and he went to the khan and explained what had happened. The khan commanded him to bring the dervish before him, but when Ṣadr returned home he found his daughter in chains where the dervish was supposed to be. He became very concerned; his daughter was going mad, and so they decided to bring her to Shaykh al-‘Ālam.

The shaykh smiled and said: “That dervish was a holy spirit. From this fortunate daughter a very lucky son will be born.”

Immediately the girl regained her senses from her auspicious meeting with the shaykh’s nobility.

“I will take care of this daughter myself,” said His Holiness.

“It is your choice,” said Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a.

The people heard that the daughter became very devoted to the shaykh. Many amirs and *‘ulamā’* asked for her hand in marriage, but the shaykh said: “Her husband has not yet entered Bukhara.” However, people suspected that he probably wanted to keep her for himself.

(But now let us hear about the events of Taraghāi Bahādur.) One day Taraghāi Bahādur was hunting in the vicinity of Shahr-i Sabz when he started in pursuit of a gazelle. The gazelle broke off through a flock of sheep and escaped. Bahādur looked up and saw that a wolf had cut off one sheep from the flock. He aimed an arrow at the wolf and fired, and his shot woke a shepherd from his dream.

[20] See the introduction for probable identification. The audience, apparently, needed no explanation. Perhaps the Ṣadr was well-known, but then possibly this was a symbolic title (in the audience’s mind) for one who clearly represented the highest rank among the *‘ulamā’*.

“O amir,” said the shepherd. “Do not kill me for I just saw you in my dream.”

“Speak!” said Bahādur.

“I saw,” said the shepherd, “that a man dressed in green[21] called me and said, ‘Tell your master that he should leave for Shaykh al-ʿĀlam and marry the daughter of Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa because from her will be born the conqueror of the world.’”

“You are trying to deceive me out of fear,” said Bahādur.

“O Bahādur,” answered the shepherd. “I never heard the name of the Shaykh or that of Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa before. I swear before God that a great fortune has befallen you.”

Bahādur, not trusting him, wanted to hit him. Suddenly, the shepherd’s dog jumped up and barked. It seemed to the Bahādur as if the dog had said that the shepherd was telling the truth. After that the Bahādur, believing the words of the shepherd, prepared all the provisions for the journey and set out to Bukhara.

After a few stops on the way he reached Bukhara. In Bukhara, he first went to Shaykh al-ʿĀlam. Ishān was praying at the time, but he took notice of the Bahādur’s arrival. Taraghāi Bahādur sat in the circle of Sufis and waited.

At last, the shaykh raised his head and said: “Welcome, father of the Ṣāḥib-qirān!” (The shaykh was the one who gave the title Ṣāḥib-qirān to Amir Tīmūr).[22]

Taraghāi Bahādur repeated the strange story of the shepherd.

“The shepherd’s dream is correct,” said the shaykh. “I reserved Tegina Begïm for you, but I did vow to finish first the construction of a *khānqāh* and you should embrace this project.”

“I am your servant,” said Taraghāi. “I will help you build it.”[23]

Then the shaykh said: “We will not begin, young man, until you have released yourself from your sin.”

The amir fell at the shaykh’s feet. Ishān sent away all his students so that no one was left beside Amir Taraghāi.

“Rise and perform the ablutions!” said the shaykh.

The amir did as the shaykh ordered.

Then the shaykh said: “Pray!”

The shaykh wrote a letter and handed it over to the amir, saying, “Go out of town to the cemetery of Fayż Athar where the spring of His Holiness Ayyūb is located.” (And at that time the shrine of His Holiness Ayyūb was outside the

[21] Green has been associated with the color of garments worn by righteous men in Islam already in the Qur’an (see for example, Qur’an 18:31).

[22] The narrator will explain the title’s meaning later on.

[23] Historically, the construction of the shaykh’s *khānqāh* (a structure that served Sufis for various purposes) in the Bukharan suburb of Fathabad was sponsored by Sorqaqtani, mother of the Mongol Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251–1259). The restoration of the building was undertaken by Tīmūr in the 1380s.

citadel of Bukhara. ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz Khan ibn ʻUbayd Allāh ordered the inclusion of the shrine in the city).[24] "When you reach the shrine of His Holiness Ayyūb sit on the bank of the spring. You will see the closed door of the *khānqāh*. Do not try to open it and remain silent. A Sufi will come out and will bring you a pot. If its contents are permissible (*halāl*), then God will grant you a son who will be true to the *sharīʻa*. If, however, the food is unacceptable (*harām*), you will have a son who will do nothing but evil deeds. After eating, give my letter to the Sufi. Then leave. Be careful not to look back.[25] If someone speaks to you, do not respond. Return to us."

Taraghāi Bahādur thanked him, took the letter and set out. Leaving the city gates, he reached the shrine of His Holiness Ayyūb and saw that a heavenly ray was emanating from the dome. Beautiful music of lute and tambourine and the sound of a flute reached his ears.

"God be praised!" he said. "What does all this mean?"

Then he recalled what the shaykh had told him and sat on the bank of the spring. Suddenly, a door opened and out came a Sufi, dressed in green, carrying a tablecloth and dishes, which he placed before the amir. Taraghāi was tormented by thoughts of whether the food would be prohibited or permitted because the fate of his son depended upon it. When he took the lid off the pot, he saw – much to his dismay – that the pot was full of milk.[26] He drank all the milk, gave the letter to the Sufi and headed back.

All of a sudden, he heard cries of "*Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar, lā ilāha illā ʼl-lāh, Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar*"[27] behind him, and he began to tremble. He went out to the garden of Shams al-Mulk (which today they call Namazgah).[28]

Out of the garden came an old man who said: "Why don't you look around? Take a chair and admire the wondrous things around you."

The words of the old man had such an effect on Taraghāi that he nearly stayed. Suddenly, a mysterious breeze touched his face, and the Bahādur continued on his way to the shaykh. The old man disappeared.

[24] The author refers to the Shïbanid ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ibn ʻUbayd Allāh Khan (d. 1550) who had rebuilt and expanded the walls of the city of Bukhara. Ayyūb is the biblical Job.

[25] Perhaps a reference to the warning against the temptation of looking back at the destruction of Sodom issued to the wife of the biblical Lot (the Qur'anic Lūṭ).

[26] Milk, mare's milk in particular, was an important dietary staple of the peoples of Central and Inner Asia. It also carried a special ceremonial significance. In Islam, milk was typically a symbol of good fortune, a reminder of the rivers of fresh milk that flow through heaven (Qur'an 47:15).

[27] The Islamic profession of the faith – "There is no God but God."

[28] This may be a reference to Shamsabad, a complex built by Shams al-Mulk, the Qarakhanid ruler of Bukhara (r. 1068–1080), to the south of the city. One of Shams al-Mulk's successors, Arslan Khan Muḥammad (r. 1102–1129), built a *namāzgāh* (an open space for prayer adjacent to a mosque) near the old site. In the eighteenth century, Bukhara's southern gate was known as the Namazgah gate. For information about Bukhara's topography and neighborhoods in the period under discussion, see Olga Sukhareva's publications *Bukhara: XIX-nachalo XX veka (Pozdnefeodal'nyi gorod i ego naselenie*) (Moscow: Izd-vo ʻNauka, 1966) and *Kvartal'naia obshchina pozdnefeodal'nogo goroda Bukhary: (V sviazi s istoriei kvartalov*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1976).

Returning to the *khānqāh*, he looked for the shaykh.

"That old man was the devil (*iblīs*), curses on his head, but the mysterious breeze came from me," said the shaykh. "Had I not done so, you would have looked back and your work would perish. Now come and look through my fingers."

When Bahādur looked, he saw that many people wearing green were walking with bricks and alabaster in their hands. The shaykh remarked to him that these people were the men of the unseen world.[29]

"Who of these people is their leader?" asked Bahādur.

"Their leader died and they asked me to become their leader," said Ishān.

"I know most of them," objected Bahādur. "Outwardly, they used to be soldiers but inwardly they are of the people of the unseen world."

"O Taraghāi!" said the shaykh. "If our succession is not secured, you will not have the power to see them."

However, the men approached the shaykh and after greeting him respectfully, they said: "The first time we came here you refused to take leadership upon yourself, but now we have received word from you to come."

"Although you did not intend to lead us," they said, "we will yield to Bahādur's destiny and build a *khānqāh* for you until morning."

And in so saying, the men of the unseen removed their mourning clothes and put on clothes of joy, and began building the *khānqāh*. And so the *khānqāh* was built by morning and the sun was shining upon the dome. The people of Bukhara the Noble saw the dome the next day towering above His Holiness's head, and were amazed and mentioned this miraculous deed in honor of the shaykh. But the shaykh declared that the building was built by Taraghāi Bahādur. He then led Taraghāi and Tegina Begïm to the wedding, when the sun was in the sign of Capricorn. And within one hour the pure seed was secured in the womb of the new mother.

But there remained one obstacle, Amir Qazaghan,[30] known as the *amir al-ulus* (today it is called *atalïq*. He was a Qongrat. Everything was in the hands of the *atalïq*).[31] He desired Tegina Khātūn; he tried to influence the khan that the girl should not be given to the descendant of Qarāchār Noyān and threatened

[29] The unseen world (*al-ghayb*), in its Sufi context, was an expression for a world beyond the senses of ordinary men that could be accessed by the Sufi after mastering the path.

[30] Qazaghan was leader of the Qara'unas (a powerful fourteenth-century confederation) and ruler of the Chaghatay *ulus* in the 1340s.

[31] The *amir al-ulus* was the senior leader in the office of the four amirs (on this important rank, see Uli Schamiloglu, "The Qaraçi Beys of the Later Golden Horde: Notes on the Organization of the Mongol World Empire," *AEMA* 4, 1984, 283–97). The *atalïq* in the first half of the eighteenth century in Bukhara held one of the most influential positions in the khanate, acting as senior counselor to the khan and as mentor to the heir apparent. The line of *atalïq*s was largely responsible for deposing the Chinggisid khans in Bukhara by the middle of the century. (Cf. with *TN Kullīyāt*: "And things were such that he would not allow the *khuṭba* and *sikka* to be in [the name of] another king.")

to fight the shaykh. Bayān-Qulī Khan tried to dissuade him but with no success. He sent a man to the shaykh to ask him for the place of battle. Amir Qazaghan assembled an army and approached the *khānqāh* of the shaykh. The shaykh assembled four hundred of his disciples and instructed them to meet Qazaghan's army. He remained in his *khānqāh* in prayer. Qazaghan called him to come out and when the shaykh stepped outside, Qazaghan challenged Taraghāi Bahādur to a duel. Both men stepped into the battlefield and began to fight. As they were fighting an arrow hit Taraghāi in the eye and he fell off his horse. Taraghāi became blind in one eye. At that time Bayān-Qulī Khan arrived and stood at the shaykh's side, and the battle stopped. Taraghāi took Tegina Begïm to Shahr-i Sabz.

That year the royal falcon of the spirit of the ishān departed this frail world to the everlasting abode. (Amir Tīmūr was then six months old.) This happened in the year 736 and the shaykh was then one hundred and fifteen years of age.

At that time Bayān-Qulī Khan was informed that a Mongol army was on its way to Kashghar. The khan sent a letter to Taraghāi Bahādur in Shahr-i Sabz to take the Barlas army and go to Kashghar. Taraghāi went to the service of the khan. Taraghāi had a chief wife who was the daughter of Amir Qazaghan. Her name was Yuqun Aqa. He entrusted Tegina Begïm to her charge, and he started the journey to Kashghar.

[The story of Amir Tīmūr's Birth]

(Now let us hear about the Amir's birth.) It was Tegina Begïm's time to give birth. She had completed nine months and nine days, and it was time for her to be released from her burden. However, Yuqun Khātūn[32] harbored malice against Tegina Begïm for her father's ruin would come from her. She had a dream one night in which she saw that the sun was emanating from Tegina Begïm's womb and was illuminating the world from east to west, eventually turning to Hindustan, where, after a while, it set. Immediately she awoke from her sleep, suspecting her rival who lay there in her blissfulness. Out of envy, she lulled her back to sleep, and summoned a slave who was left to her by her father, by the name of Qaidun (he was a native of the tribe Hezarlachin[33] and was faithful to her father).

She told him: "I have something I wish to convey to you, that you should swear to keep a secret."

"I was left here by your father," answered the slave. "I shall not betray your secret."

Then she told him what she had seen in her dream about the wretched Tegina Begïm and asked him whether he could find a knowledgeable interpretation of the dream.

[32] The aforementioned Yuqun Aqa.

[33] Presumably an offshoot of the Turkmen Lachin tribe.

"There are no dream interpreters here," said Qaidun. "But I heard that there is a man named Soyulik Ata[34] who lives in a cave. They say that he can solve all the people's difficulties."

Yuqun embraced her slave, and putting her confidence in him, sent him to Soyulik. When the slave approached the cave, he saw Ata sitting in the midst of many people who were waiting to hear his words. He realized that it would take him a whole night and a whole day to be able to approach the man. As he observed him, he saw a man dressed in animal hides, who seemed as though he were not of this world.

He began to explain his story, when Ata said: "Yes, in this year a child will be born who will become the conqueror of the world. I believe that the time of his appearance in this world is beginning. The child who will be born from this woman will have descendants who will rule the world."

When the slave heard these words from Soyulik Ata he took his leave, returned home and told the whole story to Yuqun Aqa. The fire of envy from the hearth of her bosom consumed her.

"Can't you kill Tegina Begïm?" she said to the slave.

When the slave heard her words he tried his best to talk her out of it, but without success. Finally, seeing that Yuqun was firm in her decision, and not finding any means to calm her down, he agreed to the murder conspiracy. Writing a false letter, he gave it to Tegina Begïm. The letter's contents were as follows:

From your father (that is, Ṣadr al-sharī'a)*: O, dear daughter, know that if you do not leave soon you may not see me alive again, for I do not have long to live*.

When Tegina Begïm studied the letter, she was burning with impatience to see her father. She rushed to Yuqun Aqa, explained what had happened and asked her permission to leave (for she was entrusted to Yuqun's charge by Taraghāi Bahādur). Yuqun appointed two maids to escort Tegina and sent the slave with them.

When they came to a well, Qaidun killed the two maids and was ready to murder the unfortunate Tegina.

"O Baba," she cried. "What use will it be if you kill me? In my womb there is a premature child. What will become of him?"

"I am killing you because of him," answered the slave. "For your child is going to conquer the world."

Immediately he drew his sword and was about to slash Tegina Begïm. Fearing for her life, Tegina Begïm jumped into the well. The slave bent over the well's opening and shouted at her to quickly climb out. Suddenly (because of the fortunate fate of Amir Tīmūr *güregen*) a lightning bolt from Heaven

[34] Ata (literally "father" in Turkic) was a form of honorific address usually reserved for older men or for revered persons.

flashed, hit the slave in the chest and cut him in two. The princess was saved from his conspiracy but was unable to climb out of the well, which was dry.

It so happened that a shepherd was walking by and, seeing her inside, dropped a rope and managed to pull her out. He saw before him an extraordinarily beautiful woman. The shepherd inquired about the circumstances of her fall, and she replied: "I am of the tribe Aimaqiyya.[35] We passed here at night and I fell into the well. The dead body over there is my husband, who was hit by lightning."[36]

The shepherd was seized by lust and desired to commit some unsavory act against Tegina Begïm, but God would not allow such a thing. Suddenly, a man appeared who looked like an Arab. He frightened away the shepherd.

"O princess," he said. "My name is Amir Chāku Barlas and this is one of my shepherds. Be like my own daughter, come with me to my home, and then we will learn of your origins and your name." And uttering these words, he led her to his home and charged her to his wife.

It was at night, on Wednesday, the 25th of Sha'ban, in the Year of the Mouse, 735, in the sign of Cancer, when the sun was in the first of Capricorn and the moon was in the twenty-ninth of Aquarius, and both signs are connected.[37] And this occurrence is as follows: Whenever there are seven stars in the sign of Cancer and in the sign of Capricorn occurs a conjunction, the fortune of a child who is born in that hour will always be blessed until his death. (Sharaf Yazdī in his *Zafar-nāma* says that three children were born in such an hour. The first was Iskandar Dhū'l-Qarnayn;[38] the second was His Holiness Muḥammad Mustafā, blessings of Allah upon him; and the third Amir Tīmūr *güregen*. From the birth of Iskandar until the blessed birth of His Holiness the Messenger, peace be upon him, eight hundred years passed, and from the noble birth of His Holiness until the birth of Amir Tīmūr *güregen* another eight hundred years passed. Every eight hundred years the stars in the sign of Capricorn are in conjunction, as was mentioned.) (The storyteller says that Ṣāḥib-qirān's mother suffered no pain during the birth, such as happens to other women.)

Account of the Arrival of Seven Wise Men from the Seven Climes in order to Kill His Highness Amir Ṣāḥib-qirān, Conqueror of the World

After Amir Tīmūr's birth, Amir Chāku was engaged in his upbringing. Tīmūr was then six months old. At that time in the country of Rum[39] Yïldïrïm Sultān

[35] See footnote 8.

[36] The bodies of the slain maidens apparently had been forgotten.

[37] The sign of Aquarius follows the sign of Capricorn.

[38] I.e., Alexander the Great.

[39] I.e., Turkey (or the Ottoman Empire).

Bāyazīd, grandson of Osman Ghāzī, was the successor to the throne.[40] And Osman Ghāzī was of the descendants of Yāfith ibn Nūh, peace be upon him. During the time of Sultān Sanjar Ghāzī, the Saljuqs had conquered the kingdoms of Rum.[41] The origins of the kings of Rum were close to that of the kings of Tūrān, for both are descendants of Yāfith ibn Nūh, peace be upon him.[42] When the turn of the kingship of Rum reached Yïldïrïm Bāyazīd, whose name was Sultān Tuhūr,[43] he conquered seventy cities of Farangistan,[44] and achieved more than his ancestors.

One day, as the Sultan of Rum was returning from the hunt, he spotted a cave at the side of a mountain. When he asked what kind of cave it was, he was told that it was the cave in which Iskandar was born, and that the sultans of that region go on pilgrimage to that cave. He decided to visit the cave. Upon entering he saw a table with various diagrams inscribed upon it. His wise men explained that eight hundred years after the birth of Iskandar Dhū'l-Qarnayn, the Prophet – praises of God upon him – was born, and eight hundred years after the birth of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, a man will be born who will capture the earth and vanquish its kings. Such was written by Aristotle.[45]

"This Ṣāḥib-qirān must be me," said Caesar.[46] "I should conquer all the lands."

He summoned one of his wise men, a man named Abu'l-Mufākhir to his service and asked: "What have you to say about it?"

"I have found in these writings that this year in Mawarannahr an infant seems to have been born," said Abu'l-Mufākhir. "He will be known as the second Iskandar. The province of Rum will become his for the taking, and Yïldïrïm Bāyazīd will become his prisoner."

When the Sultān of Rum heard these words, he immediately ordered that a letter be written to Bayān-Qulī Khan. He made Abu'l-Mufākhir an ambassador and sent him to see that the infant would be destroyed.

The storyteller says that at that time there were seven climes in the world.[47] Three were ruled by Muslims, and four by infidels. The second was Dilshād Khātūn, governess of Baghdad (after Abū Sa'īd Khan's death, who was a

40 Bāyazīd, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (r. 1389–1403), was in fact the great-grandson of Osman Gazi.

41 Sanjar (d. 1157) was the ruler of the Saljuqs.

42 Earlier in the introduction we learned that Iskandar was also of Yāfith's descendants.

43 This appellation is unclear to me at present.

44 I.e., Europe.

45 The prophecy seems to have multiple sources. Earlier, the narrator had stated that Yazdī's tome was the prophecy's origin, but apparently this foresight ventured back to the days of Alexander the Great and Aristotle (Arisṭū). The Greek philosopher survived throughout the Muslim world as a compelling symbol of wisdom.

46 A reference to the Ottoman sultans, sitting on the throne of Rum, the remains of the Byzantine Empire. The speaker is, of course, Bāyazīd.

47 For the Islamic revision of the Greek (and other) division of the world into seven climes, in addition to the countries of the far south and the far north, see A. Miquel, "Iḳlīm," *EI²* III, 1076.

descendant of Hülegü Khan, no descendant of Hülegü was left who would become king. Dilshād Khātūn was sitting on the throne).[48] The third was Shāh Shujā‘ in Khorasan, who saw one night in his dream how a ray of sunshine from Heaven was illuminating Mawarannahr. He asked his wise men about it and one of them said: “Ṣāḥib-qirān was born in Mawarannahr. He will soon make his presence known.” Immediately, Shāh Shujā‘ sent this man to Bukhara as his ambassador.

The fourth was the ruler of India, Malik Ra’no Ballu Khan, who was sultan over all of India. He heard of the birth of Ṣāḥib-qirān from one of his wise men and sent him as ambassador in order to destroy the newborn child. An ambassador also arrived from the fifth ruler, the king of Farangistan, one from the sixth – the King of China – and from the seventh, the king of Russia.[49]

Bayān-Qulī Khan heard that the seven ambassadors were making their way to see him. He ordered the city of Bukhara to be decorated, and to offer the best hospitality to the ambassadors.

“With your permission,” said the messengers. “We have no time to dally.”

Bayān-Qulī Khan set a date for the meeting. He seated the three Muslim ambassadors to his right and the four infidels to his left. (Maulānā Burhān al-Dīn, author of the *Hidāyat* said: “The ambassador from Rum sat first, then the ambassador from Iraq, then the one from Khorasan.”)[50] The ambassador from Rum was the first to convey his letter. The letter’s contents were as follows:

Praises and salutations to Tengri.[51] *We send our blessings to the Sultan of Mawarannahr. In your country a child came to the world this year. Our wise men call him The Second Iskandar. He will seize the day and capture the earth and make its sultans his prisoners. Naturally, you have to try and destroy this child.*

All seven ambassadors carried letters with similar contents. Bayān-Qulī Khan called the author of the *Hidāyat*, who said: “You must not interfere with God’s plans.” At that time the vizier of the khan was Sirāj Qamari.

Bayān-Qulī Khan asked the ambassadors: “How do you know of the birth of such a child?”

[48] Dilshād Khātūn was the wife of Abu Sa‘īd (d. 1335), the last khan of consequence of the Mongol Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran.

[49] Central Asia is curiously absent from the list of climes (those included are Turkey, Iraq, Khorasan, India, Europe, China, and Russia). It is reasonable to assume, however, that the author – and the audience – considered Central Asia to form the central clime in this scheme, namely the clime with the most balanced climate and sensible population.

[50] This is a reference to the notable Hanafi jurist Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 1197). What seems to be important here is not that he had lived almost two hundred years before this event allegedly took place, but rather that the author decided to allude to one of the most renowned legal authorities, in addition to his professed dependence on the historical canon, to reinforce the claim for the narrative’s truthfulness.

[51] “God” or “heaven” in Turkic, often synonymous with Allah.

"O khan," replied the ambassadors. "We have become aware of his birth this very year and need to find him as soon as possible."

The khan ordered his wise men to assemble in the Friday mosque and at the same time sent a messenger to his own *yurt*[52] to find out whether, in fact, a child had been born that year and who his parents were, and to tempt them to come and present themselves for such and such amount of gold. He also instructed his men to search every house with toddlers. The couriers did as they were commanded but there was no newborn child in the city of Bukhara. Sirāj Qamari was appointed to accompany the messengers and help them look. They went to Miyankal, Samarqand, Khojand, Hisar, and Shahr-i Sabz. In Shahr-i Sabz Taraghāi Bahādur extended his hospitality towards them. Then they continued to Qarshi and to Zanjir Sara Barlas, where they were the guests of Amir Chāku. Amir Chāku presented his children the next day. Meanwhile, he told his wife of these events. Having overheard his words, Tegina Begïm understood and became very anxious. "In my child the marks are clear," she said to herself.

In the middle of the night she had a dream. In her dream she saw His Holiness, Shaykh al-ʻĀlam. The shaykh said: "Go to Bukhara, and stay for a while in my shrine. And bow before God. This child was appointed a great fate."

Tegina Begïm stayed up for the rest of the night, hugging her child, and decided to head towards Bukhara.

[The miracle of Shaykh al-ʻĀlam]

Before dawn she reached Bukhara and entered the shrine. She hid her son in a box and covered it. The next day, when Amir Chāku was asked by the ambassadors for her whereabouts, he answered: "This woman was my guest for a few days. I don't know where she took her son."

The ambassadors hurried back to Bukhara and petitioned the khan to see him. Bayān-Qulī Khan sent a message to his *yurt* that whoever finds a boy of such and such qualities should keep him in his house. Then he proceeded to the shrine of Shaykh al-ʻĀlam and there he found the child.

Tegina Begïm, who feared his intentions, was hugging this child. "My child, my child," she cried. "O God, save this sinless child of mine." Begïm pleaded much before the khan but he did not seem to do anything.

The first to enter the shrine was the ambassador from Khorasan. Tegina Begïm prayed to God and said: "O Lord Creator, hear the cry of the oppressed, accept my prayers." As she was praying the ambassador approached the box. Suddenly, out of the blessed grave a hand appeared and struck the man's neck, and his head – much like an apple that had fallen from the tree – fell rolling on the ground across five steps. (This was the reason why Khorasan was the first to be conquered.)

[52] Generally a term for a territory, a house, or a camp.

The second ambassador from Iraq entered. Out of the grave the weapon-like hand appeared. He too was destroyed. (Then Iraq was conquered.) The third ambassador from the Russians came; he also died. The fourth ambassador of the Franks, his head too was cut off and he died. The same fate awaited the fifth ambassador from India. The sixth ambassador, from Rum, set his foot in the shrine with much zeal, and the weapon-like hand of the unseen immediately killed him. They say that each ambassador who came in and was destroyed symbolized the conquest of his respective country. The seventh ambassador, from China, said to himself: "Clearly, if I enter the grave I too will be destroyed. O Muslims, although I am an infidel I know that the friend of Allah in this grave is an angel. This weapon-like hand must be his hand. Perhaps if I enter the grave with a dog, the angel will flee." They sent for dogs to be brought and then he entered the grave with the dogs. Near the noble grave he could see Tegina Begïm with her son, but the day was already becoming night.

"Now I shall kill the boy," said the Chinese ambassador.

But the khan said: "Be patient until dawn breaks. Then we will be able to see everything."

That night Bayān-Qulī Khan spent the night at Shaykh al-'Ālam's shrine and saw the shaykh in a dream. The shaykh commanded: "We have entrusted the boy to you. Send him to Amir Chāku." The khan immediately stood up, and, taking Tegina Begïm and her son, he dressed her in royal clothes, and sent them to Zanjir Sara. The ambassador was unable to complete his intention and was also destroyed. (These deeds demonstrate Amir Tīmūr's good fortune.)

And so Amir Tīmūr was twelve years old. He was spending his time at Amir Chāku's house. When people wondered who was this new addition to the household, Amir Chāku explained that this was a child of one of his female slaves, yet he treated him as one of his own children. (The storyteller says that Amir Chāku was about to be appointed governor of Qarshi, but Bayān-Qulī Khan canceled his appointment and made Amir Mūsā Jalayir governor in his stead.) Tegina Begïm, meanwhile, became a devoted servant of God. She would pray a lot, the sick and the needy would come to her and she would pray to God for their recovery, and they recovered. Amir Chāku was especially devoted to her and gave her a separate space in his house, where she was engaged in worship.

Amir Chāku was the richest of the Barlas. He had many possessions, and even forty slaves. Amir Chāku still did not know that Amir Tīmūr was Taraghāi Bahādur's son. Tegina Begïm never told him anything, and Taraghāi was Chāku's kinsman.

One day, as the forty slaves were engaged in drawing water out of the well, Mīrzā Sayf al-Dīn jokingly said: "Could one man draw water out of this well all on his own?"

"Of course!" said Ṣāḥib-qirān.

Sayf al-Dīn laughed.

In the middle of the night, Ṣāḥib-qirān came to the well, started pulling the chain, drew the water out, gave some to the people and watered the livestock.

"O relative of mine," said Mīrzā Sayf al-Dīn. "If it were up to me, I would make you my vizier."

"I am no king," said the amir. "But I would make *you* the vizier."

"I thought before," said the Mīrzā, "that if my relative were able to draw the water, he would become king. My thought was well fulfilled."

Amir took an oath saying: "If I become king I will make you the vizier."

That evening all the livestock were fed, and the entire tribe of Amir Chāku heard of this deed.

Taraghāi, who went to Kashghar,[53] returned to Bukhara for a council announced by Bayān-Qulī Khan. Yoqun Khātūn was by now already mad and blind. Bahādur tried to get word of his son but to no avail, and it grieved him greatly. One night Shaykh al-ʻĀlam appeared before him in a dream.

"O Taraghāi Bahādur," he said. "You have had no news and your son is already twelve years old. What are you still doing here in this land?"

Bahādur immediately stood up but could not leave Yoqun Khānïm. Bahādur was beginning to hear of what was going on in the Barlas tribe. He decided to take Yoqun Khānïm, and with many presents and gifts headed towards Zanjir Sara. They traveled for a few days until they reached a group of wells in the vicinity of Zanjir Sara. The weather was very hot. At that place Amir Tīmūr was drawing water from the well, but he grew tired and decided to lie down. In this state Taraghāi found him. Suddenly, Taraghāi saw a snake making its way towards Tīmūr's chest in order to strike him. The old father's compassion arose but there was nothing he could do. Amir Tīmūr opened his eyes and saw the snake on his chest. He quickly broke the snake's fangs and threw it away.

Taraghāi Bahādur was amazed at this behavior. "Son, who is your father?" he asked.

"I am Amir Chāku's son," he replied.

"Direct me to your father's house," said Bahādur.

Amir Tīmūr brought Taraghāi Bahādur to Amir Chāku's house and announced: "A guest is arriving." When Chāku saw Bahādur the two embraced and greeted each other. After the greeting, Bahādur said: "I was very much amazed by a thing that this slave-boy did this morning."

"This boy is no slave," said Amir Chāku. "His mother is like a daughter to me and she is very devoted to God."

"I saw something in my dream," said Bahādur. "Maybe I could ask that woman to solve this mystery."

"So be it," said Amir Chāku, and sent to fetch Tegina Begïm.

[53] Taraghāi had been away fighting the Moghul army.

As soon as she saw her husband (she was standing behind a curtain), she realized that her secret was kept.

Amir Taraghāi asked her about the events that he had seen in his dream.

"God most high gave you a son who is going to be Sultan over the whole world," she said.

"I never had a son," said Taraghāi. "Yoqun Khātūn became mad and blind a few years ago, after my own wife had disappeared."

"You do have a son and he is in good health," said Tegina Begïm. "I shall pray that Yoqun Khātūn will also recover."

They brought Yoqun Khātūn.

"O Yoqun Khānïm," said Tegina Begïm. "May God most high give you cure. Now tell your doings truthfully."

Yoqun Khānïm began to tell her deeds unwillingly: "It so happened that I had sent the slave Qaidun in order to kill Tegina Begïm."

Saying that, Taraghāi Bahādur, holding a sword in his hand, struck her down to the ground.

"Extend your hand! I am Tegina Begïm and the boy standing there is your son."

Taraghāi hugged the child and wept. Then Tegina Begïm prayed and Yoqun Khānïm was cured. They stayed at Amir Chāku's house for a few days. Then they set out towards the city of Shahr-i Sabz.

Commentary

Tīmūr's birth in his legendary biographies was not a wondrous event, as it had been presented, for example, by his near-contemporaries.[54] In fact, neither the hero's actual birth nor its immediate aftermath were granted much attention, and the stories of the prophecies and the circumstances that led to Tīmūr's birth seem to have been of much greater consequence. The same selection in storytelling applied also to other events in or surrounding young Tīmūr's life. The wedding between his parents, Taraghāi and Tegina, was left untouched as well. The events leading to Tīmūr's own marriage, to be explained in the

[54] Cf. with the following account by Ibn 'Arabshāh: "They say that on the night of his birth something like a helmet appeared, seemed to flutter in the air, then fell into the middle of the plain and finally scattered over the ground; thence also live coals flew about like glowing ashes and collected so that they filled the plain and the city: they also say that when that evil man saw the light, his palms were full of freshly shed blood. They consulted the augurs and diviners about these portents and referred to seers and soothsayers about their meaning, of whom some replied that he would be a guardsman; others that he would grow up a brigand, while others said a blood-thirsty butcher, others finally that he would be an executioner, these opinions contending with each other, until events decided the issue." Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn 'Arabshah, *Tamerlane: or, Tīmūr the Great Amir*, tr. J. H. Sanders (London: Luzac & Co., 1936), 1. See also D. Aigle, "Les transformations d'un mythe d'origine: l'exemple de Gengis Khan et de Tamerlan," *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89–90 (2000), 151–68.

next chapter, would be described in much detail, but nothing would be related about the actual ceremony. Tīmūr's birth was foretold by Alexander the Great in the prophetic message encrypted in the cave of his birth and found by the Ottoman Sultan Yïldïrïm Bāyazīd. A series of revelations to clever worldly advisors drew the great leaders' attention, and the world shared in the knowledge of the providential infant's advent. At the same time, Sufi masters such as Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī, who had predicted Tīmūr's birth and was instrumental in making it happen, or Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, who would foresee Tīmūr's accession to the throne two hundred years before the actual enthronement,[55] continued to shape the story at least as much as their political counterparts. Although the two groups had different purposes – the shaykhs were committed to Tīmūr and to his fate, the world leaders were anxious to kill the child – both elements would carry on, competing and complementing each other all through the narrative.

Many of these prophecies and revelations occurred in dreams, and both prophecies and dreams are woven together to move the storyline forward (this, in addition to mere chronology) and to spawn new developments. The dreams' source is usually identified with the unseen world. A dream inspired Bayan-Qulī Khan first to release himself from Arlat captivity and later to protect Tīmūr. Interestingly, Bayān-Qulī Khan listened and followed instructions although or perhaps because they had been instigated by Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī (by then, already dead).[56] It seems that certain people were more receptable to dreams and intercessions, and others (Baraq Khan, for example) were not. Other dreams induced the shepherd to inform Taraghāi that he should leave for Bukhara and discover his future; Yuqun Khātun's dream set off her plot to murder Tīmūr's mother, and dreams generated the assassination attempts on Tīmūr's life. A dream would compel Tīmūr's father to seek out his son and reunite the family. In later stages in the manuscript, a dream (and a prophecy) would make Tīmūr realize that his rule was not eternal, and that he and his sons would be replaced by the Uzbeks. Even the Prophet would appear before Tīmūr in a dream and command him to take the throne. In another dream, Tīmūr saw a dervish who offered him a loaf of bread, but then broke the loaf and kept half of it for himself. When Tīmūr asked for the dream's meaning, he was answered that half of the loaf would be the portion of the Sufis in his world conquest.

Dreams often required interpretation, following a long tradition in the Muslim world.[57] Dream interpreters in the legendary biographies are almost always

[55] See Chapter 4. About Kubrā's prophetic reputation, for instance in foretelling Ghazan Khan's conversion to Islam (in the work *Rawżat al-jinān*), see DeWeese, *Islamization*, 357, n. 85.

[56] The relationship between the two was an important component in Bukharan traditions, and the two men were ultimately buried next to each other, their mausolea standing side by side in Bukhara.

[57] See John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

very old men living away from society in seclusion, typically in a natural setting and in very modest conditions. Stories and tales have been circulated about them, and many in the community were seeking their advice. Other persons who are capable of dream interpretation are the very pious who are attributed hidden knowledge, such as Taraghāi's notion that his wife (unbeknownst to him at the time) might solve his mysterious dream about his missing son.

The text further introduces many of the main representatives of the Sufi community. The biographies feature alliances between the amirs and the *'ulamā'* under the mediation or sponsorship of the shaykh, whereas the descendants of Chinggis Khan are by and large missing from these associations or constitute their target. Qazān Khan's amirs undertake to prevent him from killing the Sufi shaykh. They later succeed in foiling Bayān-Qulī Khan's execution. The Sufi shaykhs are also depicted as the king makers. Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī, for example, was the one who had introduced Taraghāi Bahādur to the fate of his future son, and only through his intervention did Taraghāi survive an encounter with Satan,[58] met his future wife, Tīmūr's mother, and married her.[59] The shaykh, already dead, saved Tīmūr from the attempts on his life by the seven ambassadors, and Tīmūr was reunited with his family only after the (dead) shaykh's intervention. Tīmūr wed only after the shaykh instructed Bayan-Qulī Khan to give his daughter's hand in marriage. Following each khan's death, the amirs, as well as many in the population, viewed the shaykh as the ultimate authority who also was holding the prerogative to determine the next ruler's identity, presumably because he was aware of God's will. Although the history of Islam in Central Asia in the period under discussion has yet to be fully explored, it is safe to suggest that from the end of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century the era was marked by the growing power of Sufi shaykhs. Initially, Sufis seem to have wielded considerable influence over the Janid (Ashtarkhanid) khans, but as the seventeenth century came to a close, most of the Sufi shaykhs transferred their support to the amirs, to the tribal leaders and military commanders. The Sufis were involved in decisions about the identity of khans and had a role to play as mediators in conflicts between Bukhara and Khiva, for example.

Our author gives no consideration to whether the Sufi shaykhs in the narrative belonged to a particular order, and he certainly did not identify them as such or give any details about their origins or lineages (ancestral or spiritual).

[58] The trial was designed supposedly to test Taraghāi's loyalty, purity, and conviction. On the one hand, the test was futile for the shaykh already knew that fate had decreed that Taraghāi would become Tīmūr's father. Nevertheless, even if the divine fate had made its decree, the devil could still try to orchestrate a plot to counter it. The Sufi was therefore left as the only obstacle between the devil's scheme and the righteous path.

[59] Interestingly, although the shaykh is supposedly beyond reproach, he is still seen as human by the community (the "people suspected that he probably wanted to keep her [Tegina Begïm] for himself.")

In fact, the text hardly offers any details about the holy figures.[60] The names invoked in this story and later in the narrative – Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, Mīr Baraka, Shams al-Dīn Kulal, Sayyid Ata, Aḥmad Yasavi, Muḥammad Pārsā, Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī, Ḥasan Bulghārī, and others – were probably well-known to most audiences. They all served more or less the same functions in the story, and they were all very different from the *'ulamā'*. Tīmūr needed the guidance and active support of the Sufi shaykhs, although there was no question that they were not in the position of rulership. There was a clear separation between those who had the right to govern and those who assisted them and counseled them. One could not exist without the other, a theme that would continue to develop throughout the narrative.

The Sufis were probably also connected in the audience's imagination with conversion narratives.[61] Motifs of Islamization and conversion, defense of the faith, and association with figures who had been known for their conversion activities – Sayyid Ata is the obvious example, but Shaykh al-'Ālam or Shaykh Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī was also well-known for his conversion activities[62] – are scattered all through the text. Such associations may have "lent prestige and authority, at court and among the people, to familial and spiritual lineages linked to those bearers of Islam."[63] The story of the conversion to Islam of Özbek Khan of the Golden Horde at the hand of Sayyid Ata, drawn from earlier sources and repeated with only a few additions and modifications, is probably the most famous example for a conversion narrative in Tīmūr's biographies. Because it has become relatively well-known (again, following DeWeese's publication), we need not repeat it here, save for the mention that Zangī Ata, Sayyid Ata's teacher, also predicts the rise of Tīmūr and his world conquest as he interprets one of his disciple's dreams.

Many shaykhs are active in helping Tīmūr attain his destiny in later parts of the biographies as well. When the Qïpchaqs arrived in Qasr-i Arifīn to kill Tīmūr, they found Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband sitting calmly in his garden. When they demanded that he would hand over Tīmūr, Naqshband responded that Tīmūr was his disciple and he could not release him; Naqshband also helped Tīmūr in his fight against the Hindus and saved his life in a battle against the Ottomans; Shaykh Kulal taught Tīmūr to read from the Qur'ān, and also escorted him to undertake a "test" from the men of the unseen world. Sayyid Ata led the Bukharans in their fight against Qazaghan; Shaykh Bākharzī himself treated Tīmūr's wounds. The Sufis and the rest of the community cooperate in order to realize their goals, and the work advocates a prescription, it

[60] Another major difference between this work and a hagiography.

[61] One need not dwell too long on the significance of conversion narratives in the history of Central Asia in light of Devin DeWeese's *Islamization and Native Religion* (esp. chapters 3 and 4).

[62] In fact, Bākharzī was accredited in many sources (Ibn-Khaldūn, al-'Aynī, al-Qalqashandī) with the conversion to Islam of Berke Khan of the Golden Horde.

[63] DeWeese, *Islamization*, 138.

seems, for a certain type of individual and communal behavior.[64] There are no differences in social roles or classes; everyone is equally (or almost equally) responsible for the ultimate conclusion. They all have a role to play in the successful completion of the ascent of the hero to his delegated place, and they do so while remaining in their respective places. Without communal responsibility, Tīmūr is unable to accomplish anything. Such communal, helpful agents include women, beggars, children, men of all professions, and even animals (corroborating prophecies, for example). Many of these "simple" figures had some previous encounter with the divine that guided them into helping the hero. These figures were somehow informed of events to come, and they intervene at critical moments. They come from all walks of life: a shepherd, a dervish, or an Ottoman Sultān. In the story that opens the narrative, the shepherd knows neither the Sufi master nor the great legal scholar in Bukhara. He is an observer, and worldly intrigues do not concern him. Yet (or perhaps because of this) he is the one who receives the revelation in the dream to set Tīmūr's father on the right path so that he would meet his destiny to become the father of the conqueror of the world. The conqueror, our hero, learns that salvation can be found in the most unlikely places,[65] and the audience learns exactly the same thing, as they form their own perceptions about their place in the social fabric of the community.

In that regard, the role that women play in the narrative greatly exceeds their role in the official chronicles. Several women are at least as heroic as our central character, especially Tīmūr's mother[66] – and, as we shall see in the next chapter, Tīmūr's future wife – although there are many others, less heroic perhaps, but still crucial to the development of the story and, consequently, for Tīmūr's progress. Women are generally portrayed as attractive,[67] persuasive, usually (morally) good, and as keepers of some form of knowledge that is hidden from the men. First and foremost is, of course, Tīmūr's mother, Tegina Begïm, who bravely faces all difficulties and eventually becomes a devoted servant of God with healing powers. In the same manner, Tīmūr's wife, Sarāy Mulk, carries much of the weight in the early stages of the narrative. Both are the heroic models for women in the Islamic community of Central Asia: God-fearing, with special access to the divine, ready to sacrifice themselves for a cause, strong, chaste, and ferociously defending their sons and husbands. The audience can identify with the heroes and heroines, with the courageous men and women, as they observe them in their exploration of the limits of their abilities as well as the possible achievements of the community.

[64] See also Denis Gril's observations in his "Du sultanat au califat universel: le rôle des saints dans le Roman de Baybars," in *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*," 173.

[65] Ibid., 182.

[66] After all, "heroes require heroic mothers." (See M. C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-Telling*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, vol. I, 42.)

[67] Save for one woman whom we will meet in Chapter 4.

Prophecies, dream sequences, divinations, the hunt, captivity, and escape are only some of the prominent motifs that come into play in this long work.[68] However, the play between the external and the internal, the seen and the unseen, occupies the key position in the narrative. This is not only expressed by events that are explained straightforwardly, such as the mystical dimensions of Shaykh Bākharzī or Tīmūr's later encounters with the men of the unseen, but is also seen in various literary motifs. Problems emerge from or find their solutions in places of concealment: caves, coffers, wells, tombs, and holes in the ground. Many things are not what they appear to be. The theme of disguise is significant; for instance, for the first twelve years of his life, Tīmūr's true identity is kept secret. Others, like Tegina Begïm and Bayan-Qulī Khan do the same at particular junctures. The same is true for countless other characters in the narrative that first appear in disguise, usually as slaves or dervishes, as simple people, only to reveal their true identity later.

In the *sīra* of Sultan Baybars, the emphasis lies on the slave soldier who was born a non-Muslim and then became ruler over the lands of Islam. Not only that, he also was – like many other *mamlūk*s – removed from his family at a very young age and therefore would be ridiculed in a society that supposedly accords the family institution a place of honor.[69] In the *sīra*, Baybars' problem is solved as he is adopted by a prestigious Muslim family in Damascus – the lady of the family actually names him Baybars. Although the legendary biographies never question Tīmūr's Islam, a question that plagued much of the scholarship about him, the boy undergoes a somewhat similar process: He is detached from his family at a very young age, only to be reunited with his father twelve years later, during which he pretends to be a maid's son. The narrative goes beyond questions of legitimation through bloodline and descent and places much emphasis on certain key foundations in Muslim society, like family and social organizations.

[68] Although we may try to divide these motifs into larger categorizations (such as town-country, center-periphery, and nomads-city dwellers), these may turn out to be too artificially imposed. The focus of the narrative changes often, towns and countryside seem to serve similar purposes, and nomads and city dwellers are not necessarily treated as such in the narrative. Eventually, the story seems to maneuver the continuum of large-scale groups (Uzbeks, Hindus, Turks, Qalmuqs, Chinese, Russians, and various tribes) and their individual representatives.

[69] Amina A. Elbendary, "The Sultan, the Tyrant, and the Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of al-Zāhir Baybars," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001), 152.

CHAPTER 3

Youth

The beginning of the story is in the city of Shahr-i Sabz, where Taraghāi Bahādur brought his son as he was entering his thirteenth year in "the Year of the Mouse," presumably to receive guidance and instruction from a Sufi master, Shaykh Shams Kulal. The precise reasons for the move are left out of the story. This is Tīmūr's first direct encounter with Sufis, and as we have seen previously, such encounters also tended to be accompanied by trials and tests. Evidently, Tīmūr is able to pass his first test, and the evaluation by the Sufis enables him to continue on his path to becoming the ruler of the world. The text makes it abundantly clear that Tīmūr is not tested with the aim of becoming a Sufi, but rather to see whether he could perform as a just and able king.

Following his mentor's death, and at his advice, Tīmūr – alone, poor, and hungry – travels to Bukhara. A series of encounters with different people in Bukhara who represent almost every stratum of society, from ordinary folk to the khan's son and heir, reveal to Tīmūr that the city is in disorder, that fear and corruption rule the day, and that governmental, judicial, and bureaucratic mechanisms have become useless and unreliable. Hope lives only outside the official channels, with several unexpected individuals whom the youth befriends.

The plot then moves to describe the intricate love connection that develops between Tīmūr, who behaves in complete agreement with his very young age, and the khan's daughter, Sarāy Mulk, a much stronger and more mature person than our great hero. Like most other stories in the biographies, this love story too is not a straightforward storyline but is packed with many subplots and ordeals.

Account of Tīmūr's Encounter with the Men of the Unseen World

At that time Shaykh Ḥasan Kulal was alive.[1] He was preaching to his students from the mosque's pulpit and announced that on the morrow a man who

[1] The manuscript confuses Shaykh Ḥasan Kulal and Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Kulal. Historically, the latter is reputed to have been a friend, or spiritual advisor, of Tīmūr's father, Taraghāi, as well as one of Tīmūr's first teachers.

would become a great king would appear in town. The next day, the students assembled and saw that a boy was approaching with the sign of God on his forehead.[2] Apart from him there was no one about. They gathered around him. Tīmūr knew that these were the students of the man who was preaching from the pulpit. Tīmūr approached the pulpit.

"Today our conversation will revolve around the things of this world and the next, and what God has given," said the shaykh.

"I am going to be like this man," thought Tīmūr. "I am alone in this world to experience grief and sadness."

The shaykh became aware of his inner thoughts and recounted what was told of His Holiness Ādam: "Ādam was arrogant enough to think that everything came from him, but became silent when he saw woman."

Now Tīmūr extended his hand to the shaykh and became his disciple. The shaykh taught him to read from the Qur'ān. At the same time he offered the hand of friendship and kindness to the other followers.[3]

There was a dome there that no one had ever seen from the inside. The shaykh invited Tīmūr to enter. Suddenly a man appeared. He was a Sufi; he too entered the dome. Then another man came in, with a boy at his side as his companion. He too entered the dome and disappeared. Both men were wearing strange clothes and were speaking languages that Tīmūr could not understand. All of a sudden the door of the dome opened and out came a Sufi, wearing green clothes. Slowly their languages became easier to understand.

"I am the son of the bek of the Maghrib," said one of them. "We were out hunting when a bird flew away and we could not catch it, and it brought us here. My name is Sultān Muḥammad."

"I am the son of the bek of Yemen," said the other. "I was on my way to the *ḥajj* and I was also brought here by a bird. My name is Sultān Zunnun."

"What is the meaning of this?" they asked the Sufi.

"This is the land of the men of the unseen world," said the man. "They know the source of strength of the world. If they wish it, they can make you kings; if they wish it, they can make you beggars. This is especially important now as we are approaching a period of choosing a king.[4] Whoever they choose amongst you will receive their instruction. The birds that led you here were sent from the men of the unseen. It is their wish now to speak to you and to ask you questions, even test you. Whoever succeeds shall be garbed with the robe of kingship."

"Kingship is mine," said the prince from Yemen. "For I have been trained in all kinds of science."

[2] The "sign of God" on Tīmūr's forehead was apparent to everyone but Tīmūr.

[3] The story of the shaykh fulfills several purposes. It is a tribute to the shaykh's greatness, but also an instrument to continue and confirm Tīmūr's fate for the audience. Notably, the Sufi shaykh teaches Tīmūr to read the Qur'ān but does not instruct him on the mystical, spiritual path. The life of a Sufi is not apportioned to Tīmūr – his is the overt course.

[4] The doubt over the ruler's identity is yet again at the center of the story.

"Kingship should fall into my hands," said the son of the bek of the Maghrib, "for I have studied much wisdom."

Tīmūr remained silent.

"Turk boy," said the Sufi. "You're not saying anything?"

"Anyone who takes a look at me, O my Sufi, sees that I have no such capabilities. But I am willing to serve the men of the unseen."

In short, the three princes were invited inside.

"I should sit in the senior position," said the prince from Yemen.

"I should be sitting in the higher position," said Sultān Muḥammad.

Amir Tīmūr said nothing.

Finally, a servant came in and directed one to the left side, the other to the right. The Sufis were sitting according to protocol like amirs.[5] Only Amir Tīmūr was left standing, his hand on his heart in greeting. The servant told him to sit down, but he refused, saying: "This place is too important for me to sit down, I will remain standing."

Then Shaykh Shams Kulal appeared. He was Tīmūr's teacher. He said: "Son, your behavior is worthy of kingship."[6]

A man recited a poem and Tīmūr asked the servant for the man's identity. "This is the Shaykh of the South, Sultān Muḥammad's master," answered the servant.

Everyone kept silent. Finally, the *qutb*[7] said: "This is the place of testing. They all need to pass a test."

As soon as he finished his words, a man was brought into the room. He was drunk and rude and was holding a bottle of wine in one hand, a weapon in the other. He was wearing black.

"This is my son," said the *qutb*. "As much as I tried, he would not accept my ways. He offered his regret three times, but every time he broke his word. You three have to advise us how to deal with him."

The prince from Yemen, who was very knowledgeable, said: "You have to pray for him yourself."

"Allow him to repent once more," said the prince from the Maghrib.

Then they asked Ṣāḥib-qirān what he thought. Ṣāḥib-qirān jumped at the man and struck him so hard that he died.

Both others exclaimed at Ṣāḥib-qirān: "This is the *qutb*'s son, why have you wrongfully killed him? You don't kill people for wine drinking."

[5] The Sufi gathering, self-appointed to determine the next king, is taking over the task of the amirs not only in action but also in form. On the ceremonial sitting arrangements of the amirs and the religious dignitaries see V. V. Bartol'd, "Tseremonial pri dvore uzbetskikh khanov v XVII veke," *Sochineniia*, II /2 (1964), 388–99. See also Robert McChesney's valuable expansion of Bartol'd's article in R. D. McChesney, "The Amirs of Muslim Central Asia in the XVIIth Century," *JESHO* 26 (1983), 33–70.

[6] Tīmūr respects protocol and religious authorities and customs and shows proper reverence for Islamic institutions.

[7] The axis of the age, leader of the Sufi assembly.

"You both told us your skills," said Ṣāḥib-qirān, "but I had to show you mine. I am a Turk and this is my skill. A drunk should not enter such a place."
[Tīmūr's Marriage][8]

Tīmūr went to visit Shams Kulal, but he died that night (the year was 755). Tīmūr went to sleep by his grave[9] and one evening he had a dream in which the shaykh told him: "My son, go to Bukhara and observe the wisdom of the Lord most High."

After that Tīmūr headed for Bukhara. He walked much of the way and became tired. He entered through one of the gates of Bukhara and came into one of the buildings, found a room and settled there. By chance, someone had left a bag in that room that contained one ruby from Badakhshan.[10] There was nothing else there. He decided to take the ruby and try to sell it in the bazaar. Suddenly, a few men emerged from behind a wooden beam. They were running away, and Tīmūr tried to ask them but they would not answer and dispersed in every direction. A young, drunk bully emerged, carrying a dagger.

"Hey, Turk-boy," shouted someone. "Run away!"

Tīmūr stayed put.[11] After all, he was tall and strong. That youth struck Tīmūr with his dagger. Tīmūr evaded the blow, but then the ruby fell to the ground. The thug picked up the ruby and started to run away. Tīmūr gave chase.

"Turk-boy," shouted at him one man. "Stop chasing this tyrant! He will kill you! He is Baraq Khan's lover." (Baraq Khan was Bayān-Qulī Khan's son. He set fire to the houses of many Muslims for his own enjoyment, but out of fear no one ever complained about him to his father. At that time Bayān-Qulī Khan was becoming old and had no other son. If Baraq Khan were to be disposed with, no other person would be able to inherit Chaghatay's throne!)[12]

Although the *'ulamā'* managed to endure this hardship, order was needed. Ṣāḥib-qirān was very young when he stepped into the caravansarāy; he had nothing and was hungry and thirsty. He thought that he would petition the *dādkh'āh*.[13] At that time the *dādkh'āh* was Amir Yādgarshāh

[8] My translation of a part of this segment, with no scholarly apparatus, was recently published in Scott C. Levi and Ron Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 248–54.

[9] Shams al-Dīn Kulal is buried near the great mosque in Shahr-i Sabz.

[10] The rubies of Badakhshan were famous throughout the Muslim world both as very precious gemstones and also as metaphors in poetry for all things beautiful and red (wine and lips, for example).

[11] True to his calling, Tīmūr fights for justice yet again and takes chances while doing so.

[12] Baraq Khan had no heir, and the line of the Chaghatayids seemed to be over. For more on the principle of succession in Central Asia see Chapter 6.

[13] The different administrative positions mentioned in this part of the narrative are, like most of the "facts" in the biographies, scattered and only partly accurate. The *dādkh'āh*, for example, was in charge of receiving official petitions at the khan's court. For a study of some of these positions and administrative duties in eighteenth-century Bukhara see, among other publications, Mīrzā Badī'-dīvān, *Madzhma' al-arkām ("Predpisaniia fiska") (Priemy dokumentatsii v Bukhare XVIII v.)*, faksimile rukopisi, vvedenie, perevod, primechaniia i prilozheniia A. B. Vil'danovoĭ (Moscow: Nauka, 1981); A. A. Semenov, "Bukharskiĭ traktat o chinakh i zvaniiakh i ob obiazannostiakh nositeleĭ

Arlat.[14] Tīmūr explained the circumstances to him, but he said: "Go to the *tumanbāshi*, he will take care of you." Tīmūr went to him but he said: "Go to Amir Jalayir the *mingbāshi*."[15] Amir Jalayir sent him to Amir Bayān Sulduz,[16] who was of the Noyāns, but among the Chaghatays there was no man of strength or courage.[17] He said to Tīmūr: "This is a matter for the *sharī'a*, go see a qazi."

The qazi was Imām Sa'd who said: "I have no respect for the khan. I am a man of the *sharī'a* first.[18] Go bring a witness who would testify for you."

Tīmūr went to the jewelers market to look for a witness, but all the people said: "We are simple men. We cannot be your witnesses. We want to live."

The amir went into a mosque and collapsed out of hunger.[19]

In the middle of the night a dervish came in, carrying a torch. He saw Tīmūr and asked him how he was doing. Tīmūr explained the events that happened. "Yes," said the dervish. "It is unfortunate that we have such tyranny in Bukhara." Then he said: "Tomorrow, after the morning-prayer, go to the minaret. You will find a man by the name Malham Pāradoz sitting there. Explain your situation to him, maybe he could help. Do whatever he tells you."

The next morning Tīmūr went to the minaret. There was a small shop in which an old man was sitting, sewing some old clothes. Tīmūr became upset, "How could this old man help with my misfortune?" He stepped forward anyway and greeted the man. The old man returned his greetings, but remained busy with what he was doing. He did not say a word.

After a while Tīmūr decided to explain his situation to him. He listened to Tīmūr's words and asked: "Didn't you speak to the *'ulamā'* about it?"

"I did," said Tīmūr. "But they sent me to Yādgarshāh."

Tīmūr thought that nothing could come out of this, but then suddenly Amir Yādgarshāh himself appeared and greeted the old man with much respect.

ikh v srednevekovoĭ Bukhare," *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie* 5 (1948), 137–53; Yuri Bregel, *The Administration of Bukhara under the Manghïts and Some Tashkent Manuscripts* (Bloomington, 2000, *PIA* no. 34).

14 Although according to Ibn 'Arabshāh the Arlat were one of the four main tribes of the Chaghatay ulus, they seem to feature more prominently only in the succession struggles following Tīmūr's death. See Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 155–56.

15 The Jalayir were among the most important tribes of the *ulus*.

16 Much like the Jalayir, the Sulduz or Suldus were also one of the leading tribes of the polity. Bayan (or Buyan) of the Suldus was ruler of the *ulus* between 1358 and 1360.

17 Some of these terms and administrative hierarchies are clearly confused, such as the lack of distinction between the military, courtly, and administrative positions held by the tribal leaders and army commanders and the posts that concerned legal authorities in Bukhara. We will see this even more pronounced in Chapter 5.

18 The *sharī'a* is presented as external to both the government and the military. The only one who would be able, ultimately, to overcome the dissonance is Tīmūr.

19 In the atmosphere of crisis that engulfed Bukhara, even the institutions of charity that were caring for the hungry and poor were in trouble.

The old man seemed not to notice him and continued his sewing. After a while he said: “You impious tyrant, why didn’t you help this poor young man?”

“I sent him to Amir Mu’ayyad,” said Yādgarshāh, “so that he would help him. He is my superior.”

The old man sent an apprentice to bring Amir Mu’ayyad. Mu’ayyad explained that it was on account of his superior, Bāyazīd.[20] Then Bāyazīd was summoned, and he blamed Bayān Sulduz, who arrived with his retinue, all wearing their fine brocade robes with their royal emblems. The old man paid no attention to them and they just stood there in sheer reverence. Tīmūr was shocked. He felt like he were drowning and put his finger in his mouth.[21]

After a while, the old man said: “Hey, Bayān Sulduz, if you are of Qarāchār Noyān, how come you never heard the request of this visitor?”

“I did,” he said. “I directed him to the qazi of our noble *sharī‘a*.”

So they brought Qazi Sa‘d. Amir Tīmūr was astonished to see the respect that the qazi showed the old man. The latter, still sitting in his place, said to the qazi: “Why did you not implement the judgment of the *sharī‘a*?”

“I was looking for a witness,” said the qazi. “This young man just left and never returned.”

“I went to the jewelers market,” said the amir. “But they just said that they were simple people and did not want to be witnesses. I asked them about the ruby, but they said that they would not want to deal with the qazi. They said that Baraq Khan is a tyrant and that they are afraid of him.”

Upon hearing these words the old man became bitter and enraged. He commanded that they bring Baraq Khan. Tīmūr could not keep silent any more.

“Baba,” he said. “Why do all these people show you such respect?”

“Sit quietly and I will tell you,” said the old man. But he was still busy doing his work, sewing. Everyone kept silent and uttered no word waiting for the old man to speak.

Suddenly the sound of carriages was heard. Baraq Khan was entering with much pomp and splendor. All the amirs and townsfolk were standing in their places, everyone assembled to see the glory of His Majesty. The old man remained seated in silence. Baraq Khan and his entourage approached the old man. Then he said: “O Tyrant, for a while I was guilty of praising you, but now I will tell your father to destroy you.”

“Baba,” said Baraq Khan. “What wrong have I done?”

Then he explained to him what had happened.

“I had no news of that,” said Baraq Khan. He sent for his close servant. As it so happened, his lover was there.

“I don’t know how the ruby got here,” he said. “I must have been drunk.”

[20] The author probably conjures up the image of another powerful historical tribal chieftain, Amir Bāyazīd Jalayir (d. 1361).

[21] A sign of bewilderment, often replicated in miniature paintings as well.

Baraq Khan placed his hand on his heart and with much reverence said: “Baba, with your permission, let this young man come to me tomorrow, and I will give him the price of two rubies.”

“The price is one thousand gold,” said a jeweler.

“I will give him two thousand gold,” said the khan.

“Young man,” said the old man to Tīmūr. “Stand up! You will take your money from Baraq Khan.”

“My claim is settled,” said Tīmūr. “Now explain what has just happened.”

“First go and recover your money,” said the man. “Then return here and I will explain.”

Tīmūr went to Baraq Khan’s headquarters and saw him there, sitting on a sofa, entertained by dancers. He averted his eyes. Rising from his seat, Baraq Khan saw Tīmūr and sent his servants to bring two thousand gold coins. Then he came to Tīmūr and began to apologize profusely. He also asked him to convey his apologies to the old man. Tīmūr gathered the gold and went back to the old man.

“Did you take it?” asked the old man.

“Yes,” said Tīmūr. “I did.” Then he placed the gold before them, divided the pile in half and gave one part to the old man. The man became irritated and said: “Hey, stupid kid. I have no need for anything in this world. Use it yourself for your own expenses.”

“Baba,” said Ṣāḥib-qirān. “Tell me your secret. Make my poor soul happy.”

“Ah, charming young man,” said the old man. “Listen to my words. For the last forty years I have been making clothes. I never coveted anything from anyone. I have been calling the morning prayer from this minaret. Ten years ago during the time of the evening prayer, rain began to fall. That time a woman was passing. A man, a drunk of the Chaghatay, was following her and caught her by the hand, and forced her into a house. The woman wailed and cried: ‘My hand, my hand, stop it! O good Muslims, I am pure. My husband said that if I’m not home tonight he will divorce me, take pity on me.’ So I went to that Turk’s house to help her, but his servants were there. They beat me up and I fled. I thought to myself, ‘How could the woman stay with her husband?’[22] And then I had an idea. I went up to the minaret and sounded the call for prayer, but not in its usual form. It seems that Bayān-Qulī Khan was in the citadel, reciting a prayer from the Qur’ān.[23] His retainers alerted him, and he asked who was calling for prayer at this time. ‘It must be a madman or a fool,’ they told him. The khan sent someone to check, and he came

[22] The old prayer caller’s priorities are clear: first, the concern for the integrity of the husband’s household and to the institution of marriage, then the concern for the woman’s well-being. After all, as mentioned later, this was the woman’s sin to begin with.

[23] Bayān-Qulī Khan is portrayed as the last of a dying breed of Chinggisid khans – respectful, just, and observant of Islam. Yet, he is old and about to pass away, only to leave a dreadful vacuum.

and brought me before the khan. 'Are you crazy or are you sane?' asked the khan. 'I am sane,' I said. And I proceeded to explain to him what had happened. The khan sent for the Turk and the poor woman, and they were brought before him. He then searched for the woman's husband and brought him too. He tied a rope around the Turk's neck and strangled him to death. Nothing was revealed to the husband of the woman's sin. Then he called me Ata. He said: 'Ata, help me and let me know of whatever happens in the city.' Thanks to God Almighty I pledged to make another late call to prayer if this serves justice. And I have kept my word for the last ten years. And this is why the amirs fear me." (Today they call him Bābā Paradoz, and his grave is on the south side of Bukhara near the South Gate.)

One night Bayān-Qulī Khan saw Shaykh al-'Ālam in a dream. "Do not behave contrary to the *sharī'a*," said the shaykh. "Rise and give your daughters in marriage!"

Bayān-Qulī Khan had nine daughters.[24] He rose from his sleep, assembled his daughters and told them: "My daughters, it is time for you to choose a man to marry." They all agreed.

The youngest daughter was Sarāy Mulk. She said to her father: "Father, I do not wish to depart from your fortunate shadow and I am not going to marry."

Then Bayān-Qulī Khan gave one daughter to Amir Chāku, one to Amir Jahānshāh and one to Amir Öljei.[25] He married off all his daughters – except for Sarāy Mulk – with much celebration and merriment.

One day Shaykh al-'Ālam appeared before him again in a dream and said: "Marry your daughter!"

When he woke up he called his youngest daughter and said: "You have to get married."

"I am not going to choose a husband," she said.

Again Shaykh al-'Ālam appeared before him in a dream and in a cautionary voice said: "Marry off your daughter!"

Again he summoned his daughter and told her: "O my daughter, heed to my wishes and choose a husband."

She said: "Do you care about my wishes? If so, give me Taraghāi Bahādur's son."[26] Since the khan was upset with Taraghāi Bahādur, he did not consent.

Again his daughter said: "My wish is that whoever beats me in chess, I will accept him, even if he is a shepherd."

The khan was dismayed and said: "How can I deal with your disrespect?"

"I will marry even your slave-boy," she said, "if he is of worthy quality. Whoever wins in chess, I will become his wife."

[24] Baraq Khan was his only son.

[25] Intermarriages between the Chinggisid khans and the daughters of the military (and other) elites were common tools to strengthen alliances and bases of power. Historically, Jahānshāh was Chāku's son, whereas Amir Öljei was one of the powerful amirs of the Suldus.

[26] The author does not explain how Sarāy Mulk even came to know of Tīmūr.

The khan agreed.[27]

The next morning the rumor spread and many chess players gathered at the palace. The princess beat them all. At the same time, Shaykh al-ʿĀlam appeared again in his dream and told him to give his daughter to whomever she wishes.

"My beloved father," she told him. "Tell your messengers to tell every chess player, wherever he is found, to come."

The messengers spread throughout the markets, announcing and summoning all the chess players in the realm. Amir Tīmūr heard the call, stepped outside, and the messenger explained to him what it was all about. Since Tīmūr had no equal in chess, he decided to go.[28]

The khan saw a Turk-boy, wearing a robe, on his head a fur hat. "What does this kid want?" said the khan.

"As much as I tried to discourage him, he insisted on coming along," said the messenger.

Amir Ṣāḥib-qirān said nothing.

The khan commanded that they bring a slave boy to him (this was Sarāy Mulk in disguise). They brought her. Tīmūr knew that although the clothes were those of a slave boy, the person before him was a girl. As soon as they saw each other, they fell in love. They set the chess board between them.

"I am going to play on one condition," said Ṣāḥib-qirān.

"The condition is that if you win, this slave-boy is yours," said the khan.

"And what happens if I lose?"

"Nothing is required of you if you lose," said the khan.

"If I lose, I will become the slave of this slave boy."

They played three times. Each game lasted one night and one day. Tīmūr emerged as the winner. Finally, the princess loosened her robe, and rising, went into the house. The khan became upset. Tīmūr did not reveal his true origin. (The reason was that the khan was upset with his father. Therefore, Tīmūr was afraid to reveal his true identity.)

"Leave now," said the khan. "Come back tomorrow. The slave-boy is yours."

Tīmūr returned to the caravansarāy. The khan came back to the house and summoned his daughter.

"Stay loyal to your oath," she said. "Give me to him, even if he is a slave." The khan was distressed. He placed a guard at the door, so that when the Turk boy comes he would not be allowed to enter.

[27] This brings to mind Marco Polo's account of the daughter of Qaidu, the Ögedeid ruler of the late thirteenth century, who had declared that she would not marry until she had found a man who could beat her in a feat of physical strength (wrestling). The proclamation was announced everywhere and many suitors came to seek her hand – both in combat and in marriage, apparently – only to be defeated. See Marco Polo, *The Travels*, tr. Ronald Latham (London: Penguin, 1992), 317–19.

[28] Tīmūr's expertise in chess and his fondness for the game had been distinguished by many of his contemporaries and also later in his "autobiography." (See for example, Ibn ʿArabshāh, *Tamerlane: or, Tīmūr the Great Amir*, translated by J. H. Sanders, London: Luzac & Co., 1936, 298.)

The next morning when Ṣāḥib-qirān came to the palace, the guards at the gate would not let him pass. He returned to his room at the caravansarāy. The following day a maid came to Ṣāḥib-qirān from the palace, carrying a letter:

Praise be to God. Know that the slave-boy who played chess with you is actually me, Sarāy Mulk, daughter of the khan. If the anxiety of love has kindled your heart, please petition the khan on our behalf. My father is a just man and will surely give me to you. If he gives you another slave, do not accept him.

Tīmūr honored the maid and sent her back. The next morning the khan went hunting. As he was riding Tīmūr appeared before him on the road and said: "O, just king. Please keep your promise."

The khan became upset that he could not go on the hunt on time and returned. The next day he sent to Tīmūr a number of slaves, but Tīmūr would not accept them, saying: "These are not the slaves I played chess with."

The khan became agitated and appointed Sirāj Qamari, his vizier, to talk to Tīmūr. The vizier came to him and said: "Young man, that is the khan's own daughter. Go, accept something else instead." He was holding a box in his hands that contained much gold.

"Go ahead, take it," said the vizier. But Tīmūr refused, and for the next three days he was weeping for his love.

Then he decided to visit the shrine of His Holiness Shaykh al-ʻĀlam. He covered his head and began to wail: "O Lord Creator, do not put my heart in such a state of love, and sustain me through this separation." Tīmūr cried himself to sleep. Shaykh al-ʻĀlam appeared before him in a dream and said: "O Amir Tīmūr, rise! God most High will show you the way." Tīmūr immediately woke up and headed back to the city.

He soon saw something on the road that turned out to be a box. He came close and saw that it was the same box that the vizier had offered him earlier. He picked up the box and returned to town. He saw that many people gathered and were speaking anxiously amongst themselves. Tīmūr asked one of them what had happened, but no one would answer. Suddenly the vizier Sirāj Qamari came rushing. Tīmūr greeted the vizier. The vizier spotted the box under Tīmūr's arm, and commanded: "Arrest the thief!" They put shackles on his legs, chains on his hands. (That night a thief entered the khan's quarters, and managed to injure the khan, steal the box and escape.)

"What wrong have I done?" asked Tīmūr. But people simply cursed at him. The vizier brought Tīmūr before the khan. The khan was sitting on his throne as the amirs and begs were sitting on his left and right flanks. Baraq Khan, the khan's son, was also sitting at his side. The vizier entered saying: "I found the thief."

"Was it you who came in search of my daughter?" asked the khan.

"Yes," said Amir Tīmūr.

"And you injured me?" said the khan.

Then Ṣāḥib-qirān explained everything that had happened, but the khan showed no interest in his words. They took Tīmūr and put him in prison. The khan's condition had worsened and soon his soul returned to his creator in the month of Ramadān. His son, Baraq Khan, took his place. The khan was buried next to Shaykh al-ʻĀlam.

So Baraq Khan was installed upon the seat of kingship and was carefully watching Sirāj Qamari. He soon executed Qamari, but after the latter's death the *yurt* fell into chaos and Baraq Khan began to lose his mind. He was humiliating all the begs to the point that Amir Chāku, Amir Bayān Sulduz and Amir Yādgārshāh, as well as others, dropped out of his government and distanced themselves from him. Amir Tīmūr was still in prison, as Baraq Khan seemed to have lost his memory and completely forgot about him.

The weather was very hot. It was the time of summer. Seeing no solution, Tīmūr was sitting in his cell, weeping. In the middle of the night someone came and called to Amir Tīmūr: "Young man, stand up! I will help you." Amir asked him for his name, but he said, "It's no concern of yours." And he smuggled Tīmūr out of prison. The jailor awoke from his sleep, and immediately raised the alarm. The people of Bukhara began to chase Tīmūr. Tīmūr ran into the Friday Mosque (the mosque had six gates). They all gathered at the gates, but no one dared to go inside. Tīmūr climbed to the top of the minaret and waited there. He struck with a stick those who tried to climb after him. Outside, a hundred men gathered. Day passed and night descended. A little after midnight, the black-dressed man who had saved him from prison climbed up. The amir tried to hit him, but he said: "I am your friend."

They descended the minaret when everyone around them had already fallen asleep. Two other men dressed in black joined them from the shadows. They led Tīmūr directly to the citadel. The gate was opened before them and they stepped into the citadel.

"Where are you leading me?" asked Tīmūr. "I am going to face too many hardships this way."

They laughed.

He was led into an interior hall decorated with carpets and gold, and one of them said: "Let us play chess together. I am Sarāy Mulk."

"My queen," said Tīmūr. "I have suffered a lot because of my love for you. Praise the Lord that we finally succeeded in meeting."

Tīmūr told her about his true origins, and the princess realized that he was Taraghāi Bahādur's son. The two spent the next few days together in utter delight.

One night Baraq Khan was walking on the roof, when he saw a light coming out of his young sister's room. This surprised him so he went over to check. He glanced through the crack in the door and saw the two lovers engaged in prayer. He immediately summoned ten of his strongest slaves. The princess heard their footsteps, looked outside and saw that the men had gathered outside her door. She immediately cried to Tīmūr to stop his

prayer. Tīmūr tried to get up from his place but he was injured and collapsed. They entered, made him stand, beat him and carried him to the field outside of Shaykh Ḥasan Bākharzī,[29] where they threw him to the ground and left him to die. Then Baraq Khan sent for one of his slaves to take the princess out of town and kill her secretly without anyone knowing about it, for "she shamed me."

The slave put the princess on a horse and rode out of town to the steppe. The princess realized that, for sure, she was about to die. She slowly took out a dagger from the side-saddle and struck the man's neck with such force that his head rolled, like an apple, to the ground.[30] She then jumped off the horse. She took the slave's clothes and put them on, climbed back on the saddle and headed to the town of Qarshi. In two days she reached Qarshi and from there went to Shahr-i Sabz. Her horse grew tired and she was forced to walk until she reached a place called Yighachlïq.

She saw a yellow-skinned man waiting for the shepherds and watching many sheep. That man was Taraghāi Bahādur. As she approached him she fell, and her hat rolled off her head, uncovering her hair.

"Who are you?" asked Taraghāi Bahādur. "Where are you from?"

"I am Taraghāi Bahādur's daughter-in-law," she answered.

Bahādur became upset. She explained to him all that had happened. Then Taraghāi Bahādur wept: "O my dear child, Amir Tīmūr is my son, but I haven't been able to find him for the last two years." Then he showed his new daughter-in-law every kind of reverence and respect and assigned to her a few maids. Next, he wrote a letter to Baraq Khan detailing how Tīmūr went to Bukhara, played chess with the khan's daughter, and how devoted the two were to each other. He included Sarāy Mulk's regards to her father and concluded the letter with an implied threat. The letter reached Baraq Khan. As soon as he became aware of the letter's contents he became confused.

"I did not know that Tīmūr was Taraghāi Bahādur's son," he said. "Does anyone know whether Tīmūr is dead or alive?"

That very night, as the disciples of Shaykh Ḥasan Bākharzī were visiting the shrine, they saw something lying in the field outside the shrine. They came near and saw a young man moving very slowly, several of his limbs broken. Two of them carried him into the shrine to treat his wounds. He spent forty days in the shrine before he was entrusted into the care of Shaykh Ḥasan Bākharzī himself.[31]

[29] The author probably means the empty field behind Shaykh Bākharzī's shrine.

[30] The motif of the hired slave sent to kill the girl outside town is repeating itself, but in this case Sarāy Mulk does not need a divine miracle to save her. She is perfectly capable of saving herself.

[31] Eventually Baraq Khan and Taraghāi Bahādur reached an agreement, and Tīmūr and Sarāy Mulk had a large and joyful wedding ceremony.

Commentary

Tīmūr's first direct and successful encounter with Sufis enabled him to continue on his path to becoming the ruler of the world. Once again, it was made evident that Sufis could not serve in the capacity of kings. The qualities of a leader for the Muslim community at a time of uncertainty – the thread of the search for such a leader runs through many of the stories – became more and more professed with each anecdote that was conducting Tīmūr closer to his destiny. Although Tīmūr had some unorthodox ways of demonstrating his commitment to the Sufis and to the community, it seems that his ways were exactly what the Sufi masters, portrayed as the true representatives of the will of the community, desired: Tīmūr was strong and confident, honest, pious enough to understand the significance of sacredness, and unquestionably dedicated to seeking advice from the Sufis and to accomplishing their goals. He was also the decision maker, harsh, strong-minded, and someone who could "get things done." His conviction allowed him to deal swiftly with situations as they arose, often with brute force, but as far as the Sufis were concerned, also with a clear understanding of justice.

Before the test, Tīmūr observed the shaykh and perceived him to be detached from the world, in the spiritual sense but also alone in the physical sense. Perhaps this was a moment of clarity for the youth, as he recognized not only the master's greatness but also the leader's solitude. Most likely, this was not a conscious peek into Tīmūr's own destiny. He was still a child, afraid and in mourning. Nevertheless, he ultimately chose the master as an object for identification, demonstrating an intuitive understanding that the shaykh was there to assist him. The master's reference to Ādam's loneliness and acceptance of Eve may have been a valuable lesson in patience and selflessness.

As his father Taraghāi before him passed tests, so did Tīmūr have to pass them, and the similarities abound. Tests needed to be taken even if the divine decree was already known. The tests, administered by the Sufis, would serve as an attestation to Tīmūr's skills. Guided by conviction and faith in the path, Tīmūr was willing to take chances, and his understanding of the meaning of justice was unhindered by intellectual obstructions. He was also ready and able to carry out justice on his own. By doing so, Tīmūr was bypassing the entire Islamic legal and institutional system, but in the virtually lawless sultanate of Bukhara, the audience understood that Tīmūr's behavior was not only suitable but even also called for. He was the future, not only for the realm, but also for its corrupt judicial system.

One of the most compelling assertions in the story concerns Tīmūr's "Turkicness." Tīmūr identified himself as a Turk and was also identified by others in the same manner, although his self-identification came from within while others based their judgments on his external appearance. His self-identification as a Turk, uttered in a forthright but also challenging manner ("I am a Turk and this is my skill"), was said in response to the educated foreigners

from other parts of the Muslim world, from Morocco and Yemen, and was intended to put them in their place. On the one hand, this utterance continued a long tradition in Islam that perceived the Turks as excellent soldiers, but also brutish and unrefined, eager to kill anyone who stands in their way.[32] Here, however, there seemed to be a spiritual dimension as well. Tīmūr was not a simple thug who would be willing to hit anyone in his path. He was thoughtful and portrayed himself – with the encouragement and acceptance of the Sufi master, who did not condemn his deed at all – as the defender of Islam and the executor of justice ("a drunk should not enter such a place"). One wonders about the reception of such a story by the audience. Central Asian Turks, to use as broad a generalization as possible, would probably have considered this a worthy accomplishment by a popular figure. Tīmūr emerged from this story a confident and able character who has exhibited proper behavior, flawless manners, and did not seek to impress the judges and spectators with conceited etiquette and the presumption of superior knowledge. He, a boy, was also the winner of the competition, the clear candidate for kingship and the beneficiary of a precious endorsement by the Sufi masters.

The portrayal of Tīmūr's "Turkicness" also continued the thread, introduced earlier in the biographies, of his command over the entire Turkic world and his seniority over the Ottomans, as seen in the narrator's introduction to the shared lineage of the kings of Turan and the sultans of the Saljuqs and the Ottomans. We have also seen, in the introduction to Tīmūr's legacy in Central Asia, that in some cases Tīmūr was referred to – along with Chinggis Khan – as the sultan of the Turks. For the Turkic peoples of Bukhara – the "Turks" held the throne, had been generally in command of the military and in charge of many of the highest administrative and religious positions, and also probably constituted the majority of the population – Tīmūr's representation as a Turk continued the long process of the region's Turkification, a process that had begun already before Islam's appearance in Central Asia and continued with the first Turkic-Muslim dynasties (Qarakhanids, Saljuqs, and others), with the Mongol invasions, and with the migration of the Uzbeks in the early sixteenth century.

For the Iranian audiences in Bukhara – Bukhara was, and still is, after all, home to a significant population of Persian speakers, many of whom had deep roots in the region – Tīmūr's "admission" may have resonated with the old dichotomy between Turks and Tajiks, between the soldier and scholar, the strength of the arm and sword and the power of the mind.[33] At the same time,

[32] This tradition began already with the first encounters of the Arabs and the Turks, and persisted through both the more scholarly evaluations of the early Arabs (such as the writings of the famous Arab prose writer, al-Jāḥiẓ) and later with the deliberate recruitment of Turks into the armies of the caliphate.

[33] See, for example, Jean Aubin, *Emirs mongols et vizirs persans dans les remous de l'acculturation* (Paris, 1995). (Studia Iranica. Cahier 15.)

because Tīmūr was a child, because he had acted in the service of perceived justice, because the authorities, regardless of their "ethnic" affiliation, had failed, and because Tīmūr will have vanquished also other "Turkic" opponents (such as the Ottoman sultan), Bukhara's Iranian audiences may have been more forgiving. His opponents were not Tajik: They were either foreigners or locals of diverse backgrounds. Tīmūr's identity as a Turk was not limited only to his understanding of himself, his skills, and his heritage. All the people that he encountered, whether in the marketplace or at the royal palace, immediately recognized him as a *Türk-bacha*, a Turk-boy, presumably for his attire and perhaps for his looks. Possibly, he represented to them an archetypal nomad. Whatever the reason, they still found it the most convenient and intuitive manner to address him, not knowing his name. In his designation, his dress, his appearance, and the company that he kept, Tīmūr was distinct from those in power. In fact, he was so often mistaken for a commoner that such a mistake was bound to arouse in the audience a sense of empathy and compassion.

Similar to *Sīrat Baybars*, Tīmūr's biographies humanized their protagonist. Tīmūr displayed his emotions (love, hate, fear, confusion); he was at times very naïve. Although he was predestined to rule, although he valiantly defended the *sharī'a*, and although he vanquished formidable enemies, was exceptionally strong, and enjoyed dealings with extraordinary beings (the unseen world, for example), Tīmūr was not a holy man.[34] He did not perform any miracles; he did not change his form or live an exceptionally long life. This is not the story of a saint. Tīmūr and Baybars found themselves in an ambiguous state: On the one hand, they received many signs about their destiny – prophecies, guidance from Sufi shaykhs, conspicuous dreams, and superior abilities – and their confidence and understanding of their allotted destiny was rising throughout the narrative. On the other hand, they were not really privy to God's design and could only see the external side of things, not the internal and, supposedly, the more meaningful.[35] Externally, Tīmūr possessed all the necessary attributes to allow him to rule, with the exception, of course, of the Chinggisid ideal. Internally, Tīmūr had no real access to the hidden or unseen world. Even when he was associating with the unseen and with its representatives, as in the story of the test, he remained the odd man out. He did not attain true knowledge or the kind of wisdom that had been apportioned to the men of the unseen world. He was only able to gain their approval.[36] We should not really wonder about his lack of access to the Sufi truth. After all, it was not Tīmūr's place.

34 Neither was Baybars.

35 Gril's comments about Baybars are especially instructive. See Denis Gril, "Du sultanat au califat universel: le rôle des saints dans le Roman de Baybars," in *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*," 178.

36 Ibid., 183.

This is another reason why we should not treat this work as a hagiography, or as "epico-religious" literature, to use Jean Calmard's (and others) definition. Tīmūr's biographies have a strong religious dimension because they had been written in a religious setting. This is not, however, religious literature per se: It is not a hagiography, even if it displays hagiographical motifs; it is neither a doctrinal work nor a devotional work, even if Tīmūr's biographies were clearly inspired by religious literature.

One of the most enduring features in the narrative is the plight of the Muslim community, which is expressed in a variety of internal threats (heathen rulers, corruption, anti-Muslim oppression, anti-*sharī'a* activities, and false prophets) and external dangers (invasions and battles). The examples are numerous and range from Tīmūr's first experiences in the city of Bukhara that involve fights, drunkenness, encounters with ineffective and crooked city officials, and a cruel tyrant who "set fire to houses of many Muslims for his own enjoyment," to events following Bayan-Qulī Khan's death that include the execution of the head minister and the growing rift between the khan and the amirs. The rise of another tyrant in the figure of Amir Qazaghan, who had slaughtered four thousand *mullah*s in forty days, destroyed *madrasa*s and burned down mosques, and even forbade the Muslims to fast during Ramadan,[37] further emphasized the predicament of the Muslim community and Tīmūr's duty to help them. Tīmūr's rise to power and eventual success would serve, as Gril had demonstrated in his study of *Sīrat Baybars*, as a sign of the Muslims' eventual victory, a show of confidence that the Muslim community would ultimately prevail. However, the apocalyptic dimension in Tīmūr's heroic apocrypha is much more pronounced than in *Sīrat Baybars*, as will become evident in Chapter 5.

[37] To the point that our storyteller would evoke the time of Noah and the Flood.

CHAPTER 4

Inauguration and Kingship

Tīmūr's ascent to the throne of his Central Asian realm followed a sequence of events whose aim was not only to establish the hero's merit and worthiness of the esteemed position, but also to show how reluctant he had been to part with the old tradition that prescribed that only Chinggis Khan's male descendants had the legitimacy to claim the seat of majesty. By the time the last Chaghatayid khan had died, Tīmūr had already secured the support of the military commanders and the Sufis. They all agreed that he should become king, but he still hesitated. A seemingly chance meeting with a 200-year-old deformed woman affected him greatly. After all, she had in her possession – courtesy of an early thirteenth-century Sufi shaykh – the original agreement between Tīmūr's ancestor, Qachulai, and the latter's brother, Qabūl (Chinggis Khan's great-grandfather), that she had been instructed to deliver to him. After further deliberation, Tīmūr was still not persuaded. He believed that he had located the real heir to the throne, a Chinggisid youth residing in a village to the east. Messengers were dispatched to fetch the boy, but despite all efforts the boy found his premature demise. On his death bed the boy implored Tīmūr to take upon himself the task of ruling the land. Tīmūr seemed moved but still not fully convinced. That night, the Prophet himself was revealed to our hero in a dream and commanded him to accept leadership. Tīmūr, in a very unusual exchange with Muḥammad, reminded the Prophet the covenant of his ancestors. Oddly enough, Muḥammad agreed that the covenant took precedence over his own command. Tīmūr then set out to find another Chinggisid and ultimately enthroned himself and the Chinggisid in a curiously similar ceremony.

Account of the Installation on the Imperial Throne and the Enthronement of Ṣāḥib-qirān in the Year 771 A.H.[1]

When Baraq Khan's fortune had reached its demise, a group of amirs gathered in the city of Balkh to decide upon the fate of the country by determining the

[1] *Kunūz*, 285–93. This story does not appear in the recent Uzbek version of the work. See also *TN Kullīyāt*, 136–39.

identity of its next ruler.[2] The gathering was in unanimous agreement that His Highness Ṣāḥib-qirān was worthy and deserving of the crown, even though up until that time the affair of the khanship was part and parcel of the lineage of Chinggis Khan. Having this consideration in mind, the amirs set out for the hunt.

It so happened that Tīmūr was hunting when his favorite falcon, indeed his falcon of good omen, picked up the trail of a gazelle.[3] They kept following the gazelle through every step and in every direction and in their zealous pursuit separated from the rest of the group. Thus they carried on until midnight, when they reached an old village in ruins where Tīmūr decided to camp for the night.

When daylight broke, Tīmūr heard a whistling sound and when he turned around he saw a woman approaching the campsite. The skin was flayed from her face from her forehead to her chin, so that the bones of her face shone in their whiteness. At first Tīmūr was startled, but then he took courage and approached. The woman exhibited much honor, but Tīmūr grew suspicious and drew his sword in order to strike.

"I am not an enemy," swore the woman.

When Tīmūr asked her to explain her condition, the woman said, "My story is long and difficult, and my circumstances are heartbreaking, for I have lived two hundred years and at the time Chinggis Khan invaded these lands I was but twenty years old.[4] Ah, my lot is a bad one. The Mongols had murdered my husband, and I decided to kill Chinggis Khan in revenge. As the Mongol convoy was returning to Khorezm, I was cooking some food along the side of the road, and poured some poison into the pot. I approached Chinggis Khan and said, 'O Khan, I implore His Majesty to taste my cooking.' But just then Qarāchār Noyān, his vizier, prevented me from coming any closer. After many trials, they finally decided to put my food to the test. They brought a thief from a local prison and commanded him to eat the food. The thief ate and died on the spot. They realized that the food contained poison and they handed me over to Qarāchār, who had me locked up in his house as a prisoner.[5] At that time, the Mongol army arrested the great Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā,[6] and

[2] This time the amirs, not the Sufis, seem to be in the decision-making position, even if their decision would not be final. It is clear that their disillusionment with the Chinggisids already was reaching a critical stage.

[3] Hunting with gyrfalcons was standard practice for those of position and means. See Thomas T. Allsen, *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 244–51.

[4] Men and women of impressive longevity typically represented knowledge and wisdom acquired over the years but also served as witnesses to past events that might have direct bearing on the present.

[5] Qarāchār, Tīmūr's ancestor, is credited with saving Chinggis Khan's life.

[6] Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, the eponymous ancestor of the Kubravi Sufi order, was killed during the Mongol assault on Khorezm in 1220. For more on the shaykh and the Kubravi order, see Devin DeWeese, "The Eclipse of the Kubravīyah in Central Asia," *Iranian Studies* 21/1–2 (1988), 45–83. Several connections between Kubrā and Tīmūr survived in popular tradition. For example, in his travels in the region in the nineteenth century, Henry Lansdell heard rumors that Kubrā's mausoleum had been

they chained us together – one of my legs and one of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn's legs were shackled in one chain.

Qarāchār came in and said: 'O Shaykh, I ask for your forgiveness. You are free to go, but the woman will have to be killed.'

I was determined to try and escape, but just then His Holiness the shaykh said: 'O Qarāchār, know that this woman's life will be long. One of your own descendants will become king. Give to this woman this letter written by Qachulai and Qabūl Khan and Tumanai, so that she will deliver it to your children. Do not kill her, for the decree of the Divine is upon this woman!'

'It is the khan's command that we flay the skin off this woman's face,' said Qarāchār.

'Flay her, then,' said the shaykh.

After that they flayed the skin off my face, but they gave me that letter. And – I am in my origin a daughter of Khorezm – the shaykh told me: 'Go to Balkh and remain there.' And since that time until today I have been in this place. Now that I look at you I see all the signs that the distinguished one had told me about."

"I am of Qarāchār's lineage," said Tīmūr, "but God forbid should I be the man you are looking for."

"O woman," Tīmūr said further. "This child has no mark that you might recognize."

"When I take a closer look at you I will know if you are the destined son," said the woman. "Show me your shoulder!"

Tīmūr showed her his shoulder. The woman saw the mark on his shoulder and observed that he was lame and that he looked like an Arab.[7]

"Now explain your lineage," said the woman.

Amir Tīmūr rehearsed his lineage down to Qarāchār Noyān. That woman knelt in recognition before him and afterwards said: "I bring you greetings on behalf of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā."

Then she produced the letter of the three ancient kings, Qachulai Khan and Tumanai Khan and Qabūl Khan. Tīmūr observed that the seals of the three were affixed to the letter. However, the contents were written in a Turkic language unfamiliar to Tīmūr, and he could not read it. Tīmūr took the woman and the letter and returned to Balkh. He announced the matter to the council of amirs, but among them there was no one who could read the letter (the letter was identified as written in the Uyghur tongue) except for Mīrzā Sayf al-Dīn, who had translated its contents to the assembly.

It was, they realized, a prophecy, predicting that the fortunate turn of events would bring about the establishment of the auspicious and imperial sultanate

rebuilt by Tīmūr himself. (Henry Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia, including Kuldja, Bokhara, Khiva and Merv*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1885, 347.)

[7] Tīmūr the Lame (hence the English Tamerlane) was wounded in his right leg and his right hand (or arm).

upon a distinguished descendant whose name begins at four hundred, and comes to a close at two hundred.[8] The assembly was excited. The prophecy continued:

The khanship passes along the lineage of Qabūl Khan, and Qachulai's descendants should not take upon themselves the custom of the khan. In this manner, the seal of Chinggis Khan is of the lineage of Qabūl Khan. Qachulai should choose the vizierate.

The letter ended in the following words: "Let us hope that his distinguished descendants will not break the pact."

"I am also committed to this agreement," remarked Tīmūr. "However, I will not become king." The amir said further: "It is conveyed through the line of Qabūl Khan that one of his descendants will be king." As much as Mīr Baraka[9] tried to convince Amir Tīmūr, the amir would not accept. Finally, after making another effort, the amirs became convinced that they should find someone of Qabūl Khan's lineage.[10]

At that time a wandering dervish appeared at the court. He greeted Tīmūr and said: "I come from the direction of Sali Saray, which is in the vicinity of Kulab-i Hisar, where the Dughlat tribe is resident. One day I saw a youth, about fourteen years of age who was playing in the company of other children. He made himself to be king. When he ceased playing, he would play chess, and would beat anyone he played with. I suspected he must be a true prince. His name is Amir Ḥusayn. The people claim that he is a grandson of Amir Qazaghan, who had been missing for a while."[11]

[8] A reference to the name "Tīmūr" in accordance with the system of *abjad*, the Muslim practice of isopsephy, adding the numerical values of letters. Tīmūr's *t* had a numerical value of four hundred, and his *r* matched two hundred.

[9] Mir Sayyid Baraka was considered Tīmūr's spiritual advisor, and the two were also buried in the same mausoleum.

[10] The story of the pact between the ancestors of Chinggis Khan and Tīmūr was promoted in Timurid sources and served as one of the foundations for Tīmūr's legitimation. According to the story, Qachulai, Chinggis Khan's grandfather's brother, dreamt that four stars were emanating from his brother Qabūl's chest, the last of the stars filling the world with its brilliance. Then he dreamt of seven stars emanating from his own chest, followed by an eighth star that spread its radiance in the world. When he woke up, he asked their father, Tumanai, about the dream. His father explained that the fourth star rising from Qabūl's chest was to be Chinggis Khan, and the eighth star emanating from Qachulai was to be Tīmūr. Tumanai then wrote, in Uyghur, that from then on the *takht-i khānī* (the throne) would belong to Qabūl's descendants, and to Qachulai's descendants the *shamshīr va hukmranī* (the military and the administration). Then the two sons swore before Tumanai that they would keep the pact. Then they sealed the pact with the royal seal and kept it in the treasury. The story appears in Timurid sources, including Yazdī's *Zafarnāma*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abbāsī (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1957), vol. I, 24–25; and *The Shajrat ul Atrak, or Genealogical Tree of the Turks and Tatars*, tr. Col. Miles (London, 1838), 55–57. It seems that custody of the covenant was entrusted to Chaghatay (much like the *yasa*), and that the covenant was physically destroyed in a raid on the treasury in the year 1340, by a descendant of Ögedei ('Alī Sultān). See also Woods, "Tīmūr's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, eds. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 93.

[11] Amir Ḥusayn was indeed Amir Qazaghan's grandson.

"How can you be sure he is a real prince?" asked Tīmūr. "What are his identifying marks?"

"He is black-eyed, pearly-toothed, wide-mouthed and big-eared," exclaimed the dervish. "Naturally, Chinggis Khan's lineage is defined by these celebrated qualities."

The assembly hurried to concede that indeed these were the signs of a true prince.

Tīmūr sent his son, Mīrzā 'Umar Shaykh, to bring the boy to him. Mīrzā 'Umar Shaykh took the letter from the gathering of the amirs, and set off together with five hundred men. They came to a mountain slope. That very night there was a flood, which carried off the five hundred men. It was springtime. The Mīrzā escaped a thousand disasters and calamities.[12]

The Mīrzā reached a place where the paraphernalia of an apothecary had been scattered all over, which made the place look like a disaster had occurred. An old man appeared and said: "O young man, come quick, a tiger has come to destroy you." That old man was eating the leaves of a tree out of a stone bowl. The prince saw that there were many roots there, he took hold of them, turned them into a paste and anointed the trunk of the tree with them. When the tiger approached, the Mīrzā withdrew to the side, the tiger rubbed himself against the tree, and his hairs became glued to the tree. Then Mīrzā struck it with a cudgel and took off its skin. The old man descended from the tree. Mīrzā asked him of the whereabouts of the prince. The old man, who was an apothecary, said: "That young man is in our tribe. His name is Amir Ḥusayn ibn Amir 'Abdallāh. He is of the lineage of Chinggis Khan."

The Mīrzā was thrilled to learn of this and the old man guided him. When they came into the village Amir Ḥusayn was playing with other children. The Mīrzā bowed before him and placed the tiger skin in front of him as a gift. He also gave him Tīmūr's letter of invitation. Amir Ḥusayn studied the letter and brought the Mīrzā into his house, where he set the chess board and beat the Mīrzā three times. In chess-playing the Mīrzā used to always beat Tīmūr (and Tīmūr used to say that on account of chess he would conquer the face of the earth). In short, the men of the tribe heard about the Mīrzā's arrival and came to see him. The Mīrzā took the prince and set out on the road. They reached the city of Balkh and descended from their horses. Most of the time, when the Mīrzā came to deliver news, they would joyfully sound the drum to announce his arrival. When Mir Baraka heard of the arrival of the young prince, he said: "The turn of kingship is Ṣāḥib-qirān's, all this is idle." Tīmūr came forth to greet the important guest. But fate has its own rules.

Amir Ḥusayn rode off to the hunt. As the company of hunters were in pursuit of a gazelle, Amir Ḥusayn outpaced the others. He descended from his horse and wanted to cut off the gazelle's head. However, a man by the name of

[12] My translation here skips most of the "calamities," including a fierce battle with a pack of vicious wolves.

Möngke the Drunk appeared. A year earlier Amir Ḥusayn had struck his father with an arrow and killed him. He always contemplated taking vengeance for his father's blood and now he could seize the opportunity. Möngke arrived, and with one strike of his sword he cut off one of Amir Ḥusayn's arms at the shoulder. Having destroyed his world, Möngke began to flee.

Tīmūr arrived at the scene with an army. He had already heard in Balkh that Amir Ḥusayn had gone hunting and wanted to convene an assembly right there, but other events were taking their toll. Tīmūr hugged the head of the young man. Mīrzā 'Umar Shaykh seized Möngke and brought him.

"I implore you," said Ḥusayn. "Do not kill my murderer."

Since Amir Ḥusayn was an intelligent young man, he said,

O Ṣāḥib-qirān.
Precarious Heaven has overturned my hope,
and has made the fruit of my youth one with the dark dust.
It has cut the warp and woof of my hope into shreds.
The flower from the garden of my desire has not yet blossomed,
and the autumn of death came rushing in.
Death disheveled my musky locks under the tomb.
O Beloved, do not attach your heart to this world.
Another day has passed, I wandered and saw no rose petals,
nor have I heard the call of the nightingale.

After that, Amir Ḥusayn said further: "O Tīmūr, you are worthy of the sultanate. It is clear that you should become king. Abide by the command of the Prophet, praises and blessings of God be upon him!"

Amir Ḥusayn passed away, and they brought his body to Shahr-i Sabz and enshrined it in the mausoleum of Shaykh Shams Kulal. A multitude of men now gathered, calling to Tīmūr: "Fortune is now with you, the riches of kingship are yours. God has granted rulership to you as a present."

That very night Tīmūr saw His Holiness the Prophet, praises and blessings of God upon him, in a dream.

"O Amir Tīmūr," He commanded. "We have made you king on this earth.[13] It is necessary that you immediately renounce your doubts, and conquer the face of the earth."

"What am I to do with the letter of the ancestors?" asked Tīmūr.

"The letter of your forefathers is better than Our command," said His Holiness the Messenger, praises and blessings of God upon him. "Now rise, king, and claim the throne. Then find a man of the lineage of Chinggis Khan. He should have the title of khan, and you should have the affairs of the sultanate."

When Ṣāḥib-qirān woke up, he took counsel with the amirs. They were all of the opinion that he was deserving of the sultanate. And it so happened

[13] A Persian paraphrase on the recurrent Qur'anic dictum (for example, Qur'ān 38:26).

that on the twenty-seventh of the blessed Ramadan, on Wednesday, in the Year of the Dog, in the year 771 A.H., they girded the city with festivity. In accordance with Chinggis Khan's custom they made an enthronement, and raised Tīmūr on the white felt – four commanders of the amirs enthroned him upon the throne which they called the throne of Jamshīd.[14] And the amirs, in accordance with Chinggis Khan's custom, knelt down and saluted.[15]

"I have brought Soyurghatmïsh Oghlan," commanded the amir. He gave him the khanship, and he sat in council higher than the others, and on all the decrees they wrote his name before the name of Ṣāḥib-qirān.[16]

Commentary: Tīmūr and the Ark of the Covenant

Clearly, one of the most prominent dilemmas in Tīmūr's legendary biographies has been the question of sovereignty. Although we have dealt with the question, to a certain extent, earlier (and will return to it in our conclusions), the following story about Tīmūr and the Ark of the Covenant serves as an excellent example for the perception of the duality of power and to the sources of inspiration that the biographies had relied on.[17] According to the story,[18] Sultān Bāyazīd Yïldïrïm sent his son, Sultān Shiblī,[19] as an envoy to Tīmūr, who at that time was encamped in Egypt. After a reception, where the various dignitaries assembled and sat in their arranged places according to their ranks, Shiblī introduced the purpose of his visit. Among the many presents that he had brought with him from his father was a large box (*sunduq*) shaped like a long chest or a coffer (*tābut*). A letter from Bāyazīd explained the nature of the strange box:

"That box that I have sent to you is called the Ark of the Covenant (*tābut sakina*). It was bequeathed to His Highness Iskandar from the time of Ādam. It was opened once during Iskandar's reign, and once again during the time of the Caliphate of the Commander of

[14] The "throne of Jamshīd" was an epithet for Persepolis, Iran's ancient capital, after Jamshīd had moved his seat of government from Balkh to Persepolis.

[15] In the days of the Mongol Empire, the amirs would usually kneel three times to the sun or to the newly elected khan. For inauguration rituals in the Mongol Empire, see my *Ritual and Authority in Central Asia: The Khan's Inauguration Ceremony* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2003) [*PIA* 37], 25–32.

[16] According to the advice of his forefathers and the Prophet, Tīmūr decided to place Soyurghatmïsh Oghlan, a descendant of Ögedei, on the throne. He even made sure that the new khan's name would appear first on official decrees, but not on the coinage or in the Friday sermon.

[17] The story is brought here in the context of ideas of sovereignty in the *Tīmūr-nāma*, although it could easily fit also the genre of ʻ*ajā'ib* (marvels of creation), often viewed as a testimony to God's endless power. Such stories abound in the biographies.

[18] See *TN Kullīyāt*, 369–74. The Berlin copy of the *Kunūz al-aʻzam* is incomplete (page 572 is its last written page – only about four-fifths of the *TN Kullīyāt*) and does not include the story of the Ark.

[19] This may be an anachronistic reference to one of the sons of Shāh Shujāʻ.

the Faithful (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) 'Umar, at the court of Hirqal, who was at that time the emperor of Rum.[20] Now, for nearly eight hundred years it has been impossible to open it. The harder we hit it, it showed no signs of breaking. I have sent it so that you will open it and see what is inside."

Tīmūr ordered to open the chest but they could not find an opening. Eventually, Maulānā Sharaf Yazdī[21] saw that on one of the walls of the chest a picture of the sun was drawn, and opposite it a picture of a new moon and a star. He ordered that a piece of loadstone be brought. He held it facing the picture of the star. The loadstone raised those pictures. Slowly a knob emerged. A kind of a small door (*daricha*) opened. An apparition of a slave-child appeared, holding something written in his hand. The people asked Maulānā Sharaf how he had found the way to open it. He answered that something was written on the wall of the chest that revealed the secret of the opening, but no one was able to read it. When the slave boy brought forth what appeared to be a sheet of paper, made from the skin of a gazelle, Maulānā Sharaf took it from his hand and handed it to the Ṣāḥib-qirān. No one was able to read it. They all surrendered the reading to the Maulānā. He studied the writing and read its contents:

"From me, Iskandar Dhū'l-Qarnayn, it reaches to you, Iskandar the Second. My wise men have informed me that after one thousand and six hundred years you, a man descended from Yāfith ibn Nūḥ (peace be upon him), will emerge. We placed in the coffer the cloak of His Holiness Ādam, the staff of His Holiness Mūsā, the goblet of His Holiness Yūsuf, the shirt of His Holiness Ibrāhīm, the sash of His Holiness Seth, the sandals of His Holiness Idrīs and the hatchet of His Holiness Nūḥ (blessings of Allah upon them).[22] We have left a sign of each of the Prophets. Know that the Prophets also exercised sovereignty. As the saying goes,

According to wisdom, kingship is prophethood
For these two are the bezels of one ring.
Do you say that it is they who tormented each other?
For both come out of the same origin.

The portraits of all the sultans and kings and khaqans of 'Ajam[23] until our own time, and after [our own time] the pictures of those to come, based on what they have learned from

[20] That is, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641).

[21] Presumably referring to the celebrated author of the *Ẓafar-nāma* (completed in 1425). See also the recent excellent study on Yazdī's career, intellectual, and spiritual environment by Evrim Binbaş, *Sharaf al-Dīn 'Ali Yazdī (ca. 770s-858/ca. 1370s-1454): Prophecy, politics, and historiography in late medieval Islamic history*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2009.

[22] The Muslim tradition (following earlier Jewish and Christian traditions) about the relics of the prophets left for posterity inside the Ark began in the Qur'an. "Their prophet said to them: The sign of his kingship is that the Ark shall come to you, carried by the angels, having therein tranquillity from your Lord, and the remains of what the House of Musa and the House of Harun (Aaron) had left. Surely, in it there is a sign for you, if you are believers." (Qur'an 2:248)

[23] That is, the non-Arabs.

celestial positions were drawn. Even your own picture has also been drawn. Behold what has happened and give praise to the passed generations for having such knowledge. If you wish, you can take the pictures out of the interior of the coffer. Turn that knob to the right and the slave boy will descend and bring the picture. When you turn the knob to the left, (the boy) will leave the picture inside. Turn the knob again to the right and that boy will bring forth another picture. And that is the logic."

So they turned the knob to the right and the boy went inside and brought forth a piece of green silk, and when they unfolded the silk they saw that a picture of a man was painted on it. The man was of tall stature, his face white, of open countenance and sparse moustache and a mole on the side of his eyebrow. On that piece of silk was written that this was Jamshīd Shāh of high aspiration, who was of the nation of His Holiness Ṣāliḥ.[24] A few lines concerning Jamshīd's saga and the transient nature of the world were written on that silk.[25]

The rest of the story describes how the slave boy went inside twelve times and each time brought forth a piece of silk with a portrait of a man engraved on it. All had been ancient kings celebrated in the great Persian epic, the *Shāh-nāma*. Each portrait also included a short description of its subject's physical appearance, qualities, and the circumstances that led to his death. The twelve men were the previously mentioned Jamshīd; Zahhāk ("a man wearing red, of dark complexion, Arab looking, two serpents tangled around his shoulders"), Farīdūn the Fortunate ("a white man, Kurdish face, average height … who drank milk from the cow of splendor"), Kay-Qubād ("a tall man, white moustache, robust, long nose … of the family of Ibrāhīm"), Kay-Ka'ūs ("thick beard, open countenance … one year a vulture swooped upon him from the sky and tossed him underneath the earth"), Kay-Khusraw ("who always prostrated in supplication upon the carpet of worship, [but] his head turned away from the contract of servitude, and his rule turned from him and he was shown the carpet of resignation"), Zal ("who, in wise ways robbed his enemies of their souls"), Rustam, Afrāsiyāb, Isfandiyār, and Bahman. The final picture was awe inspiring: "They saw a man of average height, dark eyes, high eyebrows, pearly teeth, thin lips, in his skull were two horns of melted gold." This was, of course, Iskandar (Alexander).

One of the most peculiar features of this story is the fact that the portraits drawn had been of mighty kings. Stories about a box containing portraits of

[24] Ṣāliḥ was a Qur'anic nonbiblical prophet, sent to the people of Thamud in Arabia.

[25] "I am Jamshīd who clothed the bride of this world in a beautiful robe; I taught the beautiful young person of this world how to deck itself out with grace. I have brought forth 3,600 compositions from the wine cellar of brilliance.… The carpenter of destiny set the saw of annihilation upon my head, and I no longer grew lush from the fields of hope.

How well spoke Jamshīd of noble constitution;
By a spring, on a marble stone he wrote.
At this spring people would speak without rhyme or reason (like the water of the spring).
They passed on until they shut their eyes."

the Prophets circulated in the Muslim world from as early as the late ninth century.[26] In most of the stories we find Muslim emissaries in the court of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius in Constantinople, where they were shown a gilded object shaped like a cube that had many small compartments. From each of the compartments Heraclius drew out a piece of silk with a portrait painted on it. These portraits included Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Ismāʻīl, Joseph, David, Solomon, Jesus, and Muḥammad. According to Heraclius (as narrated in these stories), the portraits were made by the Lord's decree for Adam, who had asked to see the prophets who would succeed him. God transmitted these pictures to him, and they were kept in Adam's treasury in an unspecified location ("somewhere in the West"). Alexander the Great took them from there and handed them over to the prophet Daniel.

These stories apparently never identified the "box" where the portraits had been stored as the Ark of the Covenant. Mīrkhwānd, the Timurid historian, may have been the first to ascertain that the box was indeed the Ark of the Covenant (*tābut sakina*), reporting, yet again, that it contained the pictures of the prophets, pictures that previously had been in the possession of Heraclius.[27] Mīrkhwānd's account was later picked up by the sixteenth-century historian of painting and calligraphy, Dūst Muḥammad, although he did not describe the box as the Ark of the Covenant, but rather as a "chest of witnessing" (*sunduq-i shahāda*), which he mentioned in order to describe the development of the idea of portraiture and its alleged development by Daniel.[28]

I was unable thus far to trace any reference to the story of the Ark of the Covenant with portraits of kings rather than prophets. The story does demonstrate that the sources that the author used were much more diverse than he had registered in the introduction and also lent further support to the notion of "heroic apocrypha." For example, although the *Shāh-nāma* was not acknowledged as one of the sources of reference or inspiration for Tīmūr's biographies, the Persian epic is used throughout the manuscripts. Storytellers of the *Shāh-nāma* (*Shāh-nāma khvānān*) had very powerful presence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Iran[29] and apparently also in Central Asia.[30] The author's acquaintance with sources about the story of the portraits

[26] Such stories appeared in the works of al-Bayhaqī and Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, and also repeated in different versions by al-Kisā'ī, Ibn al-Faqīh, al-Dīnawarī, al-Mas'ūdī, and al-Tha'alabī. See Oleg Grabar and Mika Natif, "The Story of the Portraits of the Prophet Muḥammad," *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003), 19–38.

[27] Mīrkhwānd, *Tarīkh Rawżat al-safā'* (Tehran: Markazi-i Khayyam Piruz, 1959–60), vol. II, 58.

[28] This account is noted by David Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: the Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2001), 170–74.

[29] Calmard, "Popular Literature under the Safavids," in *Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period*, ed. Andrew J. Newman (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 332–33.

[30] Troitskaia, "Iz proshlogo kalandarov i maddakhov v Uzbekistane," in *Domusul'manskie verovaniia i obriady v Sredneĭ Azii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 207.

in the Ark of the Covenant also highlights his familiarity with Mīrkhwānd's *Rawżat al-safā*.[31]

Why did the author choose to portray a story about the portraits of ancient Iranian kings and not about the Qur'anic prophets, as it had been usually presented? In fact, the story is in agreement with the rest of the *Tīmūr-nāma* with regard to the concept of authority. It cautions the king not to be too proud and reminds him of his mortality. It also lets the *people* understand the mortality of the ruler. The basic concept of authority is introduced by Alexander the Great "himself" in the old verse:

> According to wisdom, kingship is prophethood
> For these two are the bezels of one ring.
> Do you say that it is they who tormented each other?
> For both come out of the same origin.

On the one hand, kingship and prophethood were supposedly of the same nature and used to be held, according to the verse, in one grip of authority. Nevertheless, throughout the centuries, a separation between the two emerged, due in part to their shared claim of ultimate authority. Because their source is the same – God – but their actual expression in this world is in the hands of men, the two also find themselves in constant competition. Tīmūr continued a long tradition of kings, not of prophets. The kings in the portraits could give him the model that he needed: teachings on how to act and, more importantly, how *not* to act. We should also note the audience may not have known that the story had originated with portraits of prophets, not kings, and thus did not necessarily make the association.

One of the royal attributes one should consider when choosing a new leader concerned the person's physical appearance. The fascination with the external markers that is revealed in the biographies, perhaps serving also as indicators for identification of candidates for the kingly seat, was not limited to the depictions of the epic *Shāh-nāma* figures. The narrator described an Arab-looking Amir Chāku, a yellow-skinned Taraghāi (who was also missing one eye), and an old woman bearing the letter of prophecy whose facial bones shone in their whiteness, perhaps implying a ghostly look. Amir Ḥusayn even bore the identifying marks of a Chinggisid ("black-eyed, pearly-toothed, wide-mouthed and big-eared"). Tīmūr himself was described as Arab-looking at times and more often as a Turk. He was scarred with all sorts of marks (lame, bad shoulder) and was even proud of his marks.[32] His marks not only made him identifiable

[31] The *Rawżat al-ṣafā*' is listed, of course, as one of the sources for the biographies.

[32] Cf. with his descriptions by Ibn 'Arabshāh (Ibn 'Arabshāh, *Tamerlane: or, Tīmūr the Great Amir*, Translated by J. H. Sanders [London: Luzac & Co., 1936], 295) and Christopher Marlowe, where he was portrayed as "broad shouldered, stout limbered, large browed, a pale complexion." See Howard Miller, "Tamburlaine: the Migrational Translation of Marlowe's Arabic Sources," in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam, New York, 2006), 259.

but also emphasized both his extraordinary abilities and God's omnipotence in enabling a lame and scarred person to conquer the world. In fact, when Tīmūr was visiting the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in one of the later stories in the manuscript, a healer offered to make him perfectly healthy. Tīmūr refused, saying that he was a testimony to God's power, and that he would never have accomplished what he had if he had been completely healthy. Conspicuous in their absence are descriptions of the physical appearances of Sufis. External markers, assumptions of beauty and ugliness, or indications of ethnicity had little to do with the qualities that the Sufis represented. They also consciously did not contend for the ruling position – they had other tasks to fulfill.

CHAPTER 5

Premonitions

In the chapter that concludes our literary portrait, Tīmūr has been firmly on the throne for several years engaging in campaigns of conquest against formidable enemies. At the height of his power, Tīmūr began to experience menacing dreams and visions about the troubling future of his posterity and, by implication, the ultimate threat to mankind on the Day of Judgment. In his search for a correct interpretation of his dreams, Tīmūr eventually found a dream interpreter who held the key to uncovering hidden knowledge of events past, present, and future. It became clear that the threat to Tīmūr's realm might take many forms, but the premonitions of doom and destruction ultimately centered on the Uzbeks, destined to invade Mawarannahr and terminate Tīmūr's dynasty. More related stories focused on mythical creatures associated with apocalyptic consequences, such as Gog and Magog, who were aware of the ultimate emergence of the Uzbeks and are portrayed, to an extent, as their collaborators.

As usual in the biographies, the story of the impending apocalypse was not a straightforward story of doom, but rather a warning and a prophecy about the future of the region, full of hints and multiple dimensions. Having come to the realization that the Uzbeks should be considered his ultimate foe, Tīmūr commanded one of his sons, Mīrzā Mīrānshāh, to assemble his army and set forth into the steppes in order to annihilate the entire Uzbek people, thus preventing them from fulfilling the prophecy. Mīrānshāh's intention to carry out his father's command stumbled on several difficulties as he fell in love with the daughter of Toqtamïsh Khan (Toqtamïsh is presented in this tale as the khan of the Uzbeks). After many twists and plots, Tīmūr concluded that he would have to do the job (of destroying the Uzbeks) himself. He gathered his troops for an assault on the steppe region. Having heard of his advance, the Uzbeks dispersed in all directions in fear of the wrathful Tīmūr, leaving only one old man, Daulatshaykh Oghlan, to defend their domains. Tīmūr's conversation with the old man managed to avert the dreaded military confrontation and settled peacefully several potentially deadly confrontations, at least for a while.

Account of the Dream of the Sāhib-qirān in which the Uzbeks Finally Seize the Kingdom[1]

The storyteller related that one night Ṣāḥib-qirān dreamed that from the north came a big elephant, who wandered throughout Mawarannahr. It came towards the amir's throne and ascended the throne. After that, twenty-one lion cubs came and ascended the throne. A group of thirsty people were fleeing from water, a group of blind people were engaged in buying and selling, a group of sick and ailing persons were visiting the healthy, a flock of sheep were eating grass but were not dropping manure, an ox was grazing in the meadow but when it left it was in worse shape than before. He saw a bazaar where there was meat of pig and bear, and the people of that place were not buying permissible (*halāl*) meat.

In short, when he awoke from his dream he asked the knowledgeable dream interpreters for an explanation, but no explanation satisfied him. They said that in Qarshi there was a man whose name was Hakīm Sābi Bakhshī,[2] who was living in the cloisters and who used to be a student of 'Umar Nisfarat.[3] If the Sāhib-qirān desired a satisfactory interpretation for his dream he should consult this man. He sent Mīrzā Mīrānshāh to bring him.

"If this is so important to him," said Hakīm, "he should come to see me himself."[4]

Mīrānshāh returned to Tīmūr and told him what had happened. Sāhib-qirān set out in the direction of Qarshi. He paid homage to Hakīm and told him of the events. Hakīm said: "My master has a book. He placed it in an iron box, and instructed me that whoever opens the box will conquer the face of the earth."

Sāhib-qirān commanded that they bring the box, but no one was able to open it. However much they tried it would not budge, so Sāhib-qirān himself opened the lock,[5] and took hold of the Book of the Ages.[6]

[1] *Kunūz*, 301–12; *TN Kullīyāt*, 141–48. See also *Temurnoma: Amir Temur Kuragon zhangnomasi* (ed. Ravshanov, Tashkent: Chulpon, 1990), 164–69.

[2] The term "Bakhshi" had multiple meanings, from Buddhist priests to Muslim physicians, from scribes to reciters of poetry. The word invoked the sense of someone who possessed some form of skilled knowledge that ordinary folk usually did not have.

[3] The identity of this individual is unknown to me at present.

[4] As usual in this text, if Tīmūr desired mystical knowledge he had to satisfy his desire by compromise, journeying to the source of that knowledge.

[5] Tīmūr was, in fact, the only one who could open the box, but its contents escaped him. He needed the mystic to interpret knowledge for him, just as the mystic could not open the box himself and had no access to the concealed knowledge and to the power that the knowledge would bring. The relationship continued to be reciprocal.

[6] *Kitab-i Tārīkh-i Ayyām*.

"Understanding this book is very difficult," said Hakīm Sabi, "for it was written in the manner of *'ilm-i jafr*. If one is versed in *'ilm-i jafr* all events that are to be recorded until the Day of Judgment will become plain."[7]

After this, he turned to explain the dream to the Ṣāḥib-qirān: "That elephant is the Uzbek who will rule over your kingdom and will take your kingdom from your descendants. Those lion cubs are his children and twenty-one of his relatives will become kings. The thirsty ones who were fleeing from the water are the people of that time who will flee.[8] The blind ones are the people of that time who will not distinguish friend from foe. The sick who were visiting the healthy are the hypocrite ascetics[9] who will curry favor with the wealthy. The animals who were eating but not depositing manure are the kings of that time who will take from the poor and give nothing in return. The ox who was grazing in the meadow and was not getting any fatter is the amirs of that time who, no matter how much property they take from the poor, are never satisfied. The men who were not eating sheep in the place that was selling pork and bear meat are the people of that time who will be eating *harām* instead of *halāl*."

When Ṣāḥib-qirān heard this matter he swore to massacre all the Uzbeks.[10] He came from Qarshi to Samarqand and commanded Mīrzā Mīrānshāh to go to Turkistan and together with Aqbugha Nayman to fall upon the Uzbeks and massacre all of them.[11] The prince set out with ten thousand young men. When he reached Turkistan he came before Aqbugha Nayman, who threw a feast for the Mīrzā, with three thousand strong.

At that time, a man came to the Mīrzā and told him that Aqbugha had married two sisters. Mīrzā summoned Aqbugha and asked him about it. He said it was true.

"This is not according to the *sharī'a*," said Mīrzā. "Divorce one of them!"[12]

"My heart is taken with both," he said.

Mīrzā ordered that he be stripped of his clothes and beaten.[13]

7 According to one tradition, when the Prophet was on his death bed he summoned 'Alī b. Abī Tālib and said: "O 'Alī, when I am dead, wash me, embalm me, clothe me and sit me up; then I shall tell thee what shall happen until the day of resurrection." The extensive literature that developed around this tradition was mostly of an apocalyptic nature. One of its characteristics was the occult properties of the value of the letters of the alphabet (*'Ilm al-ḥurūf*). Apparently, this knowledge was transmitted from Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 765), the last *imām* recognized by the Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'īs, and therefore much of the wisdom concerning the occult was named after him or attributed to him (*'ilm-i jafr*). See T. Fahd, "Djafr," *EI²* II, 375–77.

8 This may be a reference to the many refugees who had dotted the Central Asian landscape in the early eighteenth century.

9 *Zāhidān*.

10 Thus preventing the Uzbeks' ascent to power. However, just as no one could thwart Tīmūr's rise to power, none would be able to prevent the Uzbeks from conquering the land. Both were testimonies to God's power.

11 Aqbugha Nayman was one of the leaders of the Nayman tribe and one of Tīmūr's followers.

12 Marrying two sisters at the same time is prohibited in Islam (Qur'ān, 4:23).

13 For some reason, Mīrzā Mīrānshāh decided to oversee and enforce Islamic law.

That very night, Aqbugha with his tribe killed part of the prince's men, and the others fled. He bound the Mīrzā and went to Mangïshlaq,[14] to Toqtamïsh Khan, saying, "What does the *sharīʻa* have to do with a military man?"[15]

After ten days they reached the place. Aqbugha paid homage to Toqtamïsh Khan.[16] The khan asked the Mīrzā the reason for the quarrel and the Mīrzā explained.

"It is Amir Tīmūr who commanded to kill all the Uzbeks," said Aqbugha.

The khan realized that the words of the Mīrzā were reasonable. Moreover, Ṣāḥib-qirān had done the khan some favors in the past. He took the Mīrzā and killed Aqbugha. He gave the Mīrzā a robe of honor and made him sit beside him. He said: "If it is God's decree that the Uzbeks take the kingdom, all these other circumstances do not matter." But whenever the Mīrzā came to his audience, Toqtamïsh invited him to sit on the throne. Whenever the Mīrzā asked the khan for permission to leave and go back to his country the khan said: "Be patient."

One day, when the prince returned to the tribe from the hunt he saw a woman of extraordinary beauty standing by a well. He asked her for water, and she filled a cup and gave it to the Mīrzā. Three times he spilled the water unto the ground for it was too hot. After he drank, he explained to her his situation but that woman said nothing. He asked her for her name, and she said: "My name is Suyung Khān-zāda."

"Who is your husband?" he asked, but she left, keeping silent.

The love for this princess rendered him powerless, and he fell on the bed, sick. Mīrzā was embarrassed, he told no one about it. The khan came and saw that the Mīrzā was stricken. In that place was an old, very experienced Uzbek; everything he said came true. The Turks called him Juyina Tengri.[17] The khan summoned him, but that man was wandering about in caves, wearing animal pelts. He was two hundred years old. The khan explained to him the circumstances and charged him to find the cause for the Mīrzā's illness. The old man took the Mīrzā's pulse and understood that he was in love.

"If a woman is involved," said the khan, "I can make it possible."

The old man ordered him to say out loud the names of all Uzbek women. As the khan recited their names he took the Mīrzā's pulse but found nothing unusual. He then ordered the khan to recite the names of the women of his own harem. When he reached the name Suyung Khān-zāda the Mīrzā's pulse beat rapidly. He realized that he was in love with the khan's wife. He left the Mīrzā's bed, went to the khan and said: "This boy is in love with your wife."

[14] The Mangïshlaq peninsula on the northeast banks of the Caspian Sea.

[15] The perceived dissonance between the *sharīʻa* and the tribal, nomadic military ranks, as well as the consequences for this divergence, recur frequently in the biographies.

[16] The biographies treat Toqtamïsh Khan as an Uzbek, not as a Mongol.

[17] Literally, "the seeker of God."

The khan told no one, and divorced the princess. The princess was confused: "I committed no sin. Why does he divorce me?" And she sat with her servants at the border of the tribe. The khan came and told the Mīrzā: "I found the woman that you fell in love with. Her husband just divorced her. Be patient! When the time of probation[18] has passed you will be able to marry the princess."

Amir Tīmūr's son thought that he would have her agreement as well. The Mīrzā went to see his beloved and sat at her bed, but she did not extend her hand to him.

"Who are you?" he asked her. And she explained all that had happened.

"I am the khan's wife," she said. "Today my hand was not extended towards you. The khan did this in the name of friendship, we divorced over considerations of the khan's well-being."

Upon hearing this, the Mīrzā left without the khan's permission and returned to his country until he reached Samarqand.

Sāhib-qirān approved both of the khan's behavior and the Mīrzā's as well. The next day the khan heard the news of the Mīrzā's leaving and said: "I have acted in accordance with the noble *sharīʻa*." He sent the princess and all her possessions to Samarqand with a letter from Toqtamïsh Khan, "I have sent the princess." Sāhib-qirān assigned a good place for the princess, but Mīrzā Mīrānshāh was not allowed to visit her.[19]

Daulatshaykh Oghlan[20] heard that Toqtamïsh Khan divorced his daughter and sent her to Samarqand. He became enraged. The burden weighed heavly on him. He mounted his horse and during the night charged the khan's tribe. The khan escaped, alone, and went on foot to Turkistan. After a while he reached the gates of Samarqand and entered the city. At that time Ṣāḥib-qirān was busy building the Aq Sarāy palace,[21] and so the khan went to Shahr-i Sabz. For a few days he was without food and realized that he would have to work to be able to eat. He went to the place of the hired laborers, and after a while was recruited to work in the Aq Sarāy. He was able to carry such heavy stones for the building that everyone was astonished. His aim was to regain his crown.

One day, Ṣāḥib-qirān came to see the Aq Sarāy and saw the example of the khan's strength. Ṣāḥib-qirān looked at him in wonder, thinking he must be the son of kings, but he did not recognize him as Toqtamïsh Khan.[22] With

18 *ʻIdda* signified the time of probation for divorced and widowed women to engage in sexual relations (see also Qur'ān 2:228 and 2:234).

19 This segment reinforces the didactic mission of the text, as it demonstrates Muslim regulations and proper behavior. Perhaps the need to address such matters also demonstrates that they were in existence and therefore required forewarning and admonition.

20 The historical Daulatshaykh Oghlan was the father of Abu'l-Khayr Khan, grandfather of Muḥammad Shïbānī Khan. Although himself one of Chinggis Khan's descendants, Oghlan appears in this story, much like Toqtamïsh Khan before him, as a representative of the Uzbeks.

21 Aq Sarāy was Tīmūr's palace in Shahr-i Sabz.

22 Another reference to the tension between external and internal markers that accompanies the biographies.

every stone that he carried, Sāhib-qirān's wonder grew. When he had seen Toqtamïsh Khan before he was beardless; now this man had a beard. He asked the foreman what kind of man is he? But he did not know. Ṣāḥib-qirān summoned Toqtamïsh and saw that he was good looking. He thought he recognized him as Toqtamïsh Khan but was not sure. As much as he asked him for his origin, he could not establish his identity.

"If Mīrānshāh had been here he would have recognized him," said Ṣāḥib-qirān to himself.

One evening Suyung Khān-zāda came to see the construction of Aq Sarāy. The khan saw her and saw that she was seized with pain. The people around him gossiped that Toqtamïsh Khan had given this girl to Ṣāḥib-qirān's son. The Amir observed him behind his back but did not allow him to approach her. Finally, the khan mustered his courage and approached her. She was astonished to see him and even cried. She said: "My love, where have you been?"

Word reached Ṣāḥib-qirān that the young man was indeed Toqtamïsh Khan. Ṣāḥib-qirān honored him, dressed him in a robe of kings and seated him at his side. Ṣāḥib-qirān asked him what had happened, and he told him of his trials. Ṣāḥib-qirān showed him much affection and gave him much gold, but the khan did not wish to accept his gifts.

When Tīmūr asked why, the khan said: "I did not come here for riches, but for my honor, for my kingdom has fallen."

"I have seen a dream in which I was entrusted with the killing of the Uzbeks," said Ṣāḥib-qirān. "Will you agree to this?"[23]

Since the khan was a practical man he gave his consent.

Ṣāḥib-qirān assembled the army (at that time two years and a half passed since Ṣāḥib-qirān attained the throne), and set out with three-hundred thousand troops. He left the khan with Mīrzā Mīrānshāh in Samarqand, and gave the princess back to the khan.

News reached the Uzbeks that Ṣāḥib-qirān was on his way to annihilate them. They all came to Daulatshaykh Oghlan. He was an old man.

"Let us fight," they said.

"This man Tīmūr is the chosen favorite of God," said Daulatshaykh Oghlan. "Abandon your desire to fight him. Leave me here, and scatter in all directions. I think that no person of this nation will remain."

They said: "You are an old man. What will happen to you?"

He said: "What's it to you?" And they left.

When Ṣāḥib-qirān came to Dasht-i Qïpchaq, he found no one. They all dispersed. Daulatshaykh Oghlan was brought before him.

Tīmūr asked him: "Who are you?"

[23] Tīmūr's dream had forecasted the future and naturally did not offer any possible way to avoid fate. But in his decision to annihilate the Uzbeks, Tīmūr has committed to act on his own against the divine decree, yet another confirmation that he did not really understand God's plans.

At first he did not answer, but simply recited verses from the Qur'ān about how God most High (exalted be his power) rebuked Nūḥ (peace be upon him).[24] Ṣāḥib-qirān was amazed at his eloquence.

He said: "I am Daulatshaykh Oghlan. O son, if that is God's decree that the Uzbeks shall conquer Central Asia, then this attempt of yours is futile. Even the Simurgh cannot alter God's decree." Then he recited the story of the Simurgh in such a way that everybody wept.[25] "All this blood is in vain;" he said, "and fear of the Day of Judgment is well-advised."[26]

Ṣāḥib-qirān swore not to kill them on condition that Daulatshaykh Oghlan would write a letter of testimony that would be kept in the Ṣāḥib-qirān's treasury, declaring that Ṣāḥib-qirān had compassion for the Uzbeks. Thus, whoever emerges from among the Uzbeks to seize the kingdom will also show compassion for the people of the descendants of Lord Chaghatay. He wrote the letter of testimony and entrusted it in Ṣāḥib-qirān's treasury. When Shïbānī became ruler during the time of plunder, he found the letter in that treasury.

Commentary: Tīmūr and the Day of Judgment

Dreams foretold Tīmūr's rise to power, and dreams predicted the demise of his house and the rise of a rival dynasty. These dreams were mixed: The first were dreams that his rivals had about him, and the second were his own dreams and they always kept him in doubt.[27] Such dreams and apocalyptic predictions emphasized the strife of the Muslims and their need of a hero to save them from potential doom. Indeed, many parts of the narrative carry eschatological qualities, some relatively straightforward, such as dreams and prophecies about the end of the world or about various stages in the world's gradual disintegration until the Day of Judgment. By and large, such narratives tended to circulate when approaching the end of a century, and we may hypothesize that

[24] According to the Qur'ān (in the Sūra of Hood), when Noah pleaded with God to be merciful because his son was one of the disbelievers, God rebuked him saying: "Noah, he is not of thy family; it is a deed not righteous. Do not ask of Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge. I admonish thee, lest thou shouldst be among the ignorant."

[25] In the *Shāh-nāma*, the mythical bird Simurgh, out of ultimate compassion, rescued an abandoned infant (who turned out later to be Zāl) and adopted him as her own child. Then God put it into the heart of the Simurgh to change her mind and return the child to humanity. She did so, heartbroken, and they departed with many tears and much sorrow, and Zal returned to his father, the great hero Sām.

[26] The Qur'ān and the *Shāh-nāma* become, in this episode, equal sources of authority. In both, the story focuses on parents and children, or fathers and sons, and the lessons of compassion entailed in them.

[27] See also G. E. von Grunebaum's introduction to the typology of dreams in the Muslim world in his "The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam," in G. E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 3–21.

the end of the eleventh Islamic century, approximately in the year 1688–1689, probably lent some intensity to eschatological narratives. We have already encountered several manifestations of this inclination in Tīmūr's heroic apocrypha, and many more associations with apocalyptic visions were to follow. In particular, stories of Gog and Magog (Yājūj and Mājūj) who had held a special place in Islamic eschatology as the destroyers of the world before the Day of Judgment, the many references to al-Dajjāl, "the deceiver," and the role of Jesus in the biographies require some consideration.[28]

One of the most fascinating accounts in our texts narrates the story of Mīrzā Sultān Muḥammad, Tīmūr's favorite grandson, who had traveled the world in search of the wall that Alexander the Great had built to enclose the nations of Gog and Magog and protect humanity from their wrath.[29] The search for Alexander's wall was frequently associated in the Muslim tradition with apocalyptic qualities and dates back over a millennium. Ibn Khurradādhbih, a ninth-century geographer and provincial director of posts and intelligence, communicated the story of the journey, undertaken some time in the 840s, of Sallām al-Tarjumān (Sallām the Interpreter, reputed to have spoken thirty languages), to find the barrier. This journey followed the dream of the ʿAbbasid caliph, al-Wāthiq (r. 842–847) in which he saw a breach in Alexander's wall and feared its ominous outcome.[30]

Centuries later, Tīmūr's favorite grandson reached a place far beyond the borders of China and met an old man (one hundred and twenty years old) who immediately identified Muḥammad as Tīmūr's grandson. He explained that the people of Gog and Magog had destroyed many cities in that region during the age of Alexander the Great, but the latter had managed to repel them, and built a wall to keep them at bay. The place was apparently still inhabited by the descendants of Alexander's army commanders who were left there to secure the wall. After finding a way to scale the exceptionally high and very smooth barrier, Mīrzā Muḥammad climbed up and saw before him a stretch of land surrounded by water. He distinguished three groups of creatures: Some were felt-wearing giants, others were very tall and resembled men, whereas the third group included creatures with very long ears and beards. After about an hour of watching, several of the creatures began howling, approached the wall and tried to scale it. The commanders stopped them, but Muḥammad was still able to talk to them. They told him that they were descended from

[28] To this we should add other attributes of eschatological dimension such as the *ʿIlm-i jafr* mentioned previously (that also appears in the *Sīrat Baybars*. See Gril, "Du sultanat au califat universel: le rôle des saints dans le Roman de Baybars," in *Lectures du Roman de Baybars*," 181 and 193).

[29] The story about Alexander's wall (or barrier, as it is sometimes referred to) has attracted considerable attention. See the recent study by Kevin van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83–102," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 175–203.

[30] Andrew Runni Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1932), 93–100.

'Ūj son of 'Anaq.[31] They had lived long, even back to the time of the prophet Moses. Eight hundred years after Moses, Alexander the Great appeared, and eight hundred years after him, the prophet Muḥammad. "We were told," they said, "that three men would come to look at us, and after that we will make our appearance in the world. You are the second." Muḥammad asked them when they were going to appear, and they simply said: "We will come after al-Dajjāl."[32]

On the way back home, Muḥammad heard a voice calling him from a cave: "O Tīmūr's grandson, so you have returned from Gog and Magog?" He entered the cave and saw a man standing there. He asked him how he had recognized him, and the man answered: "I know God, so I know all about you as well." He tested Muḥammad to see whether he knew all the prayers and then commanded him to bow before him. The prince refused, expressing a few doubts, and suddenly found himself alone outside the cave. He realized that the man inside the cave was al-Dajjāl. Muḥammad called to him: "When will you come out of the cave?" Al-Dajjāl answered: "The Uzbeks will come and cross the Amu Darya and take over Mawarannahr and Khorasan. Then others will emerge. After that all will become unclear and then I shall make my appearance." Muḥammad returned home to Tīmūr and explained all that had happened.

'Īsā (Jesus) and al-Dajjāl

'Īsā appears several times in the narrative, particularly as Tīmūr faces the Russians and undergoes many adventures before and after the conquest of Moscow. He even debates with Russian clerics about the nature of 'Īsā (son of God or slave of God).[33] One of the fascinating stories relates how Tīmūr had found a spear stuck in a stone inside a cave not far from Moscow. He tried to pull the spear out of the stone, but it would not budge. Tīmūr went outside and saw an old man who advised him to pray before pulling the spear. Tīmūr prayed and was indeed able to take out the spear. The old man cautioned him against taking the spear away with him. He said that he had lived there since Muḥammad's time and was going to stay there until

[31] 'Ūj is identified with the biblical giant Og.

[32] Al-Dajjāl, "the deceiver," was a person of great magical abilities who would appear (for forty days or forty years, depending on the tradition) before the end of time, and would allow tyranny and impurity to rule the world. In fact, his arrival was considered to be one of the proofs for the end of time. Only Jesus (as is also told in the *Tīmūr-nāma*) could kill him. See also, Abel, "al-Dadjdjāl," *EI²* III, 76–77.

[33] Vámbéry edited and translated, with very little commentary, a short part of Tīmūr's adventures in Russia. He suggested that the context for understanding the story lies either in studying the connections between Christian communities in Central Asia and Russia or in the greater context of Russian-Central Asian relations. (Vambéry, "Eine legendäre Geschichte Tīmūrs," *ZDMG* (1897), 224, n. 1; 231–32.) I think that this is not the case, as the story before you demonstrates.

ʿĪsā would come to collect the spear before departing to kill al-Dajjāl at the end of time. Tīmūr asked the man to tell him about the end of the world, and the old man explained that before ʿĪsā's arrival several cities will be destroyed, including Bukhara. The people of Bukhara will find refuge in the Maghrib, but Samraqand will be flooded, Badakhshan will be destroyed by an earthquake, a strong wind will raze Balkh to the ground, snakes will infest Isfahan, tigers will overrun India, lightning will reduce the mountains, frost will destroy Russia, Ethiopians will conquer Mecca, and the Arabs will flee to Turkey. At that time the Kaʿba will also be destroyed. Scholars will stop their learning, children will disrespect their parents, mosques and *madrasa*s will be administered by bullies, and people will drink wine and eat *harām*. After all these signs the *mahdī* will appear in Mecca, but al-Dajjāl will also become visible. Then, on a Friday, ʿĪsā will come and together with the *mahdī* will trap al-Dajjāl, and ʿĪsā will kill him with this spear. Only then will the *sharīʿa* rule and the Muslims finally live well.

The multitude of apocalyptic visions generated an increase in false prophethood, a phenomenon also closely linked to the sense of crisis in the Islamic community. Interestingly, there are several narratives in the work about false prophets and, for reasons that are unclear to me at the moment, they all put forward the Ismāʿīlīs as the symbols of false prophethood. Tīmūr's biographies explain that when Tīmūr was still very young (fourteen years old, in fact), a false prophet had emerged near the city of Shahr-i Sabz. His name was Nāṣir-i Khusraw,[34] but he was also known as Muqannaʿ.[35] He claimed to have invented a new school of law (*madhhab*), to be able to restore sight to the blind, and to enjoy the benefaction of the angel Gabriel. He commanded his followers to proclaim that he was the true messenger (*rasūl*), and indeed people began to believe in him. After the *ʿulamāʾ* declared him to be an infidel,[36] he began an organized slaughter of those Muslims who rejected his doctrine. In 1348 in the cities of Bukhara, Samarqand, and Balkh, as many as four thousand Muslim *mullah*s were slain. Young Tīmūr insisted on participating in a war that was declared against Nāṣir and in a couple of battles even showed remarkable skill. Still, many Muslims were converting to the new religion. Tīmūr went to Shaykh Burḥān al-Dīn for help,[37] but even he feared Nāṣir. One night the Prophet appeared before the shaykh in a dream and told him to face Nāṣir with Tīmūr at his side, which would be the only

[34] Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the eleventh-century writer, poet, traveler, and philosopher who was also a noted preacher of the Ismāʿīlī doctrine.

[35] Referring to al-Muqannaʿ, leader of the rebellions in Mawarannahr during the caliphate of al-Mahdī (r. 775–785). His followers were known as the "wearers of white" (*safīd jāmagān*), who are also mentioned in the narrative.

[36] We are told that the *ʿulamāʾ* began to refer to his doctrine as the *fidāʾī Nāṣir*. Among the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, this term was used for those who had risked their lives to assassinate the enemies of the sect.

[37] Possibly a reference to the aforementioned Burḥān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī.

way to victory. Tīmūr rode forth together with the shaykh to meet Nāṣir. He succeeded in injuring Nāṣir's military commander, and when Nāṣir's troops realized that the angel Gabriel was not coming to their aid as their leader had promised, they dispersed. Nāṣir himself managed to escape.

The next encounter of the people of Central Asia with a false prophet was with Nāṣir-i Khuraw's son. The son, Shāh Manṣūr, fled to India where he was trained in magic by "Brahmins of Kashmir." He began preaching to his followers, claiming that he was the *mahdī*. The *'ulamā'* who rejected him sooner or later found their demise. Shāh Manṣūr challenged Tīmūr in a letter from Kashghar. Tīmūr decided to assign twenty thousand troops to this matter, under the command of his son Jahāngīr, and to send him to face Manṣūr. The latter challenged him to a contest, telling him that he could not be killed. They chained Manṣūr, dug a grave, buried him alive, and lit a fire on top. For three days the fire burned until they decided to dig him out. Manṣūr emerged completely unharmed. When Jahāngīr commanded to untie him, the chains disintegrated on his body, showing everyone that he could have easily gotten away had he wished so. This, of course, greatly increased his following. Manṣūr demanded that Jahāngīr and his troops believe in him and gave them a seven-day ultimatum. For a week Jahāngīr was baffled, thinking that, "If Manṣūr were not a prophet, how was he able to perform such miracles?"

When the two armies finally collided, a strange disease afflicted all the horses in Jahāngīr's army. The battle seemed lost when a dervish suddenly appeared before Jahāngīr and introduced himself as Maulānā Sa'd al-Dīn from Kashghar.[38] He told the story of his own past conflict with Manṣūr and explained that Khiżr had told him that a man of the Chaghatay would come to his aid. "With Khiżr's help, I am now able to dispel Manṣūr's magic," he said. And so it happened that the next day Jahāngīr was about to kill Manṣūr in the battlefield when the latter all of a sudden evoked the name of his daughter, Qoyliq. (Jahāngīr was in love with her, but was unaware that Manṣūr was her father). Once Jahāngīr finished destroying the rest of Manṣūr's army, he took him to a mountain and hurled him from the summit. To everyone's surprise, Manṣūr did not die. They tried to kill him again and again, but nothing happened. Finally, Sa'd al-Dīn suggested that the answer may lie with the daughter. The daughter agreed to disclose the secret on condition that Jahāngīr would marry her, and when Jahāngīr consented she revealed that Manṣūr could only be killed by a blade coated with a young girl's menstruation blood. And so it was. Jahāngīr and his new wife returned to Bukhara, and Sa'd al-Dīn became Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshabnd's disciple.

A third story of a false prophet describes Hākīm Nizārī, a descendant of one of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's disciples who had quarreled with Nāṣir and established

[38] Sa'd al-Dīn Kāshgharī (d. 1456) was a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi who had spent several years in training in Bukhara and eventually settled in Herat. The famous Persian poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) is said to have been Kāshgharī's disciple.

his own sect. Nizārī declared that he was reincarnated seventy-two times, during which he once appeared as a merchant, once as a butcher, and even as a wolf during the time of the biblical Jacob. Now he finally came to save the world, declaring that his religion preceeded all others. Everyone began to believe in him and accept his message, but several men came to Tīmūr to complain. Tīmūr decided to investigate. He came to Kuhistan and besieged the city where Nizārī was residing. Tīmūr sent his ambassador into the city with a letter commanding Nizārī to renounce his false teachings and practice the *sharīʻa*. The letter cautioned Nizārī: "Behold the fate of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his son Manṣūr." Nizārī dismissed the ambassador and challenged Tīmūr to a battle.

More or less at the same time Tīmūr was informed about a holy man named Ḥamza,[39] who had just returned from the *ḥajj* and was living in a cave nearby. Tīmūr was told that Ḥamza was the only one who could successfully debate with Nizārī. Tīmūr convinced Ḥamza to face Nizārī, and when the two began to debate Nizārī suddenly offered a contest. "We will both enter into the fire," he said, "and see who can come out alive and unharmed." Ḥamza immediately agreed, but Tīmūr grew worried.

All of a sudden two men appeared, carrying a large chest. Inside there was a slave-girl. She said that Nizārī put her there as punishment for having sexual relations with another slave. It occurred to Tīmūr that the girl might know how Nizārī was able to withstand fire, and she said that her master had a vial of salamander fat that he used as ointment, but she did not know where he had kept it. (The salamander, explains the narrator, is a creature who lives in fire, and fire cannot harm it). Tīmūr commanded to postpone the contest for three days, as his men were frantically looking for the vial of salamander fat. In the meantime, the *inaq*'s[40] son managed to sneak into Nizārī's quarters and found the vial. He replaced it with a vial of lamp oil (that looked exactly like the fat), and brought the salamander fat to Ḥamza. However, he refused to use it, saying that he only trusted God. The day came and the shaykh, wearing white, stood facing Nizārī, who was dressed in black (and was completely drunk). Nizārī's body was dabbed in the lamp oil, which he thought was the salamander fat. Everyone started to recite the *dhikr* as both men stood before the fire. Holding hands, they took seven steps forward. Nizārī was instantly burned, but Ḥamza came out after one hour, unharmed.[41]

39 Probably a reference to Ḥamza, the Prophet's uncle and protector and the subject for different legendary narratives and romances, particularly in the Persianate world.

40 *Inaq* was a title and a position of particular importance in Khorezm, where it was even bestowed on the rulers of the khanate of Khiva.

41 This narrative bears a striking resemblance to the story of Özbek Khan's conversion to Islam at the hands of Baba Tükles (with the exception of the salamander fat). (See Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.)

The host of apocalyptic visions and prophecies, combined with the numerous portrayals of real and imagined predicament in Central Asia that had been featured in earlier chapters, lead us to examine the biographies in the context of the crisis that prevailed in the region in the first half of the eighteenth century. After all, the biographies conveyed a sense of impending doom, an emergency that only a chosen ruler, with the help of everyone in the community and the representatives of the divine (the Sufis), could mend. Even after Tīmūr’s ascent to the throne, his task was just beginning, and the process of restoring Central Asia to the right path was ensuing. Naturally, this restoration was required because the foundations of the region’s Muslim community had been cracked.

CHAPTER 6

Central Asia in Turmoil, 1700–1750

In reflecting upon the poverty of Tūrān[1] and Arabia, I was at first at a loss to assign a reason, why those countries had never been able to retain wealth, whilst, on the contrary, it is daily increasing in Hindustan. Tīmūr carried into Tūrān the riches of Turkey, Persia, and Hindustan, but they are all dissipated.… It is evident that this dissipation of the riches of a state must have happened either from some extraordinary drains, or from some defect in the government. Hindustan has been frequently plundered by foreign invaders, and not one of its Kings ever gained for it any acquisition of wealth; neither has the country many mines of gold and silver, and yet Hindustan abounds in money, and every other kind of wealth. The abundance of species is undoubtedly owing to the large importation of gold and silver in the ships of Europe, and other nations, many of whom bring ready money in exchange for the manufactures and natural productions of the country. If this is not the cause of the prosperous state of Hindustan, it must be owing to the peculiar blessingof God. [ʻAbd al-Karīm Kashmīrī, 1740][2]

The study of Central Asia's history in the first half of the eighteenth century, scanty as it has been, has been dominated by the paradigm of a region in decline: a political and economic crisis that afflicted the land as the different Central Asian polities struggled and could not measure up to former, more glorious days in the region's history. For the most part, the decline paradigm was not contested in Western scholarship, although it had been the subject for debates and discussions within the Soviet academic community.[3] Recently, however, a reaction against the notion of decline has become fashionable, particularly among American and European scholars. Unfortunately, Kashmīrī's aforementioned comments – as well as similar observations made by many

[1] Tūrān originally signified the Turkic, nomadic world of Central Asia as opposed to the sedentary world of Iran, as mentioned also in Firdawsī's *Shāh-nāma* (*Book of Kings*). Since the eleventh century the term has been associated with the central lands of Central Asia, and specifically with Mawarannahr (or Transoxiana).

[2] *The Memoirs of Khojeh Abdulkurreem ... who accompanied Nadir Shah, on his Return from Hindostan to Persia*, tr. F. Gladwin (Calcutta: W. Mackay, 1788), 42. Cf. with the more recent translation of a portion of this passage in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 272.

[3] We will revisit the debates within Soviet academia hereinafter.

of his contemporaries – have been absent from both lines of argumentation (supporting or dismissing the "decline"), a lacuna that probably indicates that a more thorough study of the era may benefit from consulting the eighteenth-century sources.[4]

'Abd al-Karīm Kashmīrī accompanied Nādir Shāh (1688–1747), the Turkmen ruler of Iran, on his foray into Central Asia in 1739–1740, probably serving as one his fiscal officers. His candid and interesting reflections on the Turkmen leader and on the circumstances in the region have been overlooked until recently.[5] Nādir Shāh swept rapidly through Central Asia, encountering little to no resistance, as one polity after another succumbed before his forces.[6] The inability or reluctance of the Central Asian powers to put up any meaningful challenge to the Turkmen emperor also has been invoked as evidence for the crisis in the region: Decentralized, disorganized, and impoverished, the Central Asian polities were unable to afford the maintenance and upkeep of any significant military presence. Nādir Shāh's expedition was to have extensive ramifications for the ascendance of the Manghïts in Bukhara and for Central Asia's transformation in the second half of the century.[7]

Reading Kashmīrī's eyewitness account, it seems hasty to write off Central Asia's severe economic depression and the profound political corruption and ineffectiveness that characterized the region during the first half of the

[4] What I aim to chart in the following pages is not a schema of Central Asia's decline in the eighteenth century that is artificially organized by topic. Because the political, religious, and socio-economic conditions were so intertwined and multifaceted, we shall move back and forth between these different dimensions and considerations as there appears to be no one particular factor that caused or dominated the crisis. Although, for the most part, we do not have concrete numbers and figures to support some of our conclusions – as many of the participants in the discussion about the so-called global crisis of the seventeenth century have demonstrated (see also Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, second edition, London: Routledge, 1997) – the sense of a severe crisis in Central Asia emerges unequivocally from the sources of the period.

[5] On Kashmīrī and his text, see Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 248–95. The authors refer to the traveler as "Khwaja 'Abdul Karīm Shahristani."

[6] The only attempt at resistance was in Khiva, but that effort was squashed rather quickly. On Nādir Shāh's career, see L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly upon Contemporary Sources* (London: Luzac & Co., 1938); Michael. Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[7] Nādir Shāh drafted many locals in Bukhara and Khiva to serve in his own army. The training and the troops that he supplied to Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan, future founder of the Manghït dynasty in Bukhara, was invaluable (See 'Abd al-Karīm Bukhārī, *Histoire de l'Asie centrale par Mir Abdoul Kerim Boukhary*, ed. and tr. Charles Schefer, Paris, 1876, Persian text, 46; French tr., 101). His conquest also impacted the economy. In addition to other effects, described anon, he also ordered to free all the slaves in the khanate of Khiva, mostly from Iran, whose number reached, according to some estimates, thirty thousand men and women. Lastly, Nādir Shāh also helped Abu'l-Fayż Khan, the weak Bukharan ruler, repulse a rebellion by Ibadullah, leader of the Khitai tribe in 1746. With the aid of an artillery unit, the troops chased the rebels all the way to Ferghana. See also P. P. Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii Sredneĭ Azii (XVI – seredina XIX v.)* (Moscow, 1958), 98–99.

eighteenth century. Indeed, Kashmīrī seems to portray a three-fold state of affairs: First, evidenced by the "dissipation of riches," Central Asia was on a declining curve from the olden imperial days modeled after Tīmūr; second, the region's geographical position, isolated and closed in, tucked away from Asia's ports, kept it from sharing in the wealth of the maritime trade brought about by Europe; and a third, somewhat ambiguous added dimension – perhaps a "defect in the government," perhaps the "will of Allah" – that was somehow affecting Tūrān's ill-fated circumstances. Unfortunately, few scholars have read and used his work in the context of Central Asia's eighteenth-century history, and many of the recent studies that mention or examine the crisis (whether they confirm or reject its existence) have relied on no eighteenth-century sources to support their claims. The story of the decline, which began in the Central Asian sources themselves, continued, with some adjustments, in the initial Russian and later Soviet studies and has made its way into general scholarship on the region and the era.

As mentioned, eighteenth-century Central Asia has enjoyed, at least until recently, a very dubious repute: one of stagnation and isolation, even decline. So dreadful has been its reputation that the era has become probably the most disregarded and least-studied period in Central Asian history. After all, the study of great empires is much more inviting. The reasons cited for the decline ranged from the decentralization of the state to the court's loss of revenues, from the deterioration in city life and in artistic production to the establishment of nomadic principles of governance and land distribution mechanisms that failed to adapt well to the administration of the sedentary regions. Central Asia's powerlessness in facing foreign invasions and its inability to settle internal disputes peacefully marked the region's downfall. In an era when competition in an increasingly "global" market meant a shift toward maritime trade, landlocked Central Asia could not adjust to the new scheme. Encroached on its boundaries (boundaries that were becoming more and more discernible) by new and old acquaintances – Russians from the north, Manchus from the east, Shi'ite Persians from the southwest, and nomadic Qazaqs and Qalmuqs from the northeast to the northwest – the Central Asian sedentary core was becoming less and less pertinent to "international" affairs. Even the growth and influence of "backward" Sufi brotherhoods was invoked by some to sustain the argument for a general decline in the region.

This broad scheme has been more or less accepted – with some contestation – in the Soviet and the "post-Soviet" world, where official publications in and about Central Asia continue to treat the history of the region in the eighteenth century in keeping within these previously mentioned parameters. The general agreement has been that the crisis was beginning to diminish in the second half of the eighteenth century, with the rise of the so-called tribal dynasties and the different political and economic measures that they had begun to implement (including centralization efforts, recovery of and

assistance to agricultural and irrigational projects, renovation of ruined urban centers, new trade opportunities, better standing armies, and so forth).[8]

Indeed, most (but not all) of the claims that support the understanding of the first half of the eighteenth century as an era of crisis appear to be very convincing. They even led scholars to argue that the "extreme political disintegration and a sharp decline in the quality of social life in Central Asia, [was] comparable only to conditions prevailing in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion."[9] Nevertheless, the absence of any comprehensive attempt, free from ideological constraints, to thoroughly document such claims has rendered them all the more susceptible to criticism.[10]

In recent years, many scholars have opted to reverse the picture. In what appears to be a quest to redeem the reputation of – what they may view as – the disadvantaged Central Asians, scholars have replaced "decline" with "dynamism" and "stagnation" with "vitality." This relatively recent approach appears to embrace the *au courant* kneejerk assumption that presupposes that the malicious intent of European Orientalists is to be blamed for conjuring up a fabricated "decline" for a society that was actually "vibrant."[11] This reaction

[8] O. D. Chekhovich, "K istorii Uzbekistana v XVIII veke," *Trudy Inst. Vostokovedeniya Ak. Nauk UzSSR* 3 (1954), 43–82; "O nekotorykh voprosakh istorii Sredneĭ Azii XVIII-XIX vekov," *VI* 3 (1956), 84–95; and Yu. Bregel, "Central Asia vii. In the 12th-13th/18th-19th Centuries," *EIr* V, 193–205. In Khorezm, the crisis prolonged some more. Series of assassinations of khans and other notables, rebellions, and the violent transitions of power between Chinggisids, Qazaqs, and Turkmens contributed to a general sense of anxiety. Segments of the population were abandoning the region, leaving cities and villages deserted. Following hunger and epidemics, only forty, and some say fifteen, families remained in the capital, Khiva. Ivanov, *Ocherki*, 100–01.

[9] T. K. Beisembiev, "Farghana's Contacts with India in the 18th and 19th Centuries (According to the Khokand Chronicles)," *JAH* 23 (1994): 124.

[10] On the decline, see Yuri Bregel, "The Role of Central Asia in the History of the Muslim East" (New York: Afghanistan Council Occasional Paper # 20, February 1980); V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia. Vol. I: A Short History of Turkestan*, Tr. V. and T. Minorsky (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1956), 66; B. Spuler, "Central Asia from the Sixteenth Century to the Russian Conquests," in *The Cambridge History of Islam. Vol. 1: The Central Islamic Lands*, eds. P. M. Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 470. Probably the most vocal critic of the decline paradigm in the last decade has been Scott Levi. See for example, his *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2002). Some of the arguments for decline (with additional bibliography) are briefly (and conveniently) summarized in Levi, *Indian Diaspora*, 21–23. In the first part of his book, Levi offers several fundamental counter-arguments to the idea of "decline," arguments that in my opinion are not convincing for the eighteenth century but for a century later, although by then the claim for decline is not really made in most scholarship.

[11] Based on C. A. Bayly's reevaluation of European perceptions of decline in Northern India (for example, in his *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*, Cambridge University Press, 1983), Alexander Morrison mentions in his recent study that the "decline" ascribed by "disgruntled European observers" to the post-Mughal successor states was, in fact, evidence of the states' "considerable economic and political dynamism." Accordingly, Morrison calls to modify the view of Central Asia's decline paradigm. See A. S. Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand, 1868–1910* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 12. The underlying postulation has been that the Europeans cooked up the post-Mughal decline and probably did the same for Central Asia.

against the notion of decline is perhaps understandable, not only because the academic climate has been very receptive – and encouraging – for such views, but also because the decline premise seems to have discouraged scholars from studying the region in that era.[12] Then again, recent scholarship has been fashioning its new, decline-free narrative without examining the sources from the period. It should be obvious, one hopes, that a mere assessment of Central Asia according to factors set elsewhere does not suffice to free the region from an undesirable reputation.[13] Evidence that clearly portrays the crisis in Central Asia – certainly in the first half of the eighteenth century – is so extensive that, unless we acknowledge the crisis and explore its causes and consequences, we will not be able to understand the transformation that was set into motion in the region in the second half of the eighteenth century; we will be unable to interpret the rise of the so-called tribal dynasties in Bukhara and Khiva, we will be incapable of assessing correctly the emergence of the khanate of Qoqand, and we will be unable to understand the shifts in the religious landscape in Central Asia. The tens of thousands of refugees fleeing from Mawarannahr in the 1710s and 1720s did not take flight because they were "dynamic" or "vibrant" or because they were neutrally or calculatingly "undergoing a process of economic re-alignment."[14] They were running for their lives under brutal and dreadful circumstances.

Unfortunately, several recent contributions to the history of Central Asia in the era under discussion have been more an attempt to refute the premise of decline by calling on an assortment of general theoretical evaluations of economic development and diversity or by choosing to look at sources before or after the eighteenth century, rather than consulting the unique textual and material evidence that the period has to offer. Such contributions, welcome to Western academia primarily because "decline" has been ostracized in light of post-colonial theory and a variety of anti-Orientalist (interpreted as anti-colonial) Saidian ricochets, not only failed to reveal any new data concerning the historical developments in Central Asia in the eighteenth century, but

[12] This lack of enthusiasm for the study of the period is nothing new. The great Russian Orientalist V. V. Bartol'd complained about the dearth in scholarship on Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries already a hundred years ago, a dearth that he attributed to the "indifference of researchers." See his "Tseremonial pri dvore uzbetskikh khanov v XVII veke," *Sochineniia* II/2 (1964), 400 (and quoted by Yuri Bregel, "Barthold, Vasiliĭ Vladimirovich," *EIr* III, 830–32). Nevertheless, one has to acknowledge the positive outcome of the recent Western contributions: They have been able to draw attention to Central Asia's history and to increase its appeal among students.

[13] The sociologist Andre Gunder Frank wrote, for example, that "both the early and late seventeenth centuries were periods of marked economic expansion in both China and India. That renders the thesis of such 'decline' doubtful also in Central Asia." See Frank's *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (University of California Press, 1998), 120. Frank expressed similar ideas in "The continuing place of Central Asia in the world economy to 1800," in K. A. Ertürk, ed., *Rethinking Central Asia: Non-Eurocentric Studies in History, Social Structure and Identity* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999), 11–38.

[14] Levi, *Indian Diaspora*, 23.

also completely ignored the primary sources of the period.[15] Furthermore, although the question of the Central Asian decline became a contested issue in the Soviet Union already in the 1940s, particularly for political and "national" concerns, other scholars normally did not pay much attention to the Soviet internal debates.[16] The conclusions of recent scholarship suggest that Central Asian trade – which, for some reason, seems to be the primary and sometimes the only issue that concerns the "decline" critics, even if trade was just one in a host of concerns – continued in full force or even "escalated" despite the ascendance of maritime commerce. By implication, Central Asia's economies were actually thriving in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, such reasoning would be analogous to visiting the lively bazaars of present-day Tashkent and assuming, by the great quantity of fruit and colorful spices, that Uzbekistan's economy is to be envied for its prosperity and booming success. To be sure, the eighteenth-century Indo-Persian traveler whose words launched this chapter would not be as careless. "The inhabitants of Turan," Kashmīrī remarked back in 1740, "when compared with those of Turkey, Persia, and Hindustan,[17] may be said to be poor in point of money and the luxuries of life; but in lieu thereof, the Almighty has given them abundance of most exquisite fruits."[18] It appears that Kashmīrī was able to enjoy Central Asian produce with a sense of perspective. He could take pleasure in the sights, tastes, and scents of Central Asia's scrumptious melons, a famous regional delicacy for two millennia,[19] while still lamenting the otherwise poor state of affairs in the region.

Kashmīrī traveled in a land that, in many ways, he admired and even longed for. He seems to have had high expectations before visiting the fabled cities of Central Asia. Balkh, Herat, Khiva, Bukhara, and Samarqand evoked in him a sense of nostalgia, perhaps partly due to his devotion to the Mughals' vision of these locations as their birthplace and original native soil, or perhaps because

[15] Levi's book, for the most part an excellent portrayal of the commercial activities of Indian ("Multani") communities in nineteenth-century Central Asia, generated much praise for its attempt, deemed successful by many readers, to discredit the decline idea. Reviewers were quick to extol the author, who finally "put to rest the hoary old idea," "overturned the paradigm," and "disproved the old argument" of Central Asia's decline. (See for example, David Christian's review in *JWH* 14/4, Dec. 2003, 566–68; Adeeb Khalid in *IJMES* 35/4, Nov. 2003, 647–48; S. A. M. Adshead in *The International History Review* XXVI/1, March 2004, 104–06. For a more balanced evaluation, see Daniel C. Waugh in *Slavic Review* 63/1, 2004, 180.) Levi presented similar views also in his earlier and later publications (see his "India, Russia and the Eighteenth-Century Transformation of the Central Asian Caravan Trade" *JESHO* 42/4, 1999, 519–48; his introduction to the edited volume *India and Central Asia: Commerce and Culture, 1500–1800*, and "The Ferghana Valley at the Crossroads of World History: The Rise of Khoqand, 1709–1822," *Journal of Global History* 2/2, July 2007, 213–32). Suffice it to note, for now, that Levi cites no eighteenth-century sources in any of his publications to support his claims, a fact that, at least in my view, detracts from his sweeping generalizations.

[16] With the exception of Weinermans' study, discussed hereinafter.

[17] Kashmīrī was always comparing the region to other, predominantly Muslim-governed areas.

[18] Kashmīrī, *The Memoirs*, 41.

[19] Praised, among others, by al-Muqaddasī, Bābur, and almost every other traveler to the region.

of his desire for pilgrimage to different holy sites.[20] However, on his arrival, Kashmīrī was sad to observe the grand cities of old in ruin and the seats of powerful monarchs in shambles, the glory of bygone days still evident in the overall decay. The sight of the great city of Balkh (known as *Umm al-bilād*, or the "Mother of Cities") evoked the following remark: "Balkh must have been a fine city before the rapacity of its governors had reduced the inhabitants to their present state of indigence. The city is gone to decay; but there are some beautiful seats in the neighborhood."[21] Similar comments were the portion of Merv and Herat, "Merv appears from its ruins to have been a fine city; but is at present in the same state of Herat." Herat, correspondingly, suffered from the "oppression of accursed officials who had brought it to ruin, to the point that the people were obliged to grow crops in their own courtyards."[22] In Samarqand, the city that probably suffered the most in the first half of the eighteenth century, Kashmīrī visited Tīmūr's tomb and, noticeably disillusioned, offered the following verse:

> *The eye which seeketh for instruction, why*
> *looketh it not into the palaces of kings*,
> *To behold what they have suffered from the*
> *ravages of time?*
> *The Spider is become the chamberlain at*
> *The door of Khusro;*
> *The Owl keepeth watch in the tower of Afrasiab*.[23]

Kashmīrī subsequently reported that while at the tomb, Nādir Shāh, the leader of the incursion who was also known for his admiration and emulation of Tīmūr, decided to remove the enormous piece of jade that served as the cenotaph for Tīmūr's grave and to carry it back with him to Iran. Perhaps symbolically, on the way back from Central Asia, the stone broke into four pieces and Nādir Shāh decided to return the shattered monument to Samarqand.[24] The failed trial with the famous stone marked also other features of the expedition: The sum of plunder from the Central Asian campaign was the diadem of the ruler of Bukhara, Abu'l-Fayż Khan, which Nādir Shāh sent back with pity, three hundred camels, two hundred horses, and twenty Persian manuscripts "most beautifully written."[25] Truly, one could not blame the

[20] Indeed, it was his desire for pilgrimage that compelled him to join Nādir Shāh in the first place.

[21] Kashmīrī, *The Memoirs*, 33. The ruins that Kashmīrī had witnessed in Balkh were caused not only by the "rapacity of its governors" and other assorted conflicts but also, it seems, from an earthquake that had hit the region in 1702.

[22] Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 264.

[23] Kashmīrī, *The Memoirs*, 45–6. In this case, Gladwin's eighteenth-century translation keeps the desired effect.

[24] Ibid., 44.

[25] Kashmīrī, 'Abd al-Karīm. *Bayan-i-Waqi': a biography of Nadir Shah Afshar and the travels of the author Khwaja 'Abdu'l Karīm ibn Khwaja 'Aqibat Mahmud Kashmīrī*, ed. K. B. Nasim (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1970), 72.

Turkmen ruler for "looking down with contempt upon the humble possessions of the natives of Turan."[26]

But were these words by ʻAbd al-Karīm Kashmīrī only a form of romantic or sentimental testimony, a rhetorical device aimed to emphasize Hindustan's superiority, a way to portray the remarkable potency of the conqueror he was accompanying? Alam and Subrahmanyam's analysis of Kashmīrī's work points to a learned and well-informed author who was both honest and self-assured, and who did not shy away from criticism and censure when necessary.[27] His account of Central Asia seems highly reliable.

More or less at the same time as Kashmīrī's sojourn in the region, two British merchants, George Thompson and Reynold Hogg, arrived in Central Asia from Russia with the aim of exploring commercial opportunities around the Caspian Sea.[28] Their journey was rough, negotiating harsh terrains and gangs of brigands, but they were able to reach the territory of Khorezm. Of their first destination, the town of Urgench, once the scene of one of the most bustling markets in the region, Thompson and Hogg had very little to say: "[On September] the 5th [1740], we came to the city Jurgantz, which appeared to have been a large place; but now was entirely in ruins, no other building remaining than a mosque."[29] The two foreigners were eager to leave quickly but were forced to wait three days for their local escorts to finish their search for gold, which was supposed to "wash out by the rains from amongst the ruins of this city."[30] When they arrived in Khiva, the British tradesmen, naturally searching for business ventures, found that the city produced "little more than cotton, lamb-furrs, of a very mean quality; and a small quantity of raw silk, some of which they manufacture." They observed further that, "the consumption of European cloth and other commodities is inconsiderable, as is the whole trade of this place; so that no profit can be expected any ways proportioned to the risque." One of the reasons for this lack of profit for outsiders, beyond the dangers of travel and the meager selection of merchandise, was the duty on all goods "belonging to Christians" that amounted to 5 percent, as opposed to only 2½ percent for Muslim merchants. Thompson and Hogg estimated that the khan's entire yearly revenue did not add up to one hundred ducats (a meager sum), and that Khivan trade was conducted only with

[26] Ibid., 37.

[27] It seems that he remained true to his opening statement, in which he claimed that he kept his account "free from flattery and exaggeration, which too often stain the historic page" (Kashmīrī, *Bayan-i-Waqiʻ*, x).

[28] Jonas Hanway, *An historical account of the British trade over the Caspian Sea* (London, 1753), vol. I, 237–45.

[29] This account of Urgench in ruins is confirmed also by other visitors to the region (such as the Russian merchant Rukavkin in 1753). See Shīr Muḥammad Mīrāb Mūnis and Muḥammad Rizā Mīrāb Āgahī, *Firdaws al-Iqbāl: History of Khorezm*, translated from Chagatay and annotated by Yuri Bregel (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1999), 550, n. 124.

[30] Hanway, *Historical Account*, 240. Their report does not suggest that the locals actually found anything.

Bukhara and with Persia, where the merchants carried some cattle, furs, and hides that they acquired from the Qazaqs and Turkmens "who often prove to be very troublesome neighbors to them."[31] Realizing that commerce prospects with Khiva were inconsequential, George Thompson continued on to Bukhara with the hopes of finding better conditions for more lucrative dealings. He soon came to the realization that, "the trade of Bokhara is much declined from what it was formerly." Although he did not mention particular reasons for this decline in trade, there is ample evidence to explain them. Some had little to do with Central Asian considerations and interests. For example, the establishment of direct Russian-Chinese trade relations through Siberia, in the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) and later the Treaty of Kiakhta, disrupted the previously more dominant trade routes in Central Asia.[32]

This is not to say that trade came to an abrupt halt or that merchants ceased to navigate the treacherous routes, but trade clearly suffered considerably. Another reason for trade reduction was the economic interdependence between nomads and sedentary peoples in the region, ably described by Holzwarth. To put it simply, when the nomads suffered, the sedentary economy suffered as well. The Jungar attacks on the Qazaqs that had begun already in the late seventeenth century took on a new impetus in the first half of the eighteenth century. Their attacks, particularly forceful in 1708–1709 – the towns of Sayram and Turkistan were thoroughly ravaged in the process – wreaked havoc in the steppes, as many Qazaqs and Qaraqlpaqs had been taken captive and others were forced to flee to the environs of Tashkent. The plight of the Qazaqs in that era, and their internal disunity and separation, forced them to seek help. Attempts to form alliances and counteralliances between the khans of Bukhara and different Qazaq factions, whether against the Jungars or against other factions, usually proved futile, also due to the weakness of the khans of Bukhara and the deteriorating conditions in their state.

[31] Ibid., 241. Interestingly, horses are not mentioned. Cf. with Jos Gommans, "The Horse Trade in Eighteenth-Century South Asia," *JESHO* 37/3 (1994), 228–50. Most of the Central Asia-related data in Gommans' interesting book is applicable, with caution, for the last quarter of the eighteenth century. See Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire, c.1710–1780* (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1995).

[32] In addition to the Treaty of Nerchinsk, Audrey Burton mentions also Peter the Great's edicts from 1691, 1693, and 1697 as putting further obstacles for Bukharan merchants. See Burton, *Bukharan Trade, 1558–1718* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1993, *PIA* no. 23), 78–80. See also Morris Rossabi, "The 'Decline' of the Central Asian Caravan Trade," in James D. Tracy ed., *The Rise of the Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern Period, 1350–1750* (Cambridge, 1990), 368; Wolfgang Holzwarth, "Relations between Uzbek Central Asia, the Great Steppe and Iran, 1700–1750," in *Shifts and Drifts in Nomad-Sedentary Relations*, eds. Stephen Leder and Streck (Wiesbaden, 2005), 179–216. Somewhat related, see also Stephen Dale's comments regarding the decline in Russian-Indian trade in the eighteenth century in his *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 128–32.

The disintegration of the sedentary state, discussed hereinafter, also made sure that different actors in the political arena could, in essence, blackmail those in power. Holzwarth describes a dire situation whereby different tribal entities could pillage caravans and shut down trade routes almost at will. In 1721–1723, for example, "virtually all the caravan routes of the Bukharan capital were blocked."[33] Part of this tribal "extortion policy" also included (what seems to have been) the intentional invasion of nomads into the sown lands. The Khitay-Qïpchaq, whose notorious rebellions have been explored in the context of the nineteenth century,[34] apparently were driving their flocks into the cultivated lands near Samarqand and Qarshi in 1716–1717 only to leave them bare of fruit and grain.[35] Other major disruptions took place following the Jughar battles with the Qazaqs, particularly between 1723 and 1728. Because of the disintegration of the Qazaqs' own internal coalitions, the disruption of trade routes in the steppes continued well into the 1750s.[36]

Not only trade, but also city life deteriorated, and the urban population dwindled to the extent that several major cities were reported almost totally depopulated. Conflicts between the dynasty and rebellious tribes and intertribal warfare wreaked havoc in Central Asian cities with the warring sides attempting to pillage one another's political centers. The most noteworthy example was the period of the 1720s, after the invasion of the Qazaqs into Mawarannahr. Following a revolt led by Ibrāhīm Biy, chief of the Keneges in 1722, the large city of Samarqand was almost deserted; so that when Nādir Shāh invaded the city in 1740, only about one thousand families lodged at the fort.[37] It took the entire second half of the eighteenth century to rebuild Samarqand.

The events of 1723 are viewed today by the Qazaqs as one of their most disastrous hours.[38] What began as a series of battles amounted to a full-scale Jungar onslaught on the Qazaqs, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee from their pasture lands southward, cross the Syr Darya river, and run away from the battle scene in the direction of Samarqand and Khojand. As the Qazaqs, in their flight, disrupted the lives of numerous other nomadic groups in the khanate of Bukhara, they also ravaged the sown land, both purposefully and inadvertently. Different local tribal leaders tried to form alliances with the Qazaqs in order to fight other factions in the khanate.[39] During this period of

33 Holzwarth, "Relations," 192.

34 See P. P. Ivanov, *Vosstanie kitaĭ-kipchakov v Bukharskom khanstve, 1821–1825 gg.: istochniki i opyt ikh issledovaniia*. Moscow – Leningrad, 1937 (Trudy Instituta vostokovedeniia Akademii nauk SSSR, XXVIII).

35 Holzwarth, "Relations," 192.

36 As evidenced by contemporary Russian and Greek testimonies (Ibid., 198).

37 See V. V. Bartol'd, "Istoriia kul'turnoĭ zhizni Turkestana," *Sochineniia* II/1, 271–72.

38 In Qazaq memory, the year is commemorated as the year of the "barefoot flight" (Aqtaban shubryndy).

39 This was one of the peaks of the Samarqand bid for power, an objective that ultimately came to naught. On the symbolism involved in this struggle, see my "The 'Heavenly Stone' (Kök Tash) of Samarqand: A Rebels' Narrative Transformed," *JRAS* 17/1 (January 2007).

uncertainty, which lasted until early 1728, the battles and skirmishes among the Uzbeks and Qazaqs (and among themselves) considerably interrupted the living conditions of the population and damaged almost every facet of life.[40] The fighting and destruction also caused parts of the previously cultivated land (for example, in the Middle Zerafshan valley) to revert to their previous state, reed-covered swamps.[41]

It took the country quite some time to recover, and it is no wonder that Central Asia was in dire conditions on Nādir Shāh's arrival. The large displacement of populations following the Jungar and Qazaq tumultuous conflict also caused massive movements of refugees throughout the region, affecting Tashkent and Ferghana. Indeed, the rise of the khanate of Qoqand later in the century should be evaluated, in part, also in the context of the flood of refugees from Mawarannahr.[42]

Further to the west and south, Turkmens and Afghans were plundering caravans and rendering the roads unsafe to travel.[43] This is also evident in George Thompson's notes from Bukhara. One of his main concerns, as part of his assessment of trade routes and merchandise, was to list local goods and products ("cotton, lamb-furrs, down, rice, and cattle … soap, cotton-yarn, and callicoe") as well as the items that arrived in Bukhara from Iran ("velvet, silk, cloth, and sashes: woollen-cloth is also brought hither from Persia, as likewise shalloons, indigo, coral, and cochineal") and from the nomads ("rhubarb, musk, and castorium, and many other valuable drugs"). Unfortunately, Thompson remarked that, "the late wars, and the frequent robberies on the roads" made it impossible to trade in many different commodities, such as precious stones from Badakhshan, for example. Like Kashmīrī, Thompson described a corrupt regime that was holding onto its possessions at all costs.[44] He reiterated the conclusions that he and his partner had stated earlier in Khiva: "[The Bukharans] make very little consumption of European commodities … no foreign commodity bears a price proportionable to the risque of bringing it to market."[45]

Thompson and Hogg's visit was only one in a series of attempts to estimate Central Asia's potential for trade with the outside world in the first half of the eighteenth century. Twenty-two years earlier, the Russian empire dispatched Florio Beneveni to Bukhara in order to explore, among other

[40] Holzwarth described the complex political situation and the conflicting evidence in his "Relations," 197.

[41] Ibid., 208.

[42] T. K. Beisembiev, "Migration in the Qoqand Khanate in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Migration in Central Asia: Its History and Current Problems*, eds. Hisao Komatsu, Chika Obiya, and John S. Shoeberlein (Osaka, 2000), 35–40.

[43] Holzwarth, "Relations," 201.

[44] "The khan and his officers are possessed of very rich jewels; but never dispose of them, unless in cases of the greatest necessity, and even then they are jealous of their being carried out of the country."

[45] Hanway, *Historical Account*, 243–44.

things, trade opportunities. Beneveni's detailed and interesting report left very little hope for any substantial commerce with Russia.[46] His description of the political chaos in the region, the perilous travel conditions, and the general economic hardship is evident both from his official report and from his private diary, translated from Italian by Nicola Di Cosmo.[47] Di Cosmo indicates that Beneveni's account shows the "general state of weakness and discord in Khiva, which is just another evidence, together with the internecine wars, the struggle with Bukhara and the weakness of the army, of the general situation of decay in Khiva at the beginning of the XVIII century."[48] One of Beneveni's mandates was to investigate reports on precious metals in the area, particularly gold and silver. In the numerous studies about the so-called silver revolution – the influx of American silver into Asia that, through mostly European trade, impacted the economies of the continent already in the sixteenth century – Central Asia is usually not mentioned, and for good reason.[49] The region generally remained outside this new silver market until the middle of the eighteenth century, a change that was prompted by Nādir Shāh's invasion. George Thompson clearly stated that the Bukharans had "no silver money of their own coin; but since Nādir Shāh took this place, the Persian and Indian silver coin is very current amongst them."[50] Thompson's statement echoes the one made by Kashmīrī earlier about the lack of ready money in Central Asia. The indication of a silver crisis in the region's largest state (Bukhara) in the first half of the eighteenth century may come as a surprise for many who believe that the silver revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries touched on all of Asia. For those familiar with Central Asian history of the time, this should be old news, as the devaluation of currency under the Janid dynasty has been known and debated for some time. Silver in Central Asia was undergoing depreciation for most of the seventeenth century, as numismatic evidence from the period clearly demonstrates.[51] The percentage of silver in a silver coin in the beginning of the Janid era (early seventeenth century) was 90 percent. By the end of the seventeenth century, it was as low as 30 percent; and in the early eighteenth century decreased even further, so much so that

[46] Audrey Burton, *Bukharan Trade, 1558–1718* (Bloomington, 1993, *PIA* 23), 2.

[47] Nicola Di Cosmo, "A Russian Envoy to Khiva: the Italian Diary of Florio Beneveni," in *Proceedings of the 28th Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference, at Venice, Italy, July 1985*, ed. Giovanni Stary (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1989), 73–114.

[48] Ibid., 79.

[49] For example, Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680* (Yale University Press, 1990).

[50] Hanway, *Historical Account*, 244. In Khiva the situation was even more dire, and the first royal mint in the khanate was established during the reign of Eltüzer Khan (r. 1804–1806). Khiva's gold and silver came from Bukhara and Persia (particularly after Nādir Shāh's invasion) as was also attested by Rukavkin in 1753. Cf. with Mūnis and Āgahī (tr. Bregel), *Firdaws*, 587, n. 389.

[51] E. A. Davidovich, *Istoriia monetnogo dela Sredneĭ Azii XVII-XVIII vv* (Dushanbe: Akademiia nauk Tadzhikskoĭ SSR, 1964).

the low essay standard completely prevented its usage outside of Central Asia.[52] Only after Nādir Shāh's temporary conquest do we have indications of some Indian and Persian silver circulating in the region, although it is unclear to what extent.[53] The debasement of Bukharan silver also led to heavy fighting in 1708–1709 in Bukhara.[54]

Various themes seem to crisscross the last few pages. They include international commercial activities that bypassed Central Asia (maritime trade, influx of silver, and treaties and agreements that found a way around the region); the often tense and violent relations between nomadic entities (Qazaqs and Jungars, for example) that spilled into the region and impacted almost every aspect of life, partly due to the heavy involvement of nomads in the sedentary economy; the intermittent warfare among Central Asian political entities that, among other things, also caused the displacement of populations on the one hand and rendered roads unsafe for travel on the other; the profound corruption and the clear powerlessness of the central authorities in the region to govern more than a very limited territory; and a more general sense of political and social instability. When we add to the mix the apocalyptic notions that burgeoned in the region's popular literature and the influx of Islamic "reform" movements, we can begin also to form an understanding of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the crisis.

As mentioned earlier, in the first half of the eighteenth century Central Asia's political disintegration was reaching its peak. That era witnessed the collapse of the political system that was established following the so-called Uzbek conquest in the early sixteenth century, a system based on the rule of dynasties of Chinggisid origin that commanded loyalty on the part of the Uzbek tribes. Toward the end of the seventeenth century a process that began earlier was reaching its high point, and the tribes realized that the ruling dynasty that was once the unifying factor of the state could no longer perform its role effectively. It is abundantly clear that the central administration was, in actuality, losing its

[52] Boris D. Kočnev, "The Last Period of Muslim Coin Minting in Central Asia (18th–Early 20th Century)," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, edited by Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen, and Dmitriy Yermakov (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1996), 433.

[53] Gommans describes the "great quantity of money" that "Qirghiz, Bukhārīs and Khiwians" allegedly carried to "Russian Asia" from 1748 to 1755. See Jos Gommans, "Mughal India and Central Asia in the Eighteenth Century: An Introduction to a Wider Perspective," *Itinerario* 15/1 (1991), 51; Reprinted in *India and Central Asia: Commerce and Culture, 1500–1800*, ed. Scott Levi, 39–63. Gommans relies on the English traveler Godfrey Thomas Vinge, who had traveled in the region a century later. (And it should be mentioned that Vinge was not privy to such information himself, but borrowed it from the writings of Aleksei Levshin, the ethnographer of the Qazaqs, recorded in the 1820s.)

[54] Holzwarth, "Relations," 191. This information is based on material provided in the *'Ubaidāllah-nāma*, a dynastic history that recorded events during the reign of 'Ubaidāllah Khan (1702–1711). See Mir Muhammed Amin-i Buhari, *Ubaĭdulla-name*, tr. A. A. Semenov (Tashkent: Akademiia nauk Uzbekskoĭ SSR, 1957).

grip over the periphery, that the state was unable to maintain its financial system, and, most critically, was unable to reward the military. Indeed, throughout most of the period in question the towns and principalities of Shahr-i Sabz, Jizak, Ura-Tube, Hisar, and many other smaller locales were practically independent. Only in the 1750s was Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan finally able to reconquer them and force them again to pay taxes for their crops and cattle to the treasury and to send troops to the Manghït ruler in Bukhara.[55] Lee briefly summarizes the consequences of the breakup of Chinggisid realms: "Individual amirs and tribal groupings carved out for themselves hereditary fiefdoms and brooked no interference from the centre.… The fragmentation of Uzbek power, both north and south of the Amu Darya, made the Tuqay-Timurid realms ripe for invasion and conquest."[56] What caused this fragmentation?

From the early stages of the formation of the Chinggisid states in the sixteenth century the principles that had served the nomads in the steppes were also applied to the sedentary realms. These principles consisted of the arrangement of a system of so-called appanages (that ultimately resulted in the increase of tribal affiliation with particular locales), of rules and codes of succession, of a scheme of recruitment and rewards for military service, and more.[57] The appanage system implied that the entire territory was considered the possession of the royal clan and was distributed among the male members of the clan. The four major appanages included, at first, the areas of Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent, and Balkh. The system later expanded to include numerous other, usually smaller, appanages and subappanages, and sovereignty over them was often contested. As McChesney points out, the system was "fundamentally decentralized," and it was not an easy feat for the state to actually achieve its goals. Much depended on the khan's charisma, on the possibility of future recompense for relevant parties, on the khan's cooperation with other powerful religious and administrative institutions, on the khan's relationship with the influential stratum of the Uzbek (and sometimes non-Uzbek) amirs, and on familial and other types of alliances.

The principle of succession by seniority essentially meant that the identity of the next ruler was uncertain and remained unknown until the very end of the process. This increased the level of competition for the position of the khan, both by individuals and by clans, and often resulted in the emergence of new bases of competing powers.[58] Attempts to resolve this issue, for example in constituting an institution of the heir apparent (throughout most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries his seat was in the city of Balkh), were

[55] Ivanov, *Ocherki*, 102–03.

[56] Jonathan L. Lee, *The "Ancient Supremacy": Bukhara, Afghanistan and the Battle for Balkh, 1731–1901* (E. J. Brill, 1996), 60.

[57] For a good overview, see Robert D. McChesney, "Central Asia vi. In the 16th–18th Centuries," *EIr* V, 176–93.

[58] For more on this issue, see Martin B. Dickson, "Uzbek Dynastic Theory in the Sixteenth Century," *Trudy XXV-ogo Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa Vostokovedov* (Moscow, 1960), 208–16.

often unsuccessful due to the heir apparent's premature death, or decision to secede, or disregard for the principle. In order to keep the allegiance of the tribal leaders and the military, the rulers had to improvise a system of rewards. The difficulty arose when, after the distribution of land grants, the assignment of *tankhā* status (the right to collect taxes from a land or a piece of property), the *waqf* endowments, and various other types of allowances, the state lost most of its revenues.[59] Loyalty to the regime was often based on military success, thus satisfying the interests of the tribes. However, once the dynasty and the tribes lost their consensus, the system weakened. The rulers were unable to provide their troops (or tribes) with victories in wars (or economic gains). This was combined with a sedentarization process in a land that could only support a limited amount of agriculture and was coupled with the waning of the older system of conquests and gains (that some scholars call "imperial ideology"), as coveted territories to conquer were few and far between. Thus, most of the warfare in Central Asia from the 1680s (probably earlier) was amongst the different Central Asian polities (Bukhara, Khiva, Balkh, and so forth), set inside a territorial space that was becoming more and more confined.[60]

The bureaucratic mechanism was ineffective, partly because there was no strong centralized regime to enforce the law, collect taxes, and generally be able to ensure the well-being of the population and maintain its own authority based on military success. The Ashtarkhanid dynasty took control over the khanate of Bukhara – the largest, richest, most populous, and most influential region in Central Asia for centuries – toward the end of the sixteenth century.[61] The Janids, as their Shibanid predecessors, relied on the principle of imperial charisma that dictated that only Chinggis Khan's male descendants were entitled to the throne. However, as the dynasty lingered so did the challenges to this principle by tribal forces that were beginning to dispute the central authority and gradually ceased appreciating the Chinggisid appeal. By the time of the rise to the throne of ʿUbayd Allāh Khan, son of Subḥān-Quli Khan,[62] in 1702 (an ascent that was accompanied by murders), wide

[59] See among others, Wolfgang Holzwarth, "The Uzbek State as Reflected in Eighteenth-Century Bukharan Sources," *AS/EA* 60/2 (2006).

[60] By and large, the Uzbeks were unable to make the full transition from a nomadic into an agrarian state, described well by Maria Subtelny for the era of Sultan Ḥusayn Bayqara (Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*. Leiden, Boston: E. J. Brill, 2007.)

[61] The most comprehensive study of the dynasty in English is Audrey Burton's *The Bukharans: A Dynastic, Diplomatic and Commercial History, 1550–1702* (New York, 1997).

[62] Burton calls Subḥān-Quli Khan the "last great Ashtarkhanid" (Burton, *The Bukharans*, 329), although during his time, too, the situation was already deteriorating. The decline in artistic patronage, for example, was evidenced in the removal of thirty poets from Subḥān-Quli Khan's court. See Karin Rührdanz, "Miniatures of the Bukharan Court Atelier in a Copy of Khwājū Kirmānī's *Khamsa* Dated 1078/1667–68," *Ecrit et culture en Asie centrale et dans le monde turko-iranien x-xix siecles*, eds. F. Richard and Maria Szuppe (Cahiers de Studia Iranica) (Paris, 2008), 377, n. 8.

conflicts emerged.[63] Citing the *'Ubaydulla-nāma*, Raziya Muqminova shows that the threat to 'Ubayd Allāh was so high that he, in his powerlessness, tried to replace some of the tribal leaders with craftsmen of "poor parentage" and allowed simple artisans to "approach the most honorable posts."[64] Of course, the tribal chieftains would have none of this and they assassinated 'Ubayd Allāh, ultimately leading to the ascent of an even weaker ruler, Abu'l-Fayż Khan, to the fragile throne of the weakening khanate.

The corruption of the rulers that was invoked in the writings of Kashmīrī, Thompson and Hogg, and others, was well-known in the region. When he ascended to power in the middle of the century, Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan, the first ruler of the Manghït tribal dynasty and the most successful challenger of Chinggisid authority in Central Asia in centuries, delivered the following words in his inauguration speech:

> From the beginning of the state and the rise of the star of felicity of Muḥammad Khan Shïbānī,[65] the past sultans and khaqans established this praiseworthy tradition, and displayed noble zeal, and demonstrated miraculous power in arranging the affairs of the kingdom and securing its borders. For undertaking this exertion and effort, they earned fame in both worlds and won out over their peers and equals.[66] When the will of the Almighty God resolved upon the expiration of the rule of their dynasty and the destruction of Mawarannahr, for an [entire] generation they recited a worthless *khuṭba* in the name of Abu'l-Fayż Khan. During his reign all kinds of corruption appeared from every corner of the kingdom, to the extent that in most of the regions and cities and areas of this country not a soul was to be found.[67]

Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan's speech (or at least, the words attributed to him by the historian) emphasized the quality and magnanimity of Shïbānī's achievement in conquering Mawarannahr and founding a new dynasty in the early sixteenth century. After all, that was the period of the arrival into the region of Muḥammad Raḥīm's ancestors and also the beginning of visible Manghït presence in Mawarannahr.[68] By contrast, late Janid rule, particularly during Abu'l-Fayż Khan's long reign (1711–1747), was perceived as the epitome

[63] Holzwarth sees these as conflicts between the military "estate" and the bureaucracy. See Holzwarth, "The Uzbek State," 327–28.

[64] Raziya G. Mukminova, "Social and Economic Life in the Towns of Central Asia in the 15th and 16th Centuries," in *Matériaux pour l'histoire économique du monde Iranien*, eds. Rika Gyselen and Maria Szuppe (Paris, 1999), 274.

[65] Muḥammad Shïbānī Khan, leader of the Uzbek conquest of Central Asia in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

[66] Literally, "they stole the ball of competition from amongst their peers and equals."

[67] Muḥammad Vafā Karmīnagī, *Tuḥfat al-khānī*, MS of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, No. C 525, ff. 255ab. See the full translation of Muḥammad Raḥīm's inauguration in my *Ritual and Authority in Central Asia: The Khan's Inauguration Ceremony*, (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2003, *PIA* 37), 5–19.

[68] See V. Trepavlov, *The Formation and Early History of the Manghit Yurt* (Bloomington, 2001, *PIA* no. 35).

of the region's destruction, a devastation that was manifest physically and spiritually, as the dynasty was disintegrating, as the state was becoming incapable of collecting revenues, and the general dissatisfaction was proliferating in society. The description of a land in which "not a soul was to be found" related both to conditions of people that had to flee their homes and their land and also to the absence of actual tax payers. Even if this were an exaggeration, aimed at magnifying the role of the new ruler as savior, the meaning was still clear. The cause for this disaster, attributed first and foremost to the will of Allah and to the previous ruler's crooked ways, was strikingly reminiscent of ʻAbd al-Karīm Kashmīrī's words that opened this chapter and bore close resemblance to the gist of the message in Tīmūr's legendary biographies.

One hopes that this brief discussion should be enough to plant doubt in the minds of those who express skepticism about Central Asia's trying times in the first half of the eighteenth century.[69] This hardship was not only the portion of Central Asia's sedentary core. Central Asia's neighbors were suffering as well: the traumatic events during and after the fall of the Safavids in Iran; the equally dramatic changes in the landscape of the steppes to the north with the incessant wars between the Qazaqs and the Oirats and in light of the expanding Russian empire; the crisis in the economy of the Punjab, also a result of the declining trade with Central and West Asia; and the uprisings in parts of modern-day Afghanistan.[70]

Such comparative perspectives from neighboring regions have proven useful. For example, Ann Lambton's study of similar developments in eighteenth-century Iran – developments that some believe begun soon after the death of Shah ʻAbbas I (d. 1629)[71] and culminated under Shah Sultan

[69] Jos Gommans writes that, "Analysing the accounts of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travelers, it appears that Bukhara, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan were relatively flourishing trading areas." (See Gommans, "Mughal India and Central Asia," 48.) I do not know which travel accounts would generate this assessment, but I doubt that my reader would share this impression for eighteenth-century Bukhara.

[70] Muzaffar Alam, "Trade, state policy, and regional change: aspects of Mughal-Uzbek commercial relations, c. 1550–1750," *JESHO* 37/3 (1994), 83 (Reprinted in *India and Central Asia: Commerce and Culture, 1500–1800*, 64–92).

[71] Although Rudi Matthee writes cautiously that, "it is not strictly correct to speak of unchecked decline," the portion of his essay dealing with the Safavids in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries clearly describes a very dire state of affairs, fraught with insurgencies and rebellions, a corrupt and inept government, a feeble and crooked military, and a general weakening of the Safavid state. He depicts economic regression, low agricultural yield, deteriorating trade, and the devaluation of currency as Iran was facing "structural economic weakness, endemic corruption, and weak leadership." In addition to unsafe roads, crippled courts, and a "drastic financial crisis," the treasury "lacked the funds to equip an army capable of meeting the mounting challenges of domestic unrest and invasions from outside." Eventually, Isfahan fell to Afghan forces (after a six-month siege that resulted in widespread starvation), the Russians and Ottomans were quick to slice up parts of the country, and the dynasty came to its end. (See Rudi Matthee, "Safavid Dynasty," *EIr*.)

Ḥusayn (r. 1694–1722)[72] – resulted in what Lambton termed the "moral decay" at the center of the kingdom.[73] In her study about "Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy" in eighteenth-century Iran, Lambton painted a picture of political contraction and economic decline. She identified the collapse of the central government as the cause, or at least the impetus for tribal resurgence and the decline of the administration, describing a situation whereby a reassertion of tribal authority, first in the periphery then in the center, expressed itself in raids and incursions into the central areas, as well as in revolts against the central government. The three dynasties that followed the Safavids (the Afshars, Zands, and Qajars) were based on tribal support. Nādir Shāh, founder of the first of these dynasties, had to rely, at first, on his military prowess to justify his rule, but naturally this was not enough to secure a long-lasting dynasty.

Although Iran and Central Asia differed in many regards, some parallels persisted. For instance, the central government was no longer capable of administering the army. As Lambton puts it, "the complicated administrative machinery for allocating the funds of the empire to its military and civil officials had ceased to function effectively."[74] This can be clearly seen in Central Asia, although it does not mean that the old administrative system ceased to exist. On the contrary, as Lambton demonstrates, the old bureaucracy survived and lingered on with a few modifications, partly because the personnel were the same (only serving different rulers), but their effectiveness was minimal. Another interesting parallel was the concept of rulership. Lambton distinguishes between two forms of political theory. One deemed that kingship was inherent in the family of kings, and the other held that rule was to be inherent in the tribe, or the family of the tribal ruler. We have seen the fierce deliberation over who was worthy of kingship prominently featured in the Central Asian accounts from that era. The following story from Iran is a good example:

Before Nādir Shāh ascended the throne he assembled the amirs and the *'ulamā'* and asked them to choose a king. They nominated him. He said: "The king must be the son of a king. We are not such." They answered: "Kingship is in the hands of God. He gives it to whomsoever He wills." One participant objected, saying (about Nādir Shāh): "this fellow is not

[72] For a clear view of the crisis (particularly from 1714 onward) based primarily on the Dutch East Indies Company's documents, see Willem Floor, *The Afghan occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721–1729* (Paris, 1998). The documents clearly describe a state that has lost its effectiveness, court and country in total confusion due to the constant shifts in personnel and tribes pillaging the countryside with no opposition.

[73] As we have seen, tyranny, corruption, and poor decision making on the part of the Ashtarkhanid dynasty in the khanate of Bukhara were repeated themes in the eighteenth-century historical records whether officially sponsored or not.

[74] A. K. S. Lambton, "The Tribal Resurgence and the Decline of the Bureaucracy in Eighteenth Century Persia," in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, eds. Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), 111.

a man of any family." But he was quickly contradicted by the *shaykh al-islām* that "God gives kingship and glory."[75]

In other words, and as we have seen in Central Asia, the debate regarding who was worthy of kingship was central to this period of upheaval. The dispute was intense and introduced new elements into the decision-making process. The emphasis on the cooperation between the tribal chieftains and the religious officials (and also Sufis) created a new reality, not only in Iran, but also in Central Asia. No longer did the king have to be the son of a king (or the khan – the son of a Chinggisid), no longer (theoretically, at least) was it enough to belong to a certain tribe or family, but sanction for sovereignty also had to come from God. This is clearly stated in the official, and less official, Central Asian sources.[76] The identity of the chosen leader and his basis of legitimation were not the only issues at stake. In a period when social structures fell apart, a new social structure was forming. Like the tribal rulers in Central Asia, Nādir Shāh the Turkmen was viewed, in this context, as the counterreaction against the decay and weakness of the late Safavid state.[77] Nevertheless, the fact that the Safavids were deposed does not mean that they had completely vanished, and their charismatic appeal still persisted well into the nineteenth century.[78] This complexity also appears in Central Asia in that era.

The many sources that we surveyed indicate clearly the corrosion in the authority of the state and the collapse of the central government; the unremitting wars; the confusion, uncertainty, and conflict over the identity of succeeding rulers; the economic crisis; and so forth. Indeed, we have seen it all reflected in Tīmūr's legendary biographies as well: the uncertainty about the leader's identity, the corruption, the premonitions of doom, the desire for a strong ruler, the fighting with the heretics, and the struggle between Chinggisids and tribalists. Regrettably, but predictably, Tīmūr's biographies have not been among the primary sources that informed the scholarly community about conditions in Central Asia in the eighteenth century.

Note on the Transmission of the Decline Paradigm

Contrary to claims in current scholarship, the region's reputation for crisis did not emerge first from an Orientalist plot but rather from the body of evidence presented in sources from and about the region in the eighteenth century. I do not wish to venture too deep into the discussions of "Russian Orientalism," its supposed uniqueness or commonalities with other "Orientalisms," or the

[75] The man who spoke against Nādir Shāh was then strangled, and the *shaykh al-islām* was given a robe of honor. See Lambton, "Tribal Resurgence," 113.

[76] Sela, *Ritual and Authority*, 20.

[77] See also Mansur Sefatgol, "Persian Historiographical Writing under the Last Safavids: The Historiographers of Decline," *Eurasian Studies* V/1–2 (2006), 319–31.

[78] Lambton, "Tribal Resurgence," 119.

degree of service that the Orientalists rendered, intentionally or not, to their mother empire.[79] However, several words about the transmission of the idea of the decline need to be written.

The Russian Orientalists (as well as many non-Russian Orientalists working within the milieu of Russian oriental studies) were naturally the closest to Central Asia, and partly through their assessments the idea of Central Asia's crisis in the eighteenth century persisted (persisted, not originated). The words of the great Vasilii Vladimirovich Bartol'd (1869–1930), considered by many the founding father of Central Asian studies, open most discussions in English on the period in question. Bartol'd's assessment was that in the eighteenth century Central Asia suffered "a period of political, economical and cultural decadence."[80] This evaluation continued to dominate the historiography for many years to come and, of course, given Bartol'd's reputation and range of publications in different languages, also made its way beyond the confines of Russian oriental studies. Although Bartol'd made this comment in his most rudimentary introduction to the region's history, this quote has been preferred, most likely because it has been readily available in English translation. Bartol'd's remarkable career enabled him to develop an intimate acquaintance with the sources, the kind of acquaintance that today is very rare. This is important, because just accusing Orientalists of arrogance and haughtiness (which many of them undoubtedly had) does not excuse dispensing with their unrivaled knowledge and denying their passion for the study of their subject matter.[81] Of course, the Russians arrived in the region as conquerors and with a clear belief in their superior circumstances, a belief nurtured not only by their technological and military superiority but from their Imperial standing – firm promoters of their civilizing mission. For many of the newcomers, what they witnessed on the ground, so to speak, also helped shape their perspective. Bartol'd, for example, was clearly aware of the long and tenuous relations between Russia and Central Asia, relations that were often, certainly since Peter I's reign (r. 1690–1725), politically charged, and that culminated with Russia's resolute military conquest of the entire region. But did Central Asia's reputation in Russia also cloud Bartol'd's perspective? After all, the scientific explorations and studies patronized by the tsarist regime and its representatives into Central Asia were already informed by two centuries of political, economic, and cultural contacts. For scholars

[79] See the recent discussion on this topic between Nathanial Knight and Adeeb Khalid in *Kritika*. Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," *Kritika* 1/4 (Fall 2000), 691–99; Nathaniel Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika* 1/4 (Fall 2000), 701–15. See also Knight's slightly earlier publication, "Grigoriev in Orenburg, 1851–1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?" *Slavic Review* 59 (Spring 2000), 74–100.

[80] V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies*, 65. In the original, the Russian word *upádok* (meaning first and foremost "decline," but can also be interpreted as "decay" or "decadence") was used.

[81] See also the recent study by Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London, 2006).

like Bartol'd this was a reality close to home, and he actually regarded it as an advantage.[82]

Some, if not many, of the Russian colonizers, much like other European visitors to the region in the nineteenth century, at first assumed that what they were witnessing had been a picture of a society frozen for centuries. One may read in the travel literature of the time (the Russian and the European) a prevailing assumption that regarded Central Asia as static, undeveloped, and ruled by "Oriental despots" who were essentially corrupt and enemies of progress. The "oppressors" relentlessly sustained deplorable practices, the likes of which had not been carried out in Europe for ages (or at least for a few decades), such as slave trade, serfdom, ruthless public executions, abominable torture practices, and so forth. Of course, the technological inferiority of the locals (in military, science, and medicine) and their almost wholesale rejection of newer developments (in print, communications, and medicine) that the Russians had introduced did not contribute to their favorable assessment by the new conquerors.

Nevertheless, many of these assumptions on the then-current state of the Muslim populations of Central Asia were also shared by some of the Muslims themselves, and the Russians were also exposed to more acute conversations that took place amongst the Muslims, some of them their subjects, others not. The first was the assumption that the Central Asian decline was also part and parcel of a much larger crisis – that of the Muslim world in general and that of the non-West in an even larger perspective. These two premises – that the Muslim world and the non-European world had suffered from the rise of European power and European control of the markets, trade, and economic and technological developments – have been at the core of numerous discussions and debates that need not be repeated here. This so-called ascendance of Europe contributed, among other things, to the emergence of movements, sometimes labeled "reform" or "renewal," that gripped Muslim communities from Africa to China in the eighteenth century.[83] Some responded to their encounter with Europe, others to the collapse or downfall of Muslim empires (Safavid, Mughal), and yet others to internal affairs (economic, ethnic, or matters pertaining to theological interpretations and the validity of religious practice). Many of these movements interacted with one another, responded to or competed with one another, and also created networks of communication that influenced the creation or the direction of similar groups elsewhere. One of the issues that all these movements

[82] Bregel brings the following quote from Bartol'd: "It seemed to me quite natural that a Russian Orientalist-historian should be attracted to a region which was geographically and historically closer to Russia than the other eastern countries, the region where a Russian scholar had at his disposal material which was much less available to a west-European scholar" (*Sochineniia* IX, 789–90).

[83] See *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, eds. Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

had in common was a growing dissatisfaction with existing circumstances in their respective communities and a reaction against elements in their own society (and sometimes with a more "global" Muslim perspective) that they deemed to be stagnant or ineffective.[84] It is no surprise that Central Asia, too, experienced such a movement specifically in that era with the arrival of representatives of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya.[85] Spreading into Central Asia from India while promoting their alleged founder Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564–1624) as the "renewer of the second millennium," shaykhs of the movement settled in different regions in Central Asia and began to cultivate old and new ties with the locals and to actively engage in political and social affairs.[86] The newcomers' arrival was not uncontested. One of their most vocal representatives, Shaykh Ḥabībullāh, was killed in riots in Bukhara in 1700.[87] Nevertheless, "imbued with the idea of struggling for the purification of the *šarī'a* of all heretical admixtures," the movement's followers took advantage of Central Asia's "grave economic and political crisis."[88] The region's disorder facilitated their ability to involve themselves in the affairs of the land and, at a time of devastation and destruction, also to help build the country, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century when conditions for such renovation were more forthcoming. As the biographies of some of the more prominent shaykhs of the *ṭarīqa* suggest, in the beginning (namely, during the first half of the century) many of them had to leave places that had been in devastation and seek instruction elsewhere only to return later (and in greater numbers) and become involved in the

[84] This type of charge was also connected to earlier trends in parts of the Muslim world that viewed the era (already in the seventeenth century) as a period of decline. The internal deliberations among Muslims were not lost on the Russian scholars (or their European colleagues), and they began to translate, among other things, the calls within the Muslim world to examine the reasons for the decline and the ways to remedy the situation. Thus, for example, the famous seventeenth-century *Risāle* of Qoči Beg, a treatise about the causes for the Ottoman "decline" presented to the Ottoman sultan Murād IV, was edited and translated into Russian by V. D. Smirnov (see his *Kočybeg Gümüldzinskii i drugie osmanskie pisateli XVII. věka*, St. Petersburg, 1873) and served to inform many of Smirnov's contemporaries.

[85] Baxtiyor M. Babadžanov, "On the History of the Naqshbandiyya Muğaddidīya in Central Māwarānnahr in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, eds. Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelgen and Dmitriy Yermakov, Vol I. (Berlin, 1996), 385–413.

[86] Many of the followers of this new branch of the Naqshbandiyya claimed spiritual and/or biological descent from Makhdum-i A'ẓam (d. 1542), the famous Central Asian Naqshbandi shaykh whose descendants increased the *ṭarīqa*'s influence in different parts of the world.

[87] About him and his successors, and about their influence on the Manghït court, see Anke von Kügelgen, "Die Entfaltung der Naqšbandīya Muğaddidīya im mittleren Transoxanien vom 18. bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ein Stück Detektivarbeit," in *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries. Vol. 2: Inter-Regional and Inter-Ethnic Relations*, eds A.v. Kuegelgen, M. Kemper, and A. J. Frank (Berlin, 1998), 101–51.

[88] Babadžanov, "On the History," 412. See also Jo-Ann Gross, "The Naqshbandīya Connection: From Central Asia to India and Back (16th–19th Centuries)," in *India and Central Asia: Commerce and Culture, 1500–1800* (New Delhi, 2007), esp. 243–47.

reconstruction activities of ruined areas, activities that had been supported by the first Manghït rulers, from Muḥammad Raḥīm Khan to Shāh Murād.[89] Beyond their social activities, the representatives of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya played a role in the changing character of religious organizations and loyalties[90] – part of the profound transformation that Central Asia was experiencing in the eighteenth century, clearly affected by the crisis. During Shāh Murād's time, the practices of *dhikr jahr* (the loud vocal repetitive commemoration of Allah) and *samā'* (varied musical practices, often associated with the *dhikr*) were criticized in line with some promoters of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya.[91]

The internal Muslim discourse over the need for reform – and, of course, the discord over what "reform" actually meant – continued in Central Asia and became particularly visible under the so-called reformists (Jadids) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[92] This development has been probed to a great extent before.[93] Suffice it to say that most studies on the Russian perspective on the Jadids explored either Russian fears of the Jadids[94] or the Russian strategies of co-opting the reformists.[95] It is unclear whether the "reformist" arguments also helped fashion Russian opinion on the majority of their Muslim subjects and their state of supposed stagnation.

In the early Soviet era, Russian and Soviet scholars (such as Bartol'd, Khodorov, Ivanov, and Iakubovskii, among others) generally accepted the premise of the decline in the eighteenth century, but also tended to agree that the crisis was beginning to diminish in the second half of the century with the rise of the so-called tribal dynasties and the different political and economic

[89] As described, for example, in 'Abd al-'Azīz Namangānī's *Tadhkira-i Majdhūb Namangānī* (MS of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, No. 2662/II; *SVR* III, 374), ff. 14ab, 15b, 16b.

[90] The changing patterns of "Sufism" in Central Asia have yet to be explored fully. See also Devin DeWeese, "'Dis-ordering' Sufism in Early Modern Central Asia: Suggestions for Rethinking the Sources and Social Structures of Sufi History in the 18th and 19th Centuries," a paper delivered at the 'Uzbek-Japanese Scientific Cooperation: History and Culture of Central Asia (Sources and Methodological Issues), Tashkent, 2009.

[91] Yasavi rituals were declared by Shāh Murād, who preferred Mujadidi rituals, to be undesired innovations (*bid'a*). See Bakhtiyar Babajanov, "About a Scroll of Documents Justifying Yasavi Rituals," in *Persian Documents: Social History of Iran and Turan in the Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Kondo Nobukai (London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 68.

[92] Whether the Jadids had been the direct successors of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya is a topic that we need not engage here. Both movements were trying to occupy – in addition to other, dissimilar positions – a stance that critiqued established practices. One of the precursors to the Jadid call for reform was Mulla Abu al-Nasr Qūrsāwī (1771–1812), who had studied in Bukhara and became highly critical of its madrasas' curriculum. See Hisao Komatsu, "Bukhara and Kazan," *Journal of Turkic Civilization Studies* 2 (2006), 110.

[93] The most authoritative study in English is Adeeb Khalid's *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[94] Typically along Pan-Turkic lines or potential instigations of rebellion.

[95] At first, to educate the "masses" and make them more Russian-like; later to enable the Russians to rule Central Asia more easily.

measures that they had begun to implement.[96] However, mixed into the debate, and gradually coming to dominate it, was the general picture of Central Asian society upon the Russians' arrival (which I alluded to previously) and whether Russian colonialism encouraged or hindered Central Asia's progress and development. Most of the heated discussion concerned the way to view tsarist colonial rule and less the actual circumstances in the region before the Russian expansion; the latter conditions mattered in the debate on whether the Russians were saviors or disrupters of "natural" development.[97]

To summarize the very extensive debate in a few words, Russian colonization of Central Asia was regarded at first as negative in the Soviet era (except by a small cadre of Russian nationalists), then as a lesser evil, and later as civilizing and good, effectively rescuing the Central Asians from themselves (or at least from their rulers).[98] This view, articulated particularly in Moscow, provoked a counterreaction by Central Asian scholars (Mirzaev, Nabiev, and others) as well as some sympathetic Russians (Chekhovich).[99] The contested question continued, and the different guidelines for history writing emanating from Moscow were followed with varying degrees of adherence and success. Given the rise in nationalist sentiments, Soviet historians began to refrain from using the word "decline" and opted for the more appeasing "relative stagnation" or even reversed the picture entirely.[100] Even at the height of continued controversy from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, most Soviet scholars (including Central Asians) agreed that the region was suffering from a decline from the end of the seventeenth century and into the first half of the eighteenth century.[101] Essentially, even with all the harsh ideological constraints imposed by the Soviet regime (constraints that were changing throughout the Soviet era), scholars still debated the issue and their publications were not uniform.

[96] For bibliographic references, see Eli Weinerman, "The Polemics between Moscow and Central Asians on the Decline of Central Asia and Tsarist Russia's Role in the History of the Region," *The Slavonic and European Review* 71/3 (July 1993), 430, n. 7.

[97] Therefore, much of the argument was about "capitalism" or lack thereof in the region.

[98] This was particularly prevalent during and after World War II, in a Soviet effort to curtail growing nationalist sentiments in Central Asia. Weinerman, "Polemics," 433. See also Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, 1969).

[99] Weinerman paints a picture whereby in the 1950s scholars from European Russia were standing in opposition to Central Asian scholars and Russian scholars from Central Asia. Weinerman, "Polemics," 445.

[100] Weinerman, "Polemics," 462. This just goes to show how important it is to evaluate scholarly contributions within the "ideological" framework in which they are written. The framework need not be an instruction from above, but can also be a compliance with fashion and style.

[101] See the references in Weinerman, "Polemics," 470, n. 178.

Conclusion

The eighteenth century presented Central Asians with an unprecedented opportunity to embark on a new understanding of their geographical and cultural space, indeed, their place in the world, and also begin to fashion their self-image. One way to examine how these insights were shaped in society's upper echelons is to review the rhetoric in the more official sources and to grasp how they had been exhibited by the regime. Elsewhere, I investigated the officially declared policy of the court (or court propaganda, if you will) through the prism of court ritual, and more specifically, through the inauguration ceremonies of new khans and amirs.[1] These rituals were accorded distinction and privilege in the official chronicles, and their descriptions uncover many layers in the court's understanding of itself, its changing composition and functions over time, and in the court's perception of its sources of inspiration and, consequently, of its legitimacy.

Conversely, Central Asia's "popular history" that appeared in the eighteenth century brought before its audience extensive and compelling narratives about the region's most illustrious son and conqueror of much of Central Eurasia in the fourteenth century. The study of Tīmūr's heroic apocrypha opens a window into many expressions of Central Asian experiences, knowledge, and awareness in the eighteenth century. The two historical realms, the courtly and the popular, were connected by the circumstances of their formation and by the issues that they addressed – from the changing perceptions of the ruler's identity and the legitimacy of his rule, a question constantly invoked in all the narratives from the period, to the relationship between religion and state; from their interpretations of traditions and customs and invocation of sources of inspiration to their understanding of their place in the world. All these related issues dominated the cultural discourse in Central Asia even beyond the so-called early-modern period.

While reading the biographies side by side with the official chronicles of the time, it seems that many of the concerns that Tīmūr's biographies addressed

[1] See Ron Sela, *Ritual and Authority in Central Asia: The Khan's Inauguration Ceremony* (Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2003), [*PIA* 37].

also troubled the court histories: the lack of stability in the state, the need for change, the image of the ideal ruler, and the question of his origin as the basis for his legitimacy. Both types of sources – the more official and the less official – saw the legitimacy of the ruler as coming first and foremost from the divine and, therefore, both accorded a place for Islam in the decision-making process. Both still acknowledged the significance of older Central Asian traditions, but even if the Timurid ideal was received very coldly by the formal elites when it claimed its share in the cultural conversation, other significant segments of the society seemed to embrace it, among them Sufis, political oppositions, and probably many in the population. We historians should not be tempted to welcome only the position of the formal elites. After all, the real strength of the legendary biographies lies in their unique and meaningful perspective on a key period in Central Asia's history. The biographies are different from other forms of historical literature; they constitute a manifest against the corruption of rulers and officials, a call to respect Islamic traditions, and an attempt to situate Central Asia within a greater geopolitical and religious sphere. This was a creation born out of a period of crisis that offered its readers and listeners a new prospect, a memory, a point of identification, a source of hope, and a belief in the long-term triumph of their Muslim community. It is one of the substances that was holding Central Asian societies together.

Tīmūr's legendary biographies emerged from and responded to a prevailing crisis in the first half of the eighteenth century. It is no wonder that much of Tīmūr's literary portrait painted in this volume portrayed our hero plunged into a society in turmoil and spending most of his life fighting for its recovery and salvation. When young Tīmūr arrived in the city of Bukhara – Central Asia's political and spiritual center since the middle of the sixteenth century – he encountered deceitfulness, thuggery, drunkenness, and a population living in fear, unwillingly taking part in appalling schemes thrust on them from above. The apocalyptic qualities that accompanied these tales only added to the despair and the challenge. And yet, the hero prevailed.

Books of Tīmūr were clearly Central Asian creations. The works had been written and copied exclusively in the region, and for three centuries they remained in Central Asia and did not migrate elsewhere. The geopolitical setting in the many different stories portrayed Central Asia as the pivot of the world, the center from which and unto which everything must pour forth or come back. Both narrators and audiences imagined Central Asia's past, present, and future and also visualized the world surrounding them. *Books of Tīmūr* were not dynastic stories but, as most people in the region probably viewed it then, a history of Central Asia, retold through the biography of one of its most memorable individuals: a figure native to the region, brought up and educated in the region, who, out of its own mold or cast burst out into the world assisted by numerous members of the community. Tīmūr came from within, not from the outside. For the audiences he was not a foreign invader, a consequence or an offshoot of the Mongol invasion. In fact, he was not even a Turko-Mongol, as most studies on the histories of the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries present him. He was a Turk, and he came to the fore at a historical junction well after the Uzbek conquest of Central Asia when the ruling dynasties, as well as the majority of the population, were already much more Turkic than before.

The legendary biographies originated Central Asia's claim of Tīmūr; not, as most scholars erroneously believe, the invocation of his image in the course of late twentieth-century Uzbek nation building. Central Asians, particularly those in the sedentary regions of Mawarannahr, have been claiming Tīmūr for themselves as their native champion since the early eighteenth century. While the world around them – Imperial Russia, China under the Qing, India under the Mughals, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran under the Safavids and the following dynasties – was expanding in other directions, Central Asians were becoming more and more isolated, more and more absorbed in their own circumstances. Thus, Tīmūr's saga came into being almost intuitively – a product of an age that witnessed Central Asia's boundaries becoming clearer and the need for a rallying ethos in their own decentralized world growing stronger. Perhaps paradoxically, these processes also required the narrators and audiences to situate Central Asia in the world with very little knowledge of that world. It was a natural attempt to give Central Asia an "international" existence and significance that it deserved (in their minds, of course) without having to actually set foot outside its own borders. The biographies were leading the readers or listeners around the world, and the world, in turn, came to them. Despite the many interactions that Tīmūr held with other civilizations (mostly as a leader who had come to overpower them), an overwhelming sense of Central Asia's remoteness and lack of knowledge about the world emanates from the biographies. The quirk of fate was symbolized in the story of the seven distinguished ambassadors from China, India, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Russia, and Europe who arrived in Bukhara with the intent of killing the six-month-old infant, only to meet their untimely death by the hand (literally, the hand) of the local powers. Such a story not only portrayed the greatness of the Sufi shaykh and the glory of God but also bestowed great pride on the people of Bukhara, placing their town at the center of the narrative – and the universe.

Indeed, within Central Asia's geographic space in the narrative, Bukhara enjoyed one of the most central positions: the place that most influenced Tīmūr's youth and, consequently, Tīmūr's education and character. Once he left Bukhara as an adult, he was already self-assured, knew right from wrong, and assumed responsibility for his actions. Bukhara was the focal point of his encounters with his Sufi teachers and mentors, where he had received his spiritual training, and where he undertook tests administered by the unseen world. Bukhara was also the setting for Tīmūr's first love and eventual marriage. Not only was Bukhara the center of religious activity in the *Books of Tīmūr*, it was also the center of political power – the location of the khans' seat, the place that had shaped ideas on the nature of rulership and decreed who was entitled to govern. In fact, the story of Bukhara in the narrative may be analogous to the state of affairs in the area in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The biographies survived in dozens of manuscripts and different renditions. Whereas some of the texts were hastily copied and apparently used rather often, other manuscripts seem to have been valuable material objects. Such diversity may serve to further our conclusions that the texts were used by different audiences for different purposes and, as we have seen, even continue to be used in present-day Uzbekistan. One particularly elaborate copy (*TN 4436*) was even endowed as a *waqf* and bears numerous seals. This manuscript was copied from a text dated back to Shah Murād's time, and the colophon, mentioning the year 1282 A.H. as the date of copying, declares that the "*Tīmūr-nāma* of *ṣāḥib-qirān* was copied during the *ghazā* (namely, holy war) against the Russians." It seems likely that the text had been commissioned and executed as the Russian army was advancing toward the city of Jizak, or perhaps already after the memorable capture of the town and humiliation of its citizenry (at least from the Uzbek perspective). This copy may have assumed a very different understanding on the part of the audience, a call to unite against a foreign invader.[2]

Although it is clear to the historian that the historical Tīmūr and the Tīmūr of the *Tīmūr-nāma* were not identical,[3] it should be said that for most Central Asian readers and listeners in the eighteenth century (and beyond) it may have been the same figure, and the impact of this knowledge on them and the way in which this knowledge was brought to them through the unique style of the work was probably fairly significant. It created a figure that they could identify with; it reinforced a "Central Asian" culture and sent a didactic message regarding their place in the Muslim community. Of course, part of this ethos was to help shape a historical memory and the restoration of a great past. The work revolved around the main figure of the hero, who was not limited by some of the confines of more "historical" chronicles. Contrary to "historical" chronicles, the biographies' methodology of recording "events" was different, which is why *Books of Tīmūr* could not be a part of the canon but apocryphal creations that served different audiences. This is precisely their greatest worth for the historian: their ability to shed light on *audiences* in a particular time frame. Of course, such matters are rarely simple and straightforward. Even questions of authorship and patronage are still unresolved. At the same time, these heroic apocrypha also entertained relationships (structural, contentwise) – the exact nature of which is still to be determined – with the rich canon of historical works that have shaped Central Asia's past. Determining the *Tīmūr-nāma*'s relationship with Timurid literary pillars, for example, would make for fascinating case studies. Much has yet to be done.

[2] I intend to dedicate a separate paleographical study to this complex manuscript.

[3] See Amina Elbendary's comments on Baybars in Elbendary, "The Sultan, the Tyrant, and the Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of al-Zāhir Baybars," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 5 (2001): 151.

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