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Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the *Ṣāḥib-Qirān**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to look at the origins, employment, and claims associated with the title *ṣāḥib-qirān*. Occurring throughout the mediaeval to modern period, with special prominence during the early modern, the title underwent various transformations within particular polities and beyond. While any discussion of the *ṣāḥib-qirān* must give significant place to the life and career of Timur, the title is far older than the Central Asian conqueror. As is shown, roots of the title and its historical background suggest a pre-Islamic Iranian origin, particularly traced in Pahlavi literature.

Keywords

Ṣāḥib-Qirān, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction, Il-Khan, Mughal, Ottoman, Safavid, Titular, Amir Hamza

DEFINING THE *ṢĀḤIB-QIRĀN* AND ITS EARLY USES

Beginning with the Persian classical lexicography, the term *ṣāḥib-qirān* is known for its implications of important planetary conjunctions and a notion of a thirty years rule (for a summary of Persian *Farhangs* data on the term, see Dehxodā 1993, s.v.). While often commented upon and employed, the history of the term is far richer.

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Šāhib-qirān is a royal title that was fused with charismatic significance and universalist implications. A. Melikian-Chirvani (1992: 95-119) posits that the eulogistic title may have had its origins in pre-Islamic Iran. Commenting on the drinking ritual, *bazm*, the king by drinking a crescent boat, filled with wine, and earlier by blood, had symbolically brought together the new moon (the drinking vesicle) and the sun (the wine). This substitution of an earlier bull-sacrifice and blood libation with wine, Melikian-Chirvani contends, was a ceremony that continued unbroken and with little change from the Sasanian period to that of Mahmud of Ghazni. His conjecture, however, seems incredulous, although assumptions on the pre-Islamic Iranian origin of the title hardly raise objections.

The Pahlavi literature, indeed, preserved some vestiges of the conjunctions of the planets with the charisma and eulogistic ideas of certain rulers as being “world-conquerors” or “great personalities”. In the *Kārnāmāk-ī Araxsīr-ī Pābākān*, a 6th century Middle Persian text, the emergence of the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, Artashir, is foretold by the following conjunction of the stars: the fall of the Taurus; the culmination of Jupiter and its distance from Mars and Venus; and the Big Ursus and the constellation Leo encounter and support Jupiter (Kn.III, 5). Under this conjunction, as the text reads, “A new lord (*xvatāy*) and ruler (*pātixšāy*) will emerge (*ō paytākīh āyēt*), [who] will kill all small rulers and will bring again the world to the monarchical (*ēv-xvatāyīh*) rule” (Kn.III, 6).

A later Pahlavi apocalyptic writing, *Zand ī Vohuman Yasn* (III, 17-19), reveals a more conspicuous example of the idea. The text mentions the auspicious conjunction of the planets with regard to the appearance of a Saviour and, moreover, explicates his age at thirty years. Cf. “That prince (the Saviour) when he is thirty years old... When the star Jupiter comes up to its culminating points (*bālist*) and casts Venus down, the sovereignty comes to the prince” (West 1880: 221-222).

Most likely, the Islamicised term, *šāhib-qirān*, may be a translation, or a calque, from an earlier Middle Persian compound, having *xvatāy* “lord, ruler, owner” as one of its components. The term having been a possible reflection from a late MPers. compound like **axtarān-xvadāy* (?).

With pre-Islamic Iranian origins, it is in the 13th century that we see a proliferation of literary and historical usages of the term. The Persian historian Muhammad b. ‘Ali Ravandi in his writing (completed c. 1204-1205) celebrates his Seljuq patron, Ghiyath al-Din Kaykhusraw I, as the *Šāhib-qirān* (Meisami 2003: 265).

Other employments of the title come from the 13th century Mamluk Sultan of Egypt and Syria, Baybars I. His victories against Christian Crusaders and the Mongols at 'Ayn Jalut in 1260 helped formulate his self-image. Appealing to various forms of legitimacy, Baybars fashioned himself as the ideal Muslim sovereign, restorer of the Caliphate, protector of the holy sites, and a "New Alexander" (Aigle 2003: 73-77). The latter characteristic was part of a double titular, *Iskandar al-zamān, šāhib al-qirān* ("Alexander of the Age, the *šāhib-qirān*). This title has been inscribed on, at least, three monuments, including the Citadel in Damascus.

The Il-Khanid Persian histories set out to present the Mongol invasions within an Islamic context and consistent with Iranian concepts of justice and kingship. Ala'iddin Ata-Malik Juvayni (1226-1283) describes the *šāhib-qirān* as existing in every age, linking the contemporary ruler, Mongke Khan, with those epic heroes, such as Sasanian Shah Khosrau I and Hatim al-Tai, a famed pre-Islamic Arab poet and warrior known for his generosity (Juvayni 1997: 234). That both heroes had become legends in the popular imagination as pre-Islamic men of repute must have been consciously employed by Juvayni in an attempt to link the new ruler, Mongol Mongke Khan, with existing conceptions of legitimacy, based not on religion, but justice. The title thus seemed to have some associations with pre-Islamic figures that exuded justice.¹

Interestingly, another famous member of Hulegu's court and contemporary of Juvayni, Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, in his influential *Axlāq-i Naṣīrī*, emphasised the centrality of justice in governing an empire. Allowing for a broad interpretation of Shari'a, for Tusi, the just ruler's most important attribute is ensuring the well-being of all religious communities (Alam 2004: 49).

THE *ŠĀHIB-QIRĀN* ON THE LIMENS OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Juvayni's description of epic legendary figures as the *šāhib-qirān* seems to have been a common practice. Of the many heroes described as the *šāhib-qirān*, it is Amir Hamza that may have been the most famously linked to the term. In pre-Safavid Iran, the *qiṣṣa* (tale) of Amir Hamza featured as one of the five most popular stories (Hanaway 1970: 10).

¹ Incidentally, Nizari Quhistani, an Ismaili poet and bureaucrat, referred to the brother of Ata-Malik Juvayni, Shams al-Din, the *Šāhib-dīvān* (Minister of Finance), with the honorific title *Šāhib-i šāhib-qirān* (Jamal 2002: 136).

Believed to be based loosely on an amalgamation of Muhammad's famous uncle, Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib, renowned for his bravery and killed at the battle of Uhad, and a 9th century Persian warrior, Hamza bin Abdullah, who belonged to the Kharijite sect and rebelled against Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid, the *Qissa-i Hamza* (*Hamzanāma*) is the oldest of the early *dastans*, possibly originating in the 11th century. The epic gained widespread popularity and currency with an 11th century Arabic translation, a 12th century Georgian rendition, a 15th century Turkish edition, and 16th century editions in Malay and Javanese. Sudanese and Balinese versions are known to exist. The epic was especially popular in the 16th century court of Timurid-Mughal Emperor Akbar and continues to be popular amongst South Asian Muslims today.

The subject matter of the stories alternated between *razm o bazm*, tales from the battlefield and courtly enjoyment. Amir Hamza, the *Ṣāhib-qirān* world-conqueror, defeats all enemies and exhibits justice, generosity, and forgiveness. His battles are to propagate Islam. Amir Hamza is the *yāzī* (Ghazi) *par excellence*. He loyally fights for his Sasanian Persian king, despite the king's numerous betrayals. Hamza has no ambitions of his own, except propagating Islam, providing justice, and serving his king; thus, he is addressed as *amīr* (commander, prince). The text includes many elements of Islamicate folklore, including his superseding Alexander in conquest and surpassing Rustam in bravery. Guided by Prophet Khizr, Hamza is blessed by God.

From an early date the story of Hamza became popular in the Anatolian *Ghazi* milieu. In the cultural life of warring bands, oral traditions, especially 'literary-historical' narratives, had a key role in society's perceptions of its own ideals. *Ghazi* lore helps us understand how these segments read meaning into their actions on the frontier (Kafadar 1995: 9).

By 1400, many of the Hamza stories were collected and embellished in 24 volumes by Hamzavi, brother of the early Ottoman chronicler Ahmedi (Lang/Owens 1959: 473). This would have been under the orders of Sultan Bayezid I, who took pride in self-fashioning himself as a *Ghazi*, or, at least, as a king of *Ghazis* (Anooshahr 2004: 118-122). Stories of Amir Hamza may have had great appeal to the Sultan as an inspirational heroic model.

TIMUR AS THE ṢĀHIB-QIRĀN

If Timur had considered himself a *Ghazi* prior to his incursion into Anatolia, the historical evidence is sparse. Recent studies of the exchanges

between Timur and Ottoman Bayezid I prior to the Battle at Ankara in 1402 notes that Timur only becomes aware of *yaza* as an ideology of legitimacy through this correspondence. Absent in his earlier letters, Timur began to appropriate the ideology of *yaza* in his self-address to Bayezid I. By his final letter, Timur refers to himself as a *Ghazi*, presumably giving a new reading to his campaigns in India (Anooshahr 2004: 116-126).

When Timur did begin to see himself as a *Ghazi*, the legend of Amir Hamza may have had even greater appeal. Although I have yet to discover direct evidence of the legend in his court, undoubtedly Timur took a great interest in various histories and epics. The Damascene Ibn 'Arabshah in his acerbic *'Ajāyib al-maḡdūr* (The Wonders of Destiny) remarks: "Whether traveling or at rest, he was assiduous in listening to the reading of chronicles, the stories of prophets (prayers and peace upon them), the deeds of kings, and the accounts of men of the past, all in Persian. As these readings were repeated to him and their measures resounded in his ears, he so grasped and retained their substance that it became as a second nature to him to such an extent that if a reader stumbled he would correct him, even a jackass learns from repetition! He was illiterate and could not read, write, or understand Arabic, he knew no languages other than Persian, Turkish, and Mongol" (Woods 1987: 82).

The *Hamzanāma* and its use of terminology, such as *ṣāhib-qirān* and *gītī-sitān*, may have had special resonance to the actual world-conqueror. If this should be the case, then even his usual title *amīr* may not have been in humility, as often described (Manz 2002: 3), but may have been used to link Timur to a long list of heroic 'commanders' and 'princes' as Hamza or the paragon of *Ghazi*-kings, Amir Mahmud of Ghazni.

Folklore may not have been the only locus through which Timur appropriated the title *ṣāhib-qirān*. In fact, it is hardly the most well-known association. As provided in the lexical definition, the term *qirān*, generically, refers to astrological conjunctions. Some have located Timur's reign and use of planetary determinism in the title *ṣāhib-qirān* as linked to new ideas, largely propagated by Sufis in the 13th and 14th centuries that sought to reconnect rationale, using magical ideas, but not wholly dependent on *Shari'a* for a worldview (Nagel 1993: 13).

The important role of astrology and cosmology has been well-studied in the life of Timur's descendents: from his grandson's and one-time heir-apparent, Iskandar Sultan's illuminated horoscope (Caozzo 2005: 115-144), to Ulugh Beg and his observatory (Bartol'd 1962), to Huma-

yun's astrological readings of his "carpet of joy" (Orthmann 2008: 297-306), to Abu'l Fazl's usage of astrology to show Akbar's superiority over Timur (Orthmann 2005: 115-144), etc.

The traditional date given for Timur's birthdate is April 8, 1336. E. Orthmann (2005, fn. 35) has determined that the date does, in fact, coincide with an 'auspicious conjunction' of Mars and Jupiter. B. Manz (1988, fn. 33) has surmised that without contemporary evidence, the date was probably a later invention, in order to coincide with the death of the last Il-Khan and the astrological significance. Whether the date is correct or a later invention, the title *ṣāhib-qirān* was adopted by Timur and employed during his lifetime. In the only existing historical work written before the conqueror's death, Nizam al-Din 'Ali Shami uses the term in the introduction to his *Zafarnāma* (1404) (Ghani 1983: 14).

The title indicates something from the heavens. Timur helped to mould the myths around his origins and claims. Although officially paying homage to Chingiz Khan, Timur and his propagandists sought not for him to merely be a restorer of the Khanid order, but a second, yet equal to, Chingiz Khan (Manz 1988: 107). He had a talent for grandiosity and theatre. His buildings were big (Lentz/Lowry 1989: 17-49), his kettles were big (Komaroff 1984), and his massacres, although infrequent, even bigger (Manz 2002: 4).

Hardly modest about his supernatural pretensions, Timur claimed direct contact with angels, prophetic visions, and even access to a ladder from the sky (Aubin 1963: 88-89). Although 'Ibn Arabshah may have been exaggerating to refute Timur's Islamic claims, the Damascene captive provides us a window into the soldiers' relationship with their charismatic leader: "[His followers] took him as their guide and protector independent of God, glorying in this and being outrageously insolent (about it). Indeed, their denial of Islam (*kufṛ*) and their love for him were so great that had he claimed the rank of prophet or even divinity, they would have believed him in his claim... So strong was their [psychological] attachment to him that they attained the [spiritual] stage (*maqām*) where they [were able to] visualise [him] contemplatively" (Subtelny 2007: 13).

Timur was able to forge a synthesis between Turko-Mongolian conceptions of authority based on charisma (*qul*) and Perso-Islamic notions of royal glory (*farr*), good fortune (*daulat*, *baxt*), and manifest destiny (*maqḍūr*) (Subtelny 2007: 11). All of these were linked to his ambitions of being a world-conqueror. In his exchange with Ottoman Bayezid I, Timur states in his second letter that he is of superior rank as he is a 'world-conqueror'. His universalist claims can be heard as he takes a

patriarchal position: “The kings and the sultans of the world... are a large group who are proud to serve in our path with their lives, in spite of the dignity of their rank and pomp. Then why does he [Bayezid] cause anxiety, especially since we are like a father to him in age?” (Anooshahr 2004: 120). This universalist sentiment was echoed with Clavijo, who notes that Timur asked about the health of “my son, the king of Spain” (Manz 1999: 16).

Although the historian Shami used the term *Ṣāhib-qirān* for Timur, it does not feature prominently in his work. In the title of his *Zafarnāma*, he used Timur’s title as *xāqān* (*Khaqan*) instead. It is Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi’s *Zafarnāma*, completed in 1425, and its subsequent influence and popularity that solidified the connection between Timur and the title *ṣāhib-qirān* for posterity. Immediately after its penning, the work was widely acclaimed for its elegance and style and became a model of historical writing in Iran, Central Asia, and India (Wood 1987: 99). Yazdi’s work is largely a revision of Shami, but there are additional sections and different ideological impulses that shaped the work. A comparison of the two texts shows a common substitution, where Shami wrote *Amīr-i buzurg Teymūr-i Gurkanī* in connection with Timur, highlighting Timur’s subservience to the house of Chingiz Khan, Yazdi replaces these with the majestic *Hazrat-i Ṣāhib-i Qirān*. Yazdi goes so far as to methodically eliminate the Chingiz figure-head altogether in his text (ibid.: 104). While these changes possibly reflect the magnified place of Timur as a source of legitimacy, as well as his descendants’ elimination of a Chingiz figure-head, due to the compositions’ popularity they helped codify a particular image of Timur, a charismatic individual, and link him to the title *Ṣāhib-qirān*.

The numismatic evidence shows that Timur preserved the name of the Chingiz puppet head and referred to himself as *Amīr Teymūr-i Gurkanī*. However, his successors, including his son Shahrukh, had no quibble in calling themselves *Sultan* or *Khaqan* (Lane-Poole 1882: 3-44), but left the *Ṣāhib-qirān* (Samarqandi 1989: 299-321) to only be associated with Timur.

LATER ṢĀHIB-QIRĀNS

In the year 1000 of the Hijra, Ottoman bureaucrat, Mustafa ‘Ali, began writing his chronicle of world history, *The Essence of History*. In the fourth volume (*rukṅ* “pillar”) of the *Essence*, ‘Ali discusses the four polities of the Islamic world—the Ottomans, Safavids, Uzbeks, and Timurid—Mughals. Moving beyond regional sovereignty, ‘Ali designates

a hierarchy of sovereignty through introducing two categories: “succour of Allah” and *ṣāhib-qirān*. While the former title denotes a sovereign never defeated in battle and could be applied to three Ottoman Sultans—Mehmed II, Selim, and Suleyman, the latter term signified a world conqueror that established universal dominion. For ‘Ali, there were only three that could be called *ṣāhib-qirān*—Alexander, Chingiz Khan, and Timur. The *ṣāhib-qirān* marks the highest form of sovereignty.

After establishing these categories, ‘Ali returns to the Battle of Ankara, pitting Bayezid I against Timur. Taking issue with Ottoman historians’ vilification of Timur, he submits that Bayezid should have deferred to Timur for the latter as *ṣāhib-qirān* had a superior status than Bayezid, a mere regional Sultan (Anooshahr: 285). In ‘Ali’s presentation, we have a theoretical framework for understanding the *ṣāhib-qirān*. ‘Ali’s interest in the title and defining it underpinnings may not be surprising considering earlier conversations in the Ottoman court.

After victory over the Mamluk Sultanate, Sultan Selim added the three holy cities of Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina into his empire. A Persian prologue to the *Nigbolu kanunnamesi*, composed in 1517, soon after his victories, lauds the Sultan as the *Sahib-qiran*. However, the usage was limited only to Selim’s battlefield prowess. The latter term continued to be applied to his son, Sultan Suleyman—known in the West as Suleyman the Magnificent—for very different reasons.

Numerous studies have highlighted the charged atmosphere filled with messianic expectation and apocalyptic apprehension in 16th century Mediterranean (Parker 2002: 167-221), indeed, for much of Eurasia (Subrahmanyam 1997: 735-762). Sultan Suleyman was hardly immune to such visions of himself.

In the year 960 A.H. (1552-1553), Muslim astrologers had predicted the coming of the *Ṣāhib-qirān*—the great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. Expectations were palpable in the Ottoman court, and a substratum of the political culture, actively promoted and fostered by Sultan Suleyman, portended his messianic role. Ibrahim Pasha, the grand-vizier from 1523 until his execution in 1536, in his correspondence with the Sultan, forgoes customary Islamic titles to almost exclusively use *ṣāhib-qirān* (Fleischer 1992: 166-167).



Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566)

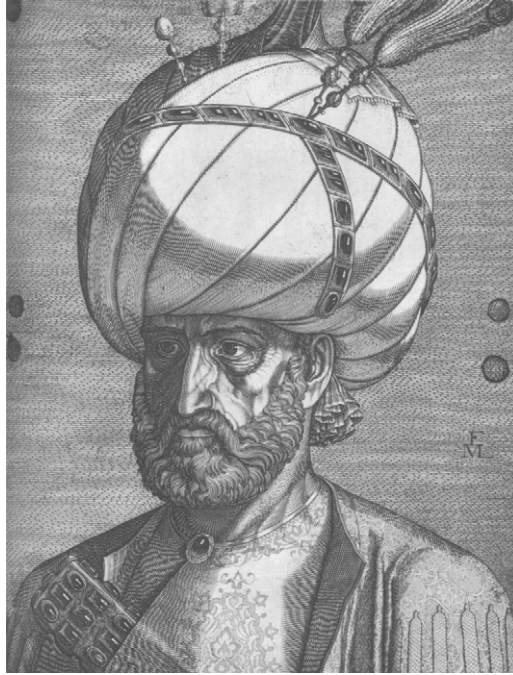
(F. Majoros, Bernd Rill, *Das Osmaische Reich 1300-1922*, Bechtermünz Verlag, 2002: 214)

Who would assume the title of *ṣāhib-qirān* was even the stage for an epic battle between Phillip II and Suleyman. In a composition, written in 1543, titled *Cami ul-Meknunat* (The Compendium of Hidden Things), Mevlana 'Isa discusses the rivalry between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI and Suleyman the Magnificent, for the claim to be the *ṣāhib-qirān* and for the victory of one universal religion. Mevlana 'Isa assembles his evidence to buttress Suleyman's claims and the triumph of Islam. Such writings were hardly exceptional. In 1556-1557, a *kadi* of Nigde, named Haki, wrote his *Suleymanname* claiming Suleyman as the *ṣāhib-qirān* and that the Sultan is in direct communication with God as the title suggests, in some way similar to Timur's own claims (ibid: 169).

Others suggested that Suleyman was the awaited *Mahdi*. In 1532, Suleyman began wearing a special tiara with four crowns, a symbol of the last world emperor. Fleischer contends that Suleyman, likely, believed in his messianic identity until the last years of his life, although

after 1550 a shift occurs in the written sources away from such messianic forecasts (Fleischer 1992: 171).

Although Sultan Suleyman had periods of flirtation with projecting himself as the *Mahdi*, Shah Isma'il and his Qizilbash followers actively embraced it.



Shah Isma'il (r. 1502-1524)
(D. Blow, *Shah Abbas*, L.B. Tauris, 2009: 82+)

While it was the *yulāt* (*ghulat*) spirit that was tapped to bring Shah Isma'il into power, that same spirit would be branded as heresy and the very partners in power, the Qizilbash, would find themselves soon “betrayed”. In its stead, a new form of Imamite Shi'ism would become the dominant state ideology. The process was hardly linear.

A break from the past could be seen as early as the reign of Shah Isma'il's son and successor, Shah Tahmasp. In Shah Tahmasp's *Memoir*, one can see his move to reject his father's role as a messiah-God and cast his own role as a saintly king (Babayan 2002: 299). Such a shift was not uncontested by other writers in the Shah's court. Amir Mahmud, the son of one of Shah Isma'il's chroniclers, Khwandamir, describes Shah Isma'il as being directly guided by the Imam and the *Ṣāhib-qirān*.

Shah Tahmasp's brother, Sam Mirza, in his *Tazkire*, calls his father the *Ṣāhib-qirān* in lieu of his divine favour and victories in battle, though the writing had followed the defeat at Chaldiran.

While those that called Shah Isma'il the *Ṣāhib-qirān*, consciously edged towards the threshold of Mahdism, his great-grandson used the title with a vastly different ideology. Shah Isma'il created an instable absolutism related to his charisma and a Mahdi eschatology; Shah 'Abbas created an absolutism related to his charisma with new institutions wholly dependent and loyal to him and through strengthening a more stable religious ideology.

The use of "Timurid legitimacy" was widespread in the historical writing during the reign of Shah 'Abbas. Iskandar Beg Munshi in his famed chronicle calls his patron *Ṣāhib-qirān*, stating that "From the time of his birth up to the present day, there has occurred the conjunction of the celestial bodies, the prognostications of which corroborate events in the life of Shah 'Abbas" (Quinn 2000: 49-50).

Quinn believes that the attempt to link Timur and Shah 'Abbas emanated from the historians, because either the Timurid legacy at the time of Shah 'Abbas' reign was still a "real force" or the loss of previous 'pillars of legitimacy' required new models (ibid.: 52, 91). Extending from the last possibility, the fact that the move was consonant with the number of chroniclers seems to suggest that it was Shah 'Abbas and not the historians that was the *prima facie* driver.

The alleged encounter between Timur and the Safaviyyah order has long been the subject of debate. The subsequent *vaqf*, supposedly issued by Timur, is largely considered a forgery. That the story of the encounter only came to Safavid notice during the reign of Shah 'Abbas may explain his attempts at myth-creation and self-fashioning. The *vaqf* document was not only mentioned, but a copy was sent to Mughal Prince Salim (later Jahangir). Quinn suggests that a forgery sent to such a high level member of the neighbouring empire could only be authorised by Shah 'Abbas (ibid.: 89). It seems possible that the entire "encounter" sequence was created at the Shah's instigation as well.

Another indicator of the Shah's role in forging the connection between him and Timur can be read in Iskandar Beg's account of the successful siege of Yerevan in the Caucasus in 1603-4. Upon the arrival of the Mughal ambassador, Mir Muhammad Ma'sum Khan, gifts from the Timurid-Mughal emperor, Akbar, to the young Shah were presented. Iskandar Beg writes: "Among the gifts brought by the Indian ambassador were a scabbard and coat of mail wrought of gold and studded with small diamonds and other costly jewels. The gift of a sword, coming at

this particular time from a descendant of Timur, who had always triumphed over his Indian and Afghan enemies, was hailed as a happy augury of the Shah's ultimate victory in Azerbaijan and Shirvan... The gifts sent by the Emperor were piled on top of one another at the entrance to the royal pavilion, waiting for the Shah to have time to inspect them, but the Shah was too busy with the prosecution of the siege to look at anything except the sword, that portent of good fortune" (Monshi 1978: 837-838). The importance given to the sword was at the behest of Shah 'Abbas and not Iskandar Beg. It is also noteworthy that the sword was auspicious, because it came from "a descendant of Timur" and not merely from Akbar, despite Akbar, arguably being the most powerful and prestigious ruler of Islamic lands at the time.

Unlike the application of the term *ṣāhib-qirān* to his great-grandfather, Shah Isma'il, Shah 'Abbas did not use the title in a messianic sense, but through the filter of the *Zafarnāma*. For Shah 'Abbas the title had already long-been de-Chingizised, hyper-Islamicised, and used to celebrate the charisma of Timur. With success against the Uzbeks, Ottomans, and Timurid-Mughals, Shah 'Abbas may have saw himself just as charismatic, just as victorious, and in battle just as blessed with divine providence. The image of Timur may have had particular appeal to Shah 'Abbas as he was inaugurating the "Isfahani Era of Absolutism" in 1590 (Babayan 2002: 349-402).

It was not only in the royal court that the title had currency. The Nuqtavis, an early modern *yūlāt* movement with a Persianate ethos used the term in their esoteric writings. Mahmud Pasikhani (d. 1427), the founder of the Nuqtavis, wrote: "What in Ajami we say twelve thousand is the right of the Ajami Sun who is the last *Ṣāhib-qirān* and the seal of manifestation and laws and is the complete manifestation" (Babayan 2002: 75).

Associating Mazdean apocalypics with Muslim eschatology, Mahmud claims that at the end of the 12,000 year cycle the "Ajami Sun" (a Persian saviour), the last *Ṣāhib-qirān*, will end the rule of the Arabs (Islam) and restore Persian reign.

Sensing the threat of the Nuqtavis, Shah 'Abbas moved to have the major figures imprisoned and executed. Iskandar Beg asserts that "if anyone escaped punishment, they either fled to India or found themselves a corner and remained anonymous, so that in Iran the way of me-tempsychosis [reference to Nuqtavi beliefs] was abolished" (Babayan 2002: 6).

Many with Nuqtavi beliefs did, in fact, flee to India to escape persecution. One of the most famous men of the Mughal court, accused by Is-

kandar Beg of being a Nuqtavi, was Shaikh Abu'l Fazl, whose patron was the Great Mughal—Akbar Badshah.

Despite the grandeur of Akbar's pretensions, this seventh generation descendent of the "house of Timur" rarely used the title *ṣāhib-qirān*. Few usages in quasi-official inscriptions, such as inscription of 1567-8 at Jaunpur and one of 1577-8 at A'zampur, can be found (Habib 1997: 300). In the panegyric *Tārix-i Akbarī* we find its sparse employment (Quinn 2000: 135-136). Irfan Habib does not believe that usage emanated from Akbar, but was rather only a bureaucratic tendency (Habib 1997: 301).

A possible reason for not using the title, especially at the end of his reign, may have come from Akbar's main ideologue, Shaikh Abu'l Fazl. In his *Akbarnāma*, a key ideological component is to show that Akbar was greater than his illustrious ancestor. In recounting the birth horoscope of Akbar, Abu'l Fazl drives the point of Akbar's superiority: "And those intimate friends of his Majesty [Humayun] [...] have been heard to tell that when his Majesty had the auspicious horoscope shown to him and had considered it, it happened several times that when in his private chamber and with the doors all closed, he fell adancing, and from excess of exaltation, revolved with a circular motion. [...] And he many times said to those who were privileged to converse with him, that the horoscope of this Light of Fortune [Akbar] was superior, in several respects and by sundry degrees, to that of his Majesty, the Lord of Conjunctions (Timur) as, indeed, clearly appears to the scrutinising students of the prognostications" (Fazl 1977: 123).

Another interesting point worthy of note relates to Akbar's patronage of the *Hamzanāma*. Although scholars have tended to see the mammoth production, believed to have been over 14 volumes with 1400 illustrations, as merely "whimsical", that Amir Hamza should be constantly referred to as the *Ṣāhib-qirān*, the principal title of Amir Timur, could not have been completely lost on the audience. Even the *Ghazi* nature of Amir Hamza has been downplayed by scholars, as it has not been prominent in the artwork (Seyller 2002: 17). Still it plays a vital role in placing the character, understanding his motives, and providing a narrative. It should also not be forgotten that *Ghazi* was an important title that Akbar and his successors attached to his name.

While Akbar rarely used the title *ṣāhib-qirān*, Prince Salim called himself the Second *Ṣāhib-qirān* intermittently. It was his son, however, Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan), that made it a regular part of his titular. Upon inheriting the throne, Shah Jahan assumed the title *Ṣāhib-qirān-i thānī*. For Shah Jahan, it seems that the title not only directly linked him with his ancestor, Timur, who at the accession ceremony was referred

to as *Ṣāhib-qirān-i avval* (first), but could have been deemed an appropriate expression of the new emperor's dramatic early military successes, while still a prince, in Mewar (1613), Kangra (1618), and in the Deccan (1620-1).

Shah Jahan's titular showed his disposition towards his Central Asian heritage and created imagined connections and possibilities. Although all of his predecessors had inclinations towards their Mawarannahr roots, Shah Jahan's propensity—Foltz (1996: 61) calls it an “obsession”)—towards his ancestral homelands seems, especially striking. His architecture was profoundly influenced by that of his ancestors in Samarqand (Hoag 1968: 234-248); his love of falconry, greater than that of his predecessors, displayed an air of Central Asian sophistication (Jahangir 1968); he was the first Mughal emperor that attempted an ill-fated 40 million rupee disastrous expedition to Balkh (Foltz 1996: 61); it may have also been this same enthusiasm that led him to channel his religiosity towards the Central Asian Naqshbandis, rather than other Sufi orders.

The importance Shah Jahan gave to this title can be detected even in private moments: when, for instance, gifting a book to his daughter, he dedicated it to her using the title *ṣāhib-qirān*. The note is hand-written rather than employing the imperial seal: “I gave this special book, which is my own property, on Monday the eleventh of Tir, year 8 of the reign, corresponding to the sixteenth of Muharram 1045 Hijri [2 July 1635], in the capital Akbarabad to my dear felicitous child, precious as my soul, Jahan Ara Begam. Written by the Second Lord of the Conjunction” (Seyller 1997: 247).

Still, before the defeat at Balkh, when Shah Jahan's self-fashioning as a Second *Ṣāhib-qirān* was greatest, it seems courtiers attempted to take advantage of the emperor's obsession. In 1637, Mir Abu Taleb Torbati appeared with his Turkic *Memoirs of the Ṣāhib-qirān*. Compiled in the “tongue” of Timur, it was written to seem as if dictated directly by Timur. While many historians have debated its authenticity or even if an earlier Turkic version really existed, the key point is the emperor's exuberance. So well-known in the court was his fascination with Timur that his courtiers even attempted forgery to satiate his obsession (Habib 1997: 310).

The Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals were not the last to continue employing the title. For those, such as Nadir Shah that desired to link himself with the memory of Timur, the title was a popular expression (see Tucker 2006: 68-79). Even moving into the modern period, the Qajar rulers, Fath 'Ali Shah and his great-grandson, Nasir al-Din Shah, called

themselves *ṣāhib-qirāns*. While Fath ‘Ali Shah had coinage minted with these titular after victories over the Ottomans and Afghans, by the time of Nasir al-Din Shah (see Amanat 2008), the title seems more connected to the bureaucratisation of the state. Rather than merit, it was his status of having ruled for thirty years that he used as the bases of calling himself the *Ṣāhib-qirān*.

CONCLUSIONS

Iskandar Beg, possibly understanding the panegyric value of the *ṣāhib-qirān*, wrote: “It will not have escaped the notice of perspicacious persons that the title *ṣāhib-qirān* has, in the past, frequently been bestowed on princes by secretaries wishing to flatter their masters” (Quinn 2000: 49). Of course, he follows this statement with his presentation why the term does appropriately apply to his patron: “In the case of Shah ‘Abbas, however, it is a verifiable fact [that he is the *Ṣāhib-qirān*]” (ibid: 49). Undeniably the title at times was used as mere sycophantic plaudit. Still, in the contexts of rulers and chroniclers discussed it had real meaning and applications.

The meaning was not static, even within chronicles of the same imperial traditions, and could be used for *Mahdi*-tendencies and eschatology or to celebrate individual achievement. Battlefield successes and charisma were key elements in its application, while for Timur and even for Mustafa ‘Ali’s typologies, the element of being a “world-conqueror” and its universalist claims were a *raison d’être* for its usage. In the early modern period, the memory of Timur was being invoked by using the titular. For rulers, such as Shah ‘Abbas, the career of Timur could be used to celebrate his victories and begin to transform the exiting state ideology. For Nadir Shah, conjuring the memory of Timur, both explicitly and implicitly, was used to create a new form of sovereignty that relied on charisma and success, opening radical possibilities, rather than older forms of dynastic legitimacy (Subrahmanyam 2000: 368).

The discussion of the *ṣāhib-qirān* over such a wide region also attests to the “connected history” of its usage. Through time and space, the title was one of the “ideas and mental constructs [that] flowed across political boundaries”, having local expressions, but being part of an extended imperial vocabulary that informed these regions (Subrahmanyam 1997: 747-748). Through claims and counterclaims, the title formed a part of Eurasian imperial dialogue from mediaeval times to the modern.

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