

## **Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty**

The great nomad conqueror Timur set out to conquer the whole of the former Mongol Empire and almost succeeded. Although the dynasty he founded lasted a relatively short time, he became a legendary figure within the Turco-Mongolian tradition of the Middle East and Central Asia, the subject of an elaborate myth connecting the Timurid dynasty with that of Chinggis Khan.<sup>1</sup>

The dynastic claims formulated by Timur's successors remained alive and relevant to those within the tradition up to the nineteenth century. Timur's myth assumed its final form well after his death, but it had its origins in Timur's own formulation of his legitimacy and his personality as a ruler.

Timur's achievements as the founder of a dynasty and a myth are the more impressive because he operated under severe restraints within both the traditions to which he belonged, the Turco-Mongolian and the Islamic. According to the tradition of the Mongol Empire from which Timur sprang, only the descendants of Chinggis Khan could adopt the title of Khan and aspire to sovereign power. In the Islamic world the title of Sultan suggested supreme rule within one region and was therefore the property rather of the formal ruler -- a Chinggisid khan -- than of Timur himself. Both the Islamic and the Turco-Mongolian traditions were widely accepted within the area that Timur ruled -- in Transoxiana, where his rule originated, and in the regions he conquered and incorporated.

All of the lands that Timur conquered were both Islamic -- formally at least -- and within territories ruled by Turks or Mongols. Even Turkic rulers outside the Mongolian tradition had accepted some aspects of it. The Qaraqyunlu dynasty of Turkmen origin honored

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<sup>1</sup> Several scholars have examined the Timurid genealogical myth in its mature form: See for example Mano Eiji, "Amir Timur Kuragan --Timur ke no keifu to Timur no tachiba", *Toyocho-Kenkyu*, vol. 34.4, pp. 591-615, English summary pp. 4-5; and more recently, John E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy", unpublished paper.

the Chinggisid tradition.<sup>2</sup> There was also some Mongol influence in the Mamluk Sultanate, though its extent is a matter of controversy.<sup>3</sup> Despite his enormous power and the autocratic nature of his rule, Timur adhered to their restrictions with scrupulous correctness. He used for himself only the modest title of *amir* -- commander--, embellishing it with the adjectives *bozorg* or *kalan* --great. Although they were not part of Timur's formal titulature, the words *khaghan* and *ṣultān* were occasionally applied to him.<sup>4</sup> He was quick to point out the moderation of his official claims even to people outside his jurisdiction and his tradition.<sup>5</sup> Timur however, did not see himself merely as a commander, nor did he express his position only in these terms. He and his chroniclers evolved instead a number of myths to justify his career of conquest and rule. He came to power within the boundaries of the Mongol Empire; Transoxiana was the center of the Ulus Chaghatay, part of the inheritance of Chinggis Khan's second son Chaghadai.<sup>6</sup>

To justify his power, he posed as protector and restorer of the Chaghadayid house and installed a Chinggisid puppet khan as many others like him had done, including the tribal chiefs who had controlled the Ulus Chaghatay before him. This Chaghadayid legitimation, though useful and acceptable to the Turco-Mongolian nomads who made up Timur's army and administration, could not justify the wide-ranging conquests which occupied most of his life. For this purpose he formulated a broader myth showing himself as a restorer not only of the Chaghadayid house, but of the whole world order established by Chinggis Khan -- disrupted both by upheavals within the Chinggisid dynasty and by the rise of illegitimate, non-Chinggisid powers. These two representations of Timur's function had one fundamental flaw; they automatically relegated him to a subordinate position as protector and restorer of the charismatic Chinggisid house. Timur was a man of enormous ambition and almost equal accomplishment. To express his actual position as sovereign over a new and large dominion he needed something beyond this, and he achieved it by fostering a personal myth -- based, indeed, largely on his own actions -- showing his career and personality in the traditional mold of nomad conquerors and dynastic

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<sup>2</sup> John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu, Clan, Confederation, Empire*, Minneapolis, 1976, pp. 4-5

<sup>3</sup> D. Ayalon, "The Great Yasa of Chingiz Khan. A Reexamination", *Studia Islamica*, vols. 33, 34, 36, 38 (1971, 1972, 1973)

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi, trans. A.A. Semenov, *Giasaddin Ali, Dnevnik pokhoda Timura v Indiiu*, Moscow, 1958, p. 21 (hereafter *Rūznāmeḥ*)

<sup>5</sup> W.J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane*, Berkeley, 1952, p. 37; Jean of Sultāniyya, "Mémoires sur Tamerlan et sa cour par un Dominicain en 1403," ed., H. Moranvillé, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, vol. 55 (1894), pp. 444-445.

<sup>6</sup> For the Ulus Chaghatay, whose population spoke Turkic, I have used the Turkic spelling of the Mongolian name Chaghadai.

founders. According to this formulation Timur was not simply the restorer of the Chinggis Khanid order, but himself a second, equal, Chinggis Khan.

### *The Sources*

Timur expressed his various claims in different ways according to his audience, and the records available to us vary considerably in the amount and type of information they provide. A brief review of the major sources is necessary for an understanding of Timur's methods. For this study I have limited myself largely to works written actually during Timur's lifetime in order to avoid elaborations of the dynastic myth by later Timurid historians. The best known sources on Timur's career are the formal dynastic histories, but few of those composed during Timur's lifetime have come down to us. We have only the *Zafarnāmeḥ* which Nizam al-Din Shami wrote for Timur in 1404, and the *Rūznāmeḥ-yi ghazawāt-i Hindūstān* of Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi, of which the introduction and the third section were probably written before Timur's death.<sup>7</sup> Although these historians were personally acquainted with Timur, they were strictly bound by the conventions of Persian historiography, and their works rarely reflect ideas running counter to the established Iranian and Islamic traditions. Nor do they give anything more than a stylized picture of Timur's personality and personal claims. It was not only the chroniclers who distorted material to fit an accepted pattern; Timur himself, when providing information for such chronicles, apparently censored his accounts of his early years.<sup>8</sup>

Another source of information on Timur's claims is his official correspondence, particularly his letters to rulers whom he intended to attack.<sup>9</sup> Here Timur, addressing a more immediate audience and intent on the justification of his expansionist claims, gave a much less sober account of his aims and position and went well beyond the accepted Persian accounts of Mongol history. Timur's correspondence presents a more personal and immediate expression of his dynastic ideology, but it too was composed at least in part by his Persian bureaucrats, and was formal in origin and intent. For a more personal description of Timur's personality and conversation we must turn to another set of works which originated outside the Timurid bureaucratic tradition and aimed not to justify or to

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<sup>7</sup> John E. Woods, "The Rise of Timūrid Historiography," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 46.2 (1987), pp.94-95

<sup>8</sup> Woods, "Historiography", p. 82; Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, *Zafarnāmeḥ*, ed., Mohammad Abbasi, (Tehran, 1336/1957) vol. I, pp. 18-19 (hereafter ZNY). This refers actually to a Turkish rather than a Persian history, and to one which has not survived.

<sup>9</sup> Prof. John E Woods has pointed out the importance of this source in his article, "Timuūr's Genealogy," p. 25.

immortalize Timur's reign but to present to a foreign audience a portrait of Timur as man and ruler. These authors did not attempt to portray Timur as an ideal type and were therefore free to report behavior and utterances which did not conform to Perso-Islamic traditions. It is here, finally, that we can discover how Timur presented himself to those around him and to the foreign ambassadors who visited his court. We are fortunate in having several such sources, independently written and of widely varying provenance.

The longest and most detailed of these sources is Ibn Arabshah's famous biography of Timur, the *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr fī akhbār Timūr*. Ibn Arabshah was a native of Damascus, born in 791/1392, whom Timur bore back to Samarqand after his conquest of Damascus in 1400-01. He was later associated with Timur's personal follower Allahdad, and remained in Transoxiana until 811/1408-9. When he left Transoxiana, he went to Moghulistan, then travelled west, first to the Dasht-i Qipchaq, thence to the Ottoman Empire, and eventually back to Damascus.<sup>10</sup>

Although Ibn Arabshah's personal acquaintance with Timur was probably slight, his association with his courtiers, relatives and followers was longer and more intimate. The information they gave him seems to have been one of the major sources for his work, which, although strongly negative, shows a more personal view of Timur than do any of the histories written for the Timurid dynasty.

Another famous source on Timur's court and personality is the travel account of the Spanish envoy Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, covering the years 1403-1406, which gives a vivid picture of Timur's great Khuriltay on the eve of his Chinese campaign in 1404.<sup>11</sup> Clavijo spent approximately fourteen months in Timur's dominions during which time he and his companions were escorted and entertained by a large number of Timur's followers, from whom he learned details of Timur's career and personality.

A less known source also provides information of considerable value to us. In 1403 the Dominican Jean, Archbishop of Sultaniyya, undertook an embassy to Europe on behalf both of Timur and of his son Amiranshah, and there wrote for a European

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<sup>10</sup> F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Geschichtschreiber der Araber und ihre Werke*, Göttingen, 1882, pp. 216-217; Ibn Arabshāh, trans., J.H. Sanders, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir*, London, 1936, pp. 238, 248-57, 283-90; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, N.E., "Ibn Arabshah"

<sup>11</sup> Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, trans., Guy Le Strange, *Narrative of the Spanish Embassy to the Court of Timur at Samarkand in the Years 1403-1406*, London, 1928

audience a report on Timur's life and personality.<sup>12</sup> It is not clear how closely Jean of Sultaniyya was connected to Timur himself, though he claims to have influenced his attitude towards Christians.<sup>13</sup> What is certain is that Jean had cordial relations with Amiranshah and his followers, from whom he had opportunity to learn about Timur. He had served as bishop at Nakhchiwan, also in Amiranshah's dominions, before his transfer to Sultaniyya in 1398, and he included in his work warm praise of Amiranshah, a description of his family, his rule and his court.<sup>14</sup>

Two accounts of Timur's campaign in Syria, translated by Walter Fischel, provide some additional information. One of these is Ibn Khaldun's description of his meeting with Timur after the conquest of Damascus, another a report by an Italian merchant, Bertrando de Mignanelli, who was resident in Damascus at this time.<sup>15</sup> Both of these reproduce the stories which were current about Timur in the area, and Ibn Khaldun, in addition, reports on his appearance and conversation.

What gives these sources especial value is their independence from Timurid historiography. Few of their authors knew Timur and his court as well as did the Persian chroniclers, nor did they have at their disposal the documentation available to Timurid historians. Their accounts of Timur's career, particularly during his rise to power, are often confused and are much less circumstantial than those in the dynastic histories. Nonetheless, it is clear that these observers shared a common fund of reliable information. Both their origins and their viewpoints vary widely -- Clavijo for instance was rather favorably inclined towards Timur, while Ibn Arabshah was outspokenly hostile -- but their descriptions of Timur are nonetheless in considerable agreement, and in some areas strikingly similar.

These accounts preserve for us two valuable sources elsewhere lost or distorted, the utterances of Timur himself and the stories told about him by his personal followers; and these they used, moreover, without the censorship displayed by court historians. They thus give us a picture of the way Timur himself presented his personality and his career to those around him, particularly to the Turco-Mongolian nomads whose support was most crucial to him. This

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<sup>12</sup> Jean of Sultāniyya, pp. 433-35; W.J. Fischel, "A New Latin Source on Tamerlane's Conquest of Damascus (1400-1401)," *Oriens*, vol. 9 (1956), p. 204 (hereafter Mignanelli)

<sup>13</sup> Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 462

<sup>14</sup> Sylvestre de Sacy, "Mémoire sur une correspondance inédite de Tamerlan avec Charles VI," *Memoires de l'Institut Royal de France, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, vol. VI, Paris 1822, p. 506; Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 446

<sup>15</sup> See above: Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane*; Fischel, "A New Latin Source"

picture differs sometimes significantly from that presented by the Timurid historians, and it offers valuable insight into Timur's personal use of myth and symbol in the formulation of his public personality.

### *The Legitimation of Timur's Rule*

The first justification that Timur sought, the most sober and formal one, was as ruler over the Ulus Chaghatay. This is the legitimation mirrored and later elaborated in official Timurid historiography. On his accession to power over the Ulus Chaghatay, indeed somewhat before it, Timur chose a Chinggisid puppet khan whose name appeared in the *khutba*, on his coinage and in official correspondence. The khan he chose was in fact not a Chaghadayid but a descendant of Chinggis Khan's third son Ögedei; nonetheless, the court histories are careful to present this appointment as a restoration of the Chaghadayid house.<sup>16</sup> Timur also took a wife from the Chinggisid line and assumed the title of Guregen (royal son-in-law). He gave considerable importance to this title, including it after his name on his coinage and his official correspondence, and securing it for several of his sons and grandsons by marrying them also to Chinggisid wives.<sup>17</sup>

Timur further claimed a special connection to the house of Chaghadai through his own ancestry. Chinggis Khan had assigned Timur's ancestor Qarachar Barlas to Chaghadai with a regiment. Nizam al-Din Shami's *Zafarnāmeḥ*, written at Timur's order, states that Qarachar was entrusted with the affairs of administration and the army and was Chaghadai's chief advisor, an arrangement which Timur now restored by becoming "advisor" to a Chinggisid khan.<sup>18</sup> Timur could, in fact, also claim a genealogical connection with the Chinggisid house since his ancestor in the eighth generation, Tumbine Khan, had likewise been an ancestor of Chinggis Khan. This connection, however, seems not to have been a major part of Timur's claim to legitimacy during his lifetime, nor an element in his charisma. Shami does not mention it in his *Zafarnāmeḥ*, and other histories originating during Timur's lifetime contain only oblique

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<sup>16</sup> Nizam al-Din Shami, *Histoire des conquêtes de Tamerlan intitulée Zafarnāma, par Nizāmuddīn Šāmī*, ed., Felix Tauer, Prague, vol. I, 1937; vol. 2, 1956 (hereafter ZNS), vol. I, p. 58; Woods, "Genealogy", pp. 28-29. Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi mentions merely that he was Chinggisid, *Rūznāmeḥ*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>17</sup> S. Lane-Poole, *The Coinage of Bukhara in the British Museum*, London, 1882, pp. xxviii-xxix; Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 444; ZNY vol. I, p. 180; ZNS, vol. II, p. 40; *Mu'izz al-ansāb fī shajārat al-ansāb*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ancien fonds # 67, ff. 100b, 122b, 132b. Only Amiranshah, however, seems to have used this title. (See Woods, "Genealogy", p. 30)

<sup>18</sup> ZNS, vol. I, pp. 10, 58

references to it although Timur in later life did name a number of princes after his aristocratic Mongol ancestors.<sup>19</sup>

It was not Timur's genealogical connection to the Chinggisid line that justified his rule but his position as upholder of the Chaghadayid house, which remained the legitimate dynasty within the area. Shami presents Chaghadai firstly as the son especially favored by Chinggis Khan, and secondly as a ruler famous for his knowledge of the Mongol *yasa* and custom. Timur's ancestor Qarachar, given charge of matters of state, was likewise especially responsible for the preservation of the *Yasa*.<sup>20</sup> In taking power, therefore, Timur was assuming his proper inherited position and restoring the Ulus Chaghatay to its original state of order and propriety. What personal legitimation he could claim came through his descent from Qarachar and his marriage association with the Chinggisid line.

While this ideology is most fully expressed in the court sources, it is echoed also in those emanating from outside; his marriages to Chinggisid princesses for instance are reported by Mignanelli,<sup>21</sup> Ibn Arabshah,<sup>22</sup> and Jean of Sultaniyya.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Ideology of Conquest*

While Timur's formal legitimation rested on the history of the Ulus Chaghatay, his ambitions went far beyond its borders. To justify his conquests he needed to formulate a broader ideology of rule. For this purpose he used both the traditions he had inherited -- the Turco-Mongolian and the Islamic -- explaining his conquests as an attempt to safeguard and expand Islam and also as a restoration, not just of a Chaghadayid, but of a Chinggisid world order. Timur's most frequent justification for his conquests was the need to retain and restore order. Both the dynastic histories and his letters to foreign rulers laid great stress on this, and the leaders whom he was about to attack he stigmatized, usually as upstarts and often as highway robbers.<sup>24</sup>

Timur undertook many of his campaigns in the interest of religious order, and we find that almost all mentions of the Shari'a in Shami's *Zafarnāmeḥ* occur as justification for Timur's conquests. His

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19 Mano Eiji, "Amir Timur," pp. 4, 112; Clavijo, p. 210

20 ZNS I, pp. 10, 12-14, 58.

21 Mignanelli, p. 228.

22 Ibn Arabshah, p. 18.

23 Jean of Sultaniyya, pp. 443, 446.

24 ZNS, I, p. 175-76; Abd al-Husayn Nava'i, ed., *Asnād wa makātibāt-i tārikhī-yi Irān*, Tehran, 2536/1977, p. 20 (to Shah Yahya Mozaffari), pp. 69-70 (*fath-nāmeḥ* from Delhi to Pir Mohammad b. Umar Shaykh), p. 109 (third letter to Yildirim Bayazid).

campaigns against the kings of Georgia, the Shi'ite sayyids of Amul in Mazandaran, and the non-Muslim populations on his route to India were all ostensibly undertaken for the preservation of the Shari'a; and Shami even invoked the sanctions of religion in explaining Timur's campaign against the Ottomans.<sup>25</sup>

Before beginning his campaigns in the Middle East, Timur took care to get the blessing of Muslim men of religion. In 781-82/1379-81, he paid visits to the powerful shaykhs of Tayabad and Torbat-i Shaykh-i Jam in Khorasan to elicit their endorsement of his forthcoming attack on the Kart dynasty of Herat.<sup>26</sup> There is some doubt about whether Timur actually succeeded in winning the approval of Zayn al-Din Tayabadi (see the cited passage in Aubin), but there can be none about his intentions. To invite the obedience of rulers within the Middle East, he also styled his puppet khan as an Islamic monarch -- Padishah-i Islam.<sup>27</sup>

The other world order which Timur professed to safeguard was the Chinggisid one. This idea he invoked in numerous ways, freely rewriting history in the process. His Chinggisid justifications are most clearly expressed in his diplomatic correspondence, though echoes can be found also in the formal histories of his reign. John Woods, in an unpublished study entitled "Timūr's Genealogy," has analyzed Timur's use of Chinggisid history in the justification of his campaigns. First of all, Timur greatly expanded the territorial claims of the Chaghadayid khanate, adding Khwarazm, Iran and even Iraq to its ancestral territories.<sup>28</sup> This apportionment, generous though it was, was not sufficient to express the extent of his ambitions. Timur therefore went beyond Chaghadayid claims declaring as his mission the restitution also of rights usurped from the Ögedeyid house: a restoration of the whole of the original world order established by Chinggis Khan.

One might regard Timur's early choice of an Ögedeyid candidate for puppet khan as part of this policy, in which case his universalist claims were in place even before his assumption of power over the Ulus Chaghatai. We do not, however, know anything about the circumstances surrounding this choice, and it is quite possible that it was due to the absence of a suitable Chaghadayid candidate. In his

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<sup>25</sup> ZNS I, pp. 128, 198, 247, 279, 285-86

<sup>26</sup> F. Tauer, ed., *Cinq opuscules de Ḥāfīz-i Abrū concernant l'histoire de l'Iran au temps de Tamerlan*, Prague, 1959, text, pp. 61-2; J. Aubin, "Le khanat de Cağatai et le Khorasan", *Turcica*, vol. 8 #2, pp. 52-3

<sup>27</sup> Nava'i, pp. 54-5 (to Sayyid Ali Kiya); Woods, "Genealogy," p. 35. See also *Rūznāmeḥ*, pp. 68-69, where the author presents Shah Mahmud Khan as representing both a Chinggisid and an Islamic order.

<sup>28</sup> Nava'i, pp. 76-77 (To Barquq); ZNS I, p. 10; Woods, "Genealogy," pp. 32, 34

official sources at least, Timur did not stress the Ögedeyid descent of the khans in whose names he ruled and conquered.<sup>29</sup>

In his later diplomatic correspondence Timur developed this theme clearly. He recalled the clash between the descendants of Chinggis Khan's appointed successor Ögedei and those of his youngest son Tolui in 1251 which resulted in Möngke's accession to the khanate and Toluid rule over Iran and China. Timur now espoused the Ögedeyid cause, presenting the Toluid takeover as illegitimate and an abrogation of the order which Chinggis Khan had set up. In taking this side he was breaking with the Persian historical tradition established by the Ilkhanid historians Juvayni and Rashid al-Din, which presented Möngke's accession as justified and sanctioned by Chinggis Khan's will.<sup>30</sup> While he backed the cause of the Ögedeyids and Chaghadayids within the Mongol Empire, Timur still did not find it necessary to forego the use of Toluid claims. Thus, he cited as one reason for his Iranian campaign the fact that the Ilkhanid line had become extinct and had been replaced by upstart dynasties.<sup>31</sup> Timur indeed went so far as to connect himself directly with the Ilkhanid line; in one of his letters to Bayazid he actually identified himself as an Ilkhanid.<sup>32</sup> Another indication of Timur's desire to connect himself with the Ilkhanid dynasty is his official birthdate, set at 1336, which on the rare occasions when it is mentioned is always identified as the date of the death of Abu Sa'id, the last Hülegüid Ilkhan.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For Shami, see my discussion above; in the correspondence see the letters to Barquq (Nava'i, p. 77) and to Bayazid in 796/1393-4 (Woods, "Genealogy," pp. 36-7, 40)

<sup>30</sup> Woods, "Genealogy," pp. 36-42; Nava'i, pp. 75-77 (to Barquq); Peter Jackson, "The Dissolution of the Mongol Empire," *Central Asiatic Journal*, vol. 22 #3-4, pp. 188-91, 204-8

<sup>31</sup> Nava'i, p. 109 (to Bayazid); Woods, "Genealogy," p. 37

<sup>32</sup> Nava'i, p. 99. This could of course have a broader meaning -- that of "subordinate khan." This is the interpretation which John Woods tentatively suggests. ("Genealogy," p. 42.)

<sup>33</sup> I strongly suspect that the birthdate of 736/1335-6 ascribed to Timur in many Timurid histories is an invention, chosen to coincide with the date of Abu Sa'id's death and thus to place Timur and his dynasty as successors to the Ilkhans. Almost none of the sources written during Timur's lifetime mention this date. The two official histories written at Timur's behest -- the account of his conquest of India by Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi and the *Zafarnāmeḥ* of Nizam al-Din Shami, give no date for Timur's birth. Other accounts from less official sources, based on information gleaned at Timur's court, give varying estimates of his age. Ibn Arabshah wrote that he was nearly eighty at the time of his death, which would place his birth in the late 720s/1320s. (Ibn Arabshāh, p. 295) Jean of Sultaniyya, writing in 1403, gave a similar estimate, putting Timur's age at approximately seventy-five at that date; the Italian merchant Mignanelli, writing in 1416, stated that Timur was seventy-four years old at the time of his siege of Damascus in 1400-1401. (Jean of Sultāniyya, p. 463, Mignanelli, p. 227) The one writer contemporary with Timur who gave his age

In the justification of his conquests, therefore, Timur presented a much less consistent ideology than in his claim over the Chaghadayid house. He felt free to identify himself in turn with the interests of the Ögedeyid, Chaghadayid, and Toluid houses and to overstep the historical facts recorded in numerous and well-known chronicles. Nonetheless, Timur's position did have a basic logic and consistency. What he sought to restore was the original Chinggisid world order as he portrayed it. Within the Mongol Empire this granted a much larger share of power to the descendants of Ögedei and Chaghadai than to those of Tolui, who after 1251 had come to hold both the position of Great Khan and the khanates of Iran and China. In a world context, it meant the restoration of Chinggisid power wherever it had once existed, and an identification with the interest of any Chinggisid dynasty, including that of the Toluid Ilkhans.

In espousing the interests of the two great world systems he recognized -- the Islamic and the Chinggisid -- Timur gave himself scope for almost unlimited expansion. He proclaimed it his duty to protect and further Islam to justify his campaigns throughout the Middle East into India and Georgia, while he invoked the Chinggisid claim in Iran, Moghulistan, the steppes, and even China. He was the protector of order -- of the Islamic Shari'a, of the Yasa, and of the will of Chinggis Khan. His campaigns were designed to punish transgressors, be they highway robbers, unbelievers, backsliders from the Shari'a, or upstart dynasties in lands originally Mongol.

#### *Timur as Dynastic Founder*

As the restorer of two great world orders, Timur could campaign where he wished, but he still remained always in second place. Neither Islamic nor Chinggisid ideology allowed him to present himself as sovereign or to claim for his descendants the right to rule as an independent dynasty. Timur needed something more to develop for himself and his family the prestige and charisma which would turn him from the restorer of the Chinggisid dynasty into the founder of a new dynasty, able to claim and hold power on its own merits.

He achieved this by creating a personal myth, portraying himself in the image of other nomad conquerors and dynastic founders --

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at a figure consonant with the birthdate later recorded for him is Ibn Khaldun, who estimated that at the time of writing (1401), he was between sixty and seventy years old -- here again however no specific birthdate is given. (Fischel, *Idn Khaldun*, p. 47.) The one known mention of the birthdate of 1336 during Timur's lifetime occurs in the *waqf-nāmeḥ* for the shrine of Shaykh Ahmad Yasawi written in the late 1390s, which contains a marginal note, in the same writing as the text, identifying Timur's birthdate as 1336, the same year as Abu Sa'id's death. (Conversation with John Woods, November, 1986.)

particularly of Chinggis Khan. In his personal pretensions, his account of his early history, and his development of court protocol, Timur was not hampered by legal limitations and could openly express his claims to grandeur and to absolute power. In this undertaking he succeeded; although court histories written during his reign make only cautious claims for him, later Islamic histories place him next to Chinggis Khan among the great world conquerors.<sup>34</sup> Timur's status as world conqueror and dynastic founder is also attested by attempts to make use of his charisma as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The eighteenth century conqueror Nadir Shah openly patterned his career on Timur's<sup>35</sup>; and the Kokand Khanate, founded at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries, attached itself to the Timurid dynasty through a contrived genealogy.<sup>36</sup>

The symbolism which Timur used to enhance his personal stature came largely from the Turco-Mongolian tradition, and sat uneasily with the Islamic dynastic legitimation promoted by his Persian scribes. To find its expression, therefore, we must look beyond their productions to those of outside observers reporting what Timur and his followers told them. These present a very different picture of Timur's youth and personal claims from the careful accounts found in the court histories. The emphasis on order and legality which characterizes Timur's official legitimation gives way here to the image of a charismatic personality outside the usual limits and conventions. To those around him, Timur was reticent neither about his early career as a brigand, nor his personal powers -- he glorified both.

One trait common to founders of nomad dynasties was their difficult youth. They were of aristocratic descent but of low station, with little power and less wealth. Most spent at least part of their youth in exile, often stealing livestock with a small band of followers. The story of Chinggis Khan's orphan childhood was well known throughout the Islamic and Turco-Mongolian world. To those around him, Timur emphasized his own modest beginnings -- if he did not invent them -- and made no secret of his career as a thief of livestock or of the reverses of his early career, while still claiming an aristocratic lineage.

The Timurid court histories omit mention of Timur's early life, beginning the story of his career with his bid for leadership over his tribe and his association with the recognized rulers of Transoxiana, first with the Eastern Chaghadayid khan and then with the pretender

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, 1986, p. 280.

<sup>35</sup> L. Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, London, 1938, p. 1

<sup>36</sup> V.P. Nalivkin, *Histoire du khanat de Khokand*, trans., A. Dozon, Paris, 1889, pp. 62-95; Molla Niyaz Mohammad b. Molla Ashur Mohammad Khawqandi, *Tārikh-i Shāhrukhi*, ed., N.N. Pantusov, Kazan', 1885, pp. 15-19

to power over the Ulus Chaghatay, Amir Husayn Qara'unas. Outside sources, vague on later events, are much more precise on Timur's antecedents and youth. Considering their varied origins, they show remarkable consistency in their accounts. Timur's father, they report, was a man of good lineage -- according to Clavijo related to the Chaghadayid dynasty -- but of small estate and with few followers.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting that Ibn Arabshah, writing later and within the Islamic tradition, reports this story but prefers an alternative one, that Timur's father was a magnate at the court of the Sultan, here apparently meaning Amir Husayn.<sup>38</sup> Stories of Timur's descent on his mother's side are less consistent. This seems to have been used for a number of different purposes. Timur told Ibn Khaldun that she was descended from the Persian hero Manuchehr; Ibn Arabshah suggested that she was a descendant of Chinggis Khan; while a later Timurid genealogy connects her more prosaically with the Yasa'uri tribe whose territories adjoined those of the Barlas.<sup>39</sup>

These accounts agree that Timur spent his early years as a petty brigand stealing sheep, horses and cattle, and sharing plunder with his small band of followers.<sup>40</sup> The wound which lamed him, received in Sistan, was connected with this activity. It is interesting that while dynastic histories state that Timur undertook this campaign for political reasons, together with his patron Amir Husayn, several of the outside sources suggest, rather, that he was alone and in opposition to Amir Husayn at this time.<sup>41</sup> Given the circumstantial documentation of this period, it seems quite possible that it was Timur's personal account, mirrored in the unofficial histories, which diverged from the truth.

It is clear that Timur, far from suppressing such stories about his early life, used them to magnify the extent of his personal achievements. Jean of Sultaniyya wrote that he emphasized his early poverty and low condition, and Timur himself told Ibn Khaldun that the wound which lamed him came from raiding in his boyhood.<sup>42</sup>

Although Timur did choose to claim a high position for his ancestor Amir Qarachar Barlas, he apparently made no attempt to magnify the status or wealth of his father. Indeed, it is possible that he tried to make him seem poorer and less powerful than he was. The Persian histories do not describe Taraghay's career, but they do give

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<sup>37</sup> Jean of Sultaniyya, pp. 441, 447; Ibn Arabshah, p. 2; Clavijo, p. 210

<sup>38</sup> Amir Husayn, p. 4

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Arabshah, p. 4; *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 37; *Mu'izz al-ansab*, f. 97a

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Arabshah, p. 2; Jean of Sultaniyya, pp. 441-42; Clavijo, pp. 210-11

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Arabshah, p. 6; Clavijo, p. 211-12; Mignanelli, p. 228; for the official Timurid version see ZNS I, pp. 21-22

<sup>42</sup> *Ibn Khaldun*, p. 47; Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 447

incidental information which suggests that while not necessarily very powerful, he was reasonably wealthy and well-connected. Yazdi's *Zafarnāmeḥ* gives as one reason for Timur's return to Transoxiana in 1360 the recent death of his father, suggesting a concern over his estate; furthermore, the father of the powerful amir Hamid Kereyid of Moghulistan was said to have been a friend of Taraghay's.<sup>43</sup>

Timur's emphasis on his early poverty could reflect his desire to fit the mold of other dynastic founders, who possessed a legitimate ancestral claim to rule but had to win their actual power through their own exertions. Chinggis Khan for instance descended from a line of Mongol khans, but his family had lost power several generations before, and he himself was orphaned and raised in poverty.

Timur also followed earlier nomad sovereigns in his claim to heavenly favor and used his modest beginnings to emphasize the miraculousness of his rise. He stated repeatedly that he himself was nothing, and that he owed all his success to the will of God. According to Ibn Arabshah, he even dated the beginning of divine support from one of the lowest periods of his early career, the raid in Sistan during which he received his wound.<sup>44</sup>

Timur's rise from obscurity and his extraordinary military successes, then, were an indication of God's favor towards him. Here Timur is hearkening directly back to the tradition of Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Great Khans whose claims that their successes were proof of divine favor are well known. The Islamic tradition contained the same notion, and Timur often used Islamic symbols in expressing it. In his correspondence with Sultan Barquq for instance, he quoted a Quranic verse stating that God gives power to whom he will.<sup>45</sup>

The notion of God's support, in clearly Islamic formulation, is strongly underlined in the preface of Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi's *Rūznāmeḥ*.<sup>46</sup> Timur made use of the Sufi shaykhs prominent in religious and political life, courting their favor and attributing his successes sometimes to their intercession.<sup>47</sup> Ghiyath al-Din Ali Yazdi suggests this in a more indirect way, by saying that Timur's victories were due less to his numberless armies than to the will of the religious figures in his retinue.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> ZNY, I, pp. 35, 75

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Arabshah, p. 5; Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 447

<sup>45</sup> Nava'i, p. 75

<sup>46</sup> *Rūznāmeḥ*, pp. 17-18, 23

<sup>47</sup> See for example Ibn Arabshah, p. 5

<sup>48</sup> *Rūznāmeḥ*, p. 23

Timur also claimed some supernatural powers for himself. In Persian sources these were cautiously expressed, and given an Islamic gloss. On occasion he used Sufi leaders to recognize and attest to his superior spiritual powers.<sup>49</sup> Ibn Arabshah reported miracles on Timur's behalf performed by the Sufi shaykh Sayyid Baraka, and reported a vision of Timur's grandmother foreseeing that one of her progeny would be lord of his age.<sup>50</sup>

To his own followers Timur was less modest in his pretensions. He claimed direct supernatural power, and here he went well beyond what was usual within the Islamic tradition. According to Jean of Sultaniyya, he claimed to have direct contact with the divine world through an angel which appeared to him, and to have extraordinary powers in the perception of other people's motives and plans. He had even ascended to heaven on a ladder which appeared from the sky -- a clear borrowing from Turco-Mongolian shamanism.<sup>51</sup>

In these claims he resembled Chinggis Khan, who while respecting Mongol shamans and religious men of all faiths, also claimed the gift of prophecy for himself.<sup>52</sup> Timur likewise patterned his actions on those of earlier nomad sovereigns. In the method of his conquests and the disposition of his realm, he often approximated the course of Chinggis Khan's career, and this was probably not fortuitous. Timur's conquests were extraordinary not only for their extent and their success, but also for their ferocity -- a ferocity which was at once selective and deliberate. This trait is the more striking because few of the regions Timur conquered were foreign to him or to his army. Almost all had been part of the Mongol empire, and most were, like his native Transoxiana, regions of mixed Iranian and Turco-Mongolian population. Timur, moreover, was strongly interested in safeguarding both trade and agriculture. Nor was it the independent actions of Timur's nomad army which precipitated the massacres for which he was famous. He held exceptionally firm control over his soldiers.

Jean Aubin has suggested that Timur's destructiveness was due to his personal ruthlessness and his taste for the colossal.<sup>53</sup> There may also have been a more pragmatic reason for it -- a desire to recall the conquests of Chinggis Khan and to assert a similar level of personal force. The logic and the methodology of Timur's conquests are

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<sup>49</sup> Jean Aubin, "Comment Tamerlan prenait les villes," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 19 (1963), p. 89; J. Aubin, ed., *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shāh Niḡmatullāh Walī Kermānī*, Tehran; Paris, 1956, pp. 15, 43

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Arabshah, pp. 4, 14

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Arabshah, pp.4-5; Jean of Sulṭāniyya, pp. 447, 462-63. See also Aubin, "Comment," p. 88

<sup>52</sup> P. Ratchnevsky *Cinggis-Khan, sein Leben und Werke*, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 140 (from Juzjani)

<sup>53</sup> Aubin, "Comment," p. 121

similar to those of the first Mongol invasion. Both Chinggis Khan and Timur preferred to take cities without battle and sent out messengers to invite submission. They also used similar justifications for their attacks. In attacking Syria, Timur cited the murder of his envoys, as Chinggis Khan had done in attacking Utrar. Here, moreover, his official chronicler Shami made the comparison clear, citing the example of Chinggis Khan in recounting Timur's campaign.<sup>54</sup> Cities which submitted voluntarily Timur spared while exacting a large ransom, but cities which refused to submit or "rebelled" after submission he opened to pillage by his army and to large-scale systematic massacres, carrying off the artisans for his own use, as had Chinggis Khan.<sup>55</sup>

For a conqueror originating within the Middle East and sensitive to the value of trade and agriculture, this was unexpected behavior; but as a means of establishing Timur both as a supremely powerful leader and as a dynastic founder comparable to Chinggis Khan it seems a coherent and effective policy. In the disposition of his realm, Timur also recalled Chinggis Khan's policy, and this was almost certainly deliberate. In 1403, a year before his final campaign against China, he undertook the division of his realm. Like Chinggis, Timur divided his realm into four main sections, each consisting of several governorships held by the family of one of his sons. The northwestern section, including Azarbaijan and Iraq, went to the family of his third son Amiranshah; the region of central Iran to the descendants of his son Umar Shaykh; the southeastern region, centered in Kabul, to Pir Mohammad, the son of Timur's senior son, Jahangir; and the northeastern regions, including Khorasan and the northern and eastern regions of Transoxiana, to his youngest son Shahrukh, with his offspring.<sup>56</sup>

While in his actions Timur imitated Chinggis Khan and other dynastic founders, in the organization of his capital and court he echoed the grander and more articulated style of later Mongol khans. The buildings of Samarqand and Timur's birthplace Shahr-i Sabz were designed in imitation of Ilkhanid monuments -- particularly the massive mausoleum at Sultaniyya -- differing primarily in their even greater concern with colossal scale.<sup>57</sup>

In the protocol of his court, Timur followed the tradition of the great Mongol khans. The account of Timur's court by the Spanish ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo strikingly recalls earlier

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<sup>54</sup> ZNS I, pp. 221-22

<sup>55</sup> For Chinggis Khan, see Ratchnevsky, *Chinggis-Khan*, pp. 118-119; Ala al-Din Ata Malik Juvayni, trans., J.A. Boyle, *The History of the World Conqueror*, Manchester, 1958, pp. 97-107, 117-122

<sup>56</sup> Beatrice F. Manz, "Politics and Control under Tamerlane," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1983, pp. 213-214

<sup>57</sup> Shella Blair, "The Mongol Capital of Sultāniyya 'The Imperial'," *Iran*, vol. 24 (1986), p. 147

European reports about the great khans.<sup>58</sup> At Timur's court, moreover, there was no pretense that the Chaghadayid khan held supreme power or prestige. It was Timur who sat on a raised dais and received homage, while the khan simply took his place among Timur's courtiers.<sup>59</sup>

In expressing his sovereign position, Timur made use of both Middle Eastern and Turco-Mongolian royal customs. He sat and ate alone, passing pieces of food on to his visitors and courtiers as he chose; and none of his court or family could approach him without permission.<sup>60</sup> His festivals included both the ritual drinking characteristic of the Mongol court and the largesse and granting of honorary robes usual among Islamic rulers.<sup>61</sup>

Timur, as the founder of a dynasty, had also to allow to his descendants some share of personal prestige. Thus, although he took care to limit their actual power, he did provide them with large suites and strikingly rich appurtenances.<sup>62</sup> He married several of them to Chinggisid wives, as mentioned above. He also, especially in the latter part of his career, gave to many of them the names of earlier Turco-Mongolian khans.<sup>63</sup>

Writing to Bayazid after his conquest of Syria, Timur announced his appointment of Muhammad Sultan to the rule of Western Iran and described at length the size of his following and richness of his suite.<sup>64</sup> At his great Khuriltay in 1404, he demanded that foreign ambassadors do obeisance to his grandson Pir Muhammad, whom he eventually named as his successor.<sup>65</sup> This behaviour contrasts with the minimal concern he showed for succession to the position of khan; when the second khan, Sultan Mahmud, died, he simply continued to rule in his name, without bothering to appoint a successor.

It was at his great Khuriltay in 1404 that Timur gave fullest expression to his personal sovereignty. He had by this time no living puppet khan, and made no pretense of sharing power or loyalty. Here Timur displayed the extent of his wealth and power before an appreciative audience of foreign ambassadors, conquered people, and followers. He sat enthroned in the midst of a huge tent city, surrounded by the spoils of his campaigns, the works of his imported artisans, and the products of his wide ranging foreign

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<sup>58</sup> Aubin, "Comment", p. 86-87; Clavijo, pp. 218, 231, 245, 254, 268

<sup>59</sup> Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun*, pp. 31, 37

<sup>60</sup> Jean of Sultaniyya, pp. 452-53

<sup>61</sup> Clavijo, pp. 230-232

<sup>62</sup> Jean of Sultaniyya, p. 446; Clavijo, p. 254

<sup>63</sup> Woods, "Genealogy", pp. 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Nava'i, p. 122

<sup>65</sup> Clavijo, p. 254.

commerce. The craftsmen of Samarqand were brought out to display their arts, and the elephants he had brought back from India formed a major attraction at his feasts.<sup>66</sup> At the same time he planned his farthest reaching and most ambitious campaign, an expedition against the realm of the Ming emperor who held the only major part of the former Mongol empire still outside Timur's sway. Although Timur had made no real claims to sovereignty beyond the borders of his conquests, in his reception of Clavijo he echoed the universalistic claims of earlier Mongol khans, referring to "my son, the king of Spain."<sup>67</sup> At the same time he publicly humiliated the ambassadors of the Chinese emperor who had had the effrontery to demand tribute of him.<sup>68</sup>

### *Conclusion*

As inheritor of both Islamic and Turco-Mongolian traditions of rule, Timur possessed rich sources of legitimation but also suffered several restraints on his claims to sovereignty. His ability to make full use of these two traditions without violating their concepts of legality illustrates the remarkable political finesse and opportunism which mark the whole of his career.

For each of his ambitions Timur put forward a separate set of claims, using a different level of symbolism and addressing, often, a different audience. The first and most basic of Timur's ambitions was to rule over the Ulus Chaghatay, and here he had ready for him a set of legitimating principles used by the commanders who had ruled the area before him. As a non-Chinggisid, he ruled through a puppet khan and justified his power by posing as the upholder of the Chaghadayid house. His personal prestige came likewise from association with the Chinggisid dynasty: his royal marriages with the consequent title "Güregen" (son-in-law), and his claim to a special place in the Chaghadayid khanate inherited from his ancestor Qarachar Barlas. All of these were relatively sober claims, conforming both to written traditions of Mongol rule in the Middle East and to Perso-Islamic ideas of dynastic legitimacy. They were expressed in a number of different ways. We find them in Timur's correspondence and in his conversation, but their fullest elaboration is in the most formal sources, the dynastic histories. This was the legitimation which could be accepted by all and passed down to future generations.

In attempting to justify his conquests, Timur had to reach beyond the confines of the Chaghadayid house to make use of the two great world systems he inherited --the Islamic and the Chinggisid. In both dynastic histories and diplomatic correspondence we find

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<sup>66</sup> Clavijo, pp. 248-9, 262-69

<sup>67</sup> Clavijo, p. 221.

<sup>68</sup> Clavijo, pp. 222-23

Timur and the court historians presenting his campaigns as protections of the Islamic order, whether from the infidels or from backsliders and deviators within the Islamic world. The Chinggisid tradition also provided legitimation for Timur's expansionism. Here he made claims which went far beyond the Chaghadayid khanate, to a restoration of the world order established by Chinggis Khan. In doing this Timur contradicted the pro-Toluid interpretation of Mongol history current in the Middle East, and in his claims for the heritage of Chaghadai, violated all the established authorities on Mongol history. Probably for this reason, these claims are more commonly found in diplomatic correspondence than in the official histories where they would be subject to review and comparison by contemporary historians and future generations.

Both of these systems of legitimation held for Timur one serious flaw. They relegated him and his descendants to a subordinate position, as protectors and promoters of a sovereign dynasty to which his family did not belong. In Timur's time, this was the only legally acceptable way for a non-Chinggisid to exercise sovereign power, but it was not a system which could satisfy the ambition of a man who wished to conquer the world and who in large measure succeeded in doing so.

Timur succeeded in finding expression for his true stature and in presenting himself as a conqueror and dynastic founder on a level with Chinggis Khan and other great nomad leaders of the past. He could not do this directly in the formal literature. His diplomatic correspondence and the dynastic histories written for him had to mirror the legal legitimation of his rule. He chose to promote his sovereign image, therefore, in a more direct and informal way: in his conversation, in the way that he himself presented his early career and his personal powers, and in his actions. From these sources we find a picture of Timur with an emphasis totally different from that presented formally in bureaucratic and historical sources. Timur's youthful career of brigandage, glossed over in the Persian sources, is here stressed. His poverty, his relative friendlessness, his lawlessness are all heightened to express both his resemblance to other nomad conquerors and the greatness of his achievements. In his actions also, Timur imitated other dynastic founders, particularly Chinggis Khan, whose methodology of conquest and division of power he imitated directly. Finally, in the protocol of the court and in the design of his imperial capital, Timur adopted the style of earlier sovereign dynasties and here he placed himself, not his puppet khan, in the center of the stage.

In the end, it was this last image, most truly representing Timur's stature and abilities, which remained after his death and made him for many centuries a source of charisma and legitimation within the Islamic and Turco-Mongolian worlds.