

Lords of the Auspicious Conjunction: Turco-Mongol Imperial Identity on the Subcontinent*

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Among the most critical developments in sixteenth-century world history was the emergence of powerful Muslim empires to replace the fragmented tribal alliances and minor sultanates that had remained in the void left by Mongol failure and collapse in the central Islamic lands. These great empires—the Ottoman, Safavid, Uzbek, and Mughal—shared Central Asian Turkic political traditions and a vision of conquest rooted in Mongol aspirations of world empire. Their development of military and political trends, centralized bureaucratic institutions, and vital artistic and cultural expressions would have a powerful lingering global influence.

Contemporary studies of the Mughal dynasty of India have, however, long been dominated by nationalist, sectarian, and ideological agendas that typically present the Mughals as a singularly Indian phenomenon, politically and culturally isolated on the subcontinent. Blaming the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century c.e., which “first propelled Muslim India on its own separate path, distinct from that taken by the lands west of the Indus,”¹ modern scholarship on the Middle East and Islamic Central Asia has long marginalized Indian Islam and assigned to the Mughal emperors of the subcontinent a position on the periphery of the early modern Islamic world.

* This article is dedicated to Professor Stephen F. Dale, with gratitude.

¹ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

Although the founder of India's Mughal empire, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), was a Chaghatai-Turkish prince and a direct descendant of both Chinggis Khan and Timur, few scholars acknowledge that Mughal ties to Transoxiana might have substantial relevance to our understanding of the empire.² The *The New Cambridge History of India* disregards the Central Asian legacy of the Mughals, asserting that “the interests and future of all concerned were in India.”³ Describing the first two Mughal kings as “immigrants,” the dynasty is linked to the preceding nearly thousand years of Muslim colonization in India and the Mughals described as “indisputably Indian . . . emerging from the Indian historical experience.”⁴ Mughal history for many scholars begins with the seventh-century arrival of Muslim armies of conquest and the establishment of “Indo-Muslim rulers—whether of foreign or Indian origin” over most of the sub-continent.⁵

Yet to demand one thousand years of Indo-Muslim continuity is to ignore the particular character of the Mughal empire. The Mughals arrived in India with a set of political, cultural, and aesthetic traditions and understandings that were entirely grounded in the late Timurid milieu in Transoxiana whence they came, and they passionately maintained many of these cultural inheritances in India. Scholars of the Timurids, such as Maria Eva Subtelny, have emphasized the “profound influence” of the Timurid legacy on the Mughal dynasty and have questioned the absence of research which links them to their ancestry in Central Asia.⁶ Historians of the Mughals such as Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam affirm the “traditionally neglected” Central Asian genealogy of the Mughals, calling it “somewhat puzzling why the Mughal specialists have by and large refused, in the past few decades, to place the state they study in the larger context.”⁷

It is time for a radical re-evaluation of the scholarly and intellectual isolation with which the Mughals have traditionally been treated.

² Valuable work has been done on certain aspects of this legacy: Maria Eva Subtelny has worked on the Mughal retention of Timurid gardens, Richard Foltz has published a study of Mughal links to Central Asia, and Stephen F. Dale has identified the Mughals as the principal heirs of the Timurids.

³ John F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; repr., 1995), p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ Maria Eva Subtelny, “The Timurid Legacy: A Reaffirmation and a Reassessment,” *Cahiers D’Asie Centrale* 3–4 (1997): 14.

⁷ Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 5.

India's Muslim kingdoms did not, before or after the Mongol invasions, develop apart from the central and hence "normative" Islamic world. More specifically, the Mughal Empire, founded as it was by a Timurid prince from Transoxiana only to become the richest and most populous of all the early modern Islamic empires, cannot be viewed as a uniquely Indian phenomenon. The Mughals must be recognized as the principal inheritors of the Central Asian Turco-Persian legacy of Timur, from whom they were direct descendants: as "true Timurids who enthusiastically embraced Timurid legitimacy and consciously presided over a Timurid renaissance" on the Indian subcontinent.⁸

In the interests of placing the Mughals in a global context, and because they left behind a very deliberately crafted imperial record, I suggest that we look to the Mughals themselves for answers as to their dynastic identity. Although often startlingly intimate, the personal memoirs of the Mughal dynasty of India were written with an eye to public readership, for the edification of the royal family and court as well as contemporary Muslim rulers. As imperial advice literature, each of the memoirs was a carefully composed clarification and justification of the Mughal's sovereign legitimacy, and as such was a critical part of the dynasty's imperial inheritance. Contemporary accounts and extant early manuscripts confirm that the Mughal dynastic memoirs were read by successive generations of Indo-Timurids as they were intended: pored over, translated, discussed, scrawled on, and cross-referenced. The ideas and identity expressed in the autobiographical writings of the dynasty seem to have been as meaningful to successive generations of emperors as any other part of the imperial legacy.

Among these writings, the memoir of the emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), composed in the court Persian of late Timurid Transoxiana and Mughal India, offers the modern reader an exceptional degree of insight into the central importance of the Timurid inheritance of the Mughal kings.⁹ Jahangir's reign represents one hundred years of Mughal rule over much of the subcontinent, after which length of time it surely may be possible to identify an evolving definition of imperial

⁸ Stephen F. Dale, "The Legacy of the Timurids," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. 3, 8 (1998): 43.

⁹ Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir Gurkani, *Jahangirnama (Tuzuk-i Jahangiri)* (Tehran: Buny adi Farhangi Iran, 1359 [1980]), hereafter cited as *Tuzuk*. All citations are to this edition, and all translations are mine unless specified. I have also used extensively the wonderful translation of Jahangir's memoir by Wheeler Thackston of Harvard University, *The Jahangirnama, Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

identity, particularly given the possibly contradictory influences of Timurid-Chinggisid ruling traditions in the Indian imperial context. As the son of a Rajput princess, born and raised on the subcontinent in a remarkably tolerant multiconfessional community, as familiar with a *howdah* as a saddle and probably as fluent in Hindi as Turkish, we might imagine Jahangir to display characteristics of an “Indian” emperor. Yet there is startlingly little of India in the memoir of the Mughal dynasty’s fourth emperor. Although he had never set foot in the Central Asia he considered his patrimony, Jahangir insistently defined and maintained his imperial identity in constant reference to the Turco-Mongol Timurid legacy of his ancestors.

JAHANGIR AND TIMURID GENEALOGY

The complex of ideas that had come to represent Timurid political legitimacy in Central Asia by the beginning of the sixteenth century originated in two political/social ideologies, Perso-Islamic and Turco-Mongol. Representing a stark philosophical contrast, they had been successfully merged by Timur through sheer force of will and a remarkable degree of pragmatism.¹⁰ His overwhelming military success and political charisma, drawn in large part from this successful co-option and adaptation of Central Asian ideological trends, lent a powerful dynastic legitimacy to his descendants. Their subsequent careful attention to both Islamic and Chinggisid ideologies is evidenced by the inscriptions on Timur’s tomb, which link his genealogy to the mythic Chinggisid mother goddess, Alanqua, whose impregnation by a beam of light was here described as inspired by the spirit of the Prophet’s son-in-law, ‘Ali ibn Abu Taleb.¹¹ Timur’s political and imperial ideological fusion continued to be nurtured by his heirs, evolving into a cultural hybrid of enormous influence and power which underpinned and sustained what had become the most elite lineage in Central Asia. A late Timurid poet wrote, “Shake loose your Turkish locks, for in your ascendant are royal fortune and Genghis Khan’s position.”¹²

¹⁰ Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, repr. ed. (1989; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Beatrice Forbes Manz, “Tamerlane’s Career and Its Uses,” *Journal of World History* 13 (2002): 5.

¹² Mir Dawlatshah Samarqandi, *Tadhkirat al-shu’ara*, in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. and trans. Wheeler Thackston (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 13.

The power of a prestigious genealogy in the establishment of dynastic political rights lay in “attention to lineages as more than family trees; they also become resources for mobilization and engagement in the present.”¹³ Nearly universal acknowledgment of the power of Timurid dynastic legitimacy in the mobilization of contemporary political aims led rival kingdoms to link their own political pretensions to the Timurid dynasty. In the case of Iran, the transformation of Safavid political realities during the reign of Shah Abbas, due in part to the destruction of the Turcoman ascendancy and the rise of the *ulema* at court, required adjustments to Safavid legitimizing principles. In recognition of the power of Timurid connections and in an attempt to bolster Safavid political ambitions, elaborate backstories were developed, one of which claimed a fifteenth-century visit by Timur to the Safaviyya *tariqat* in Ardabil, where he was said to have foreseen the rise of the Safavid dynasty.¹⁴ A *waqf* document, which described an endowment by Timur in the name of the Safavid family, is considered to have been forged in the court ateliers of Shah Abbas, who sent a copy of the document to the Mughal emperor Jahangir in order to emphasize the historical connection between the Timurid and Safavid houses.¹⁵

By the fourteenth century the Ottoman sultans had begun to prop up their own political legitimacy with the development of a central religious ideology and a flirtation with various origin myths that included elements of a charismatic genealogy. All the same, the sixteenth-century Ottoman bureaucrat and historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600) wrote of the comparatively potent quality of Chinggisid-Timurid genealogical authority.¹⁶ His detailed discussion of the topic bespeaks a general awareness, at least among Ottoman literati, of the Turco-Mongol political tradition, coupled with a defensive acceptance of the comparative weakness of Ottoman legitimizing claims. Ottoman sensitivity to the dynasty’s lack of a charismatic lineage had inspired a variety of strategies to bolster genealogical and religious ideology in its own defense, but addressing the Ottoman sultan Bayezid’s crushing defeat at the hands of Timur at the battle of Ankara in 1402, Mustafa

¹³ Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Saint* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 107.

¹⁴ Sholeh Quinn, *Historical Writing During the Reign of Shah Abbas I* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁶ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 284–285.

Ali asserted provocatively that, in taking the title Sahib Qiran (Lord of the Felicitous Conjunction), Timur's claim to rule had universal applications and was therefore "superior in status to the Sultan of Rum." Not content to simply position Ottoman origins in the general Turco-Mongol milieu, Mustafa Ali appropriated the more powerful genealogy, describing the Ottomans as derived specifically from the Chinggisid-Timurid line of world conquerors:

The Timurid dynasty and Chinggisid House, those sharp-headed
plunderers,
Have all been described in this volume,
From the start of the story to its end;
From this garden, like a moist blossom,
Bloomed those praiseworthy ones who are the Ottoman House.¹⁷

In India, in the absence of Timurid rivals, the Mughals were able to transform loyalty from the personal to the imperial, and yet the very foundation of Mughal imperial identity continued to be constructed and transmitted through the dynasty's charismatic Timurid genealogy. As the last independent princes of the House of Timur, the Mughals self-consciously derived invaluable political capital from their lineage, and Mughal nurturing of Timurid cultural and political institutions can be attributed to their value as representations of the charismatic genealogy of the Timurid dynasty. Mughal attentiveness to their Timurid ancestry was in large part devoted to an agenda of political legitimation, and unwavering loyalty to their Turco-Mongol/Timurid political legacy remained a central legitimizing feature of rule for the Muslim dynasts of the subcontinent, sanctioning their power and justifying their success. Babur's own obsession with his Timurid heritage had become a large part of the Mughal imperial self-image, ensuring Mughal retention of Timurid values. Implanted as something of a cultural memory among Babur's descendants, Samarqand remained in the Mughal imagination as a near-mythic ancestral land and Timur as the dynastic patriarch.

For the more than 250 years of their rule the Mughals referred to themselves as Guregeniyya, the dynasty of "the son-in-law," retaining Timur's choice of imperial title as husband to a princess in the line of Chinggis Khan, for their imperial dynasty in India. Timur's ceremonial title, Sahib Qiran, Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction, was often adopted as an important dynastic reference by the Mughal kings. On

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

his accession to the throne, Jahangir expressed his greatest pleasure with a chronogram, composed by the courtier Maktub Khan, that described the new emperor as a second Timur:

King of kings Jahangir, a second Timur
 Sat in justice on the victorious throne
 Success, fortune, victory, pomp and triumph
 Are wrapped around him to serve with joy
 This is the date of his accession,
 When fortune puts its head at the feet of *sahib qiran-i sani*.¹⁸

Twenty-five years later, Jahangir's son, the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (r. 1627–1659), was inspired to permanently adopt Timur's title, inscribing *Sahib qiran-i sani* on his coins, "the second lord of the auspicious conjunction."¹⁹

Beginning in the reign of Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and lasting through that of Aurangzeb (r. 1659–1707), the imperial Mughal seal emphasized the Timurid genealogy of the Mughal royal family. Mughal kings commissioned complex charts that plotted the lineage of the Mughals beyond Timur to the mythical queen, Alanqua, through whose impregnation by a beam of light the Mongols claimed descent.²⁰ Court painters illustrated Mughal emperors with golden halos, suggesting semidivine status. As emperor, Akbar commissioned dynastic histories such as the *Chingiznama* (History of Chinggis Khan), the *Timurnama* (History of Timur), and the *Tarikh-i Alfi* (History of a Thousand) which asserted the dynasty's Mongol and Timurid ancestry, claiming to have "inaugurated a new millennium" with the foundation of the South Asian Timurid empire.²¹

While the aniconic Ottomans shied away from large-scale portraiture, the Mughals (and to some extent the Safavids) covered their palace walls with frescoes of family gatherings, highlighting in the Mughal case their genealogical descent and confirming dynastic legitimacy by portraying the ruling emperor and his sons seated with their

¹⁸ "Mutribi" al-Asamm Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*, trans. Richard C. Foltz, (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1998), p. 30. As explained in Thackston, *Jahangirnama*: "The letters in the words *Sahib qiran-i sani* (second Sahib Qiran) yield 1013. To this is added the first letter of iqbal (fortune's head) which has a numerical value of one, for the Hegira date of 1014," p. 28.

¹⁹ Dale, "Legacy of the Timurids," p. 46.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gulru Necipoglu, "The Serial Portraits of Ottoman Sultans in Comparative Perspective," in *The Sultan's Portrait* (Istanbul: Isbank, 2000), p. 51.

deceased royal ancestors, particularly Timur.²² Genealogical portraits did not remain static in the Mughal palace but could be retouched to include successors and their sons. For example the painting known as “Princes of the House of Timur,” representing an imaginary garden party including Timur, Babur, and Humayun, was originally painted in the time of Humayun (around 1550) but was later reworked to include Akbar, Jahangir, and a young Shah Jahan in what had become a vast panoramic celebration of the Timurid royal lineage.²³ Illustrated genealogical scrolls, *silsilahnamas*, produced in the Mughal workshops demonstrated Mughal claims to legitimate descent from Timur, Chinggis Khan, and the mythical Turco-Mongol ancestress Alanqua. Even *silsilahnamas* produced in the fourteenth-century Ilkhanid period were, like dynastic portraits, at a much later date in Transoxiana amended to include later descendants of the House of Timur.²⁴

Babur’s descendants compulsively reiterated imperial claims to Transoxiana, confirming Mughal loyalty to the concept of an ancestral homeland, the lost patrimony of Babur, and the “hereditary dominions” of the Mughal kings.²⁵ When his son, Humayun (1508–1556), with the aid of Safavid troops, returned from Iran to reclaim his patrimony, it was toward Samarqand that he first led his invading force. Only after being decisively driven out of Transoxiana by the Uzbek Khans did he reluctantly turn south to retake Northern India. Jahangir wrote of his own and his father’s passion for Transoxiana, describing what would ultimately remain an unfulfilled aspiration to leave his sons as governors of the subcontinent while he himself led his armies north.²⁶ One son, Shah Jahan (1592–1666), did indeed organize such an expedition, sending two sons north to conquer Balkh, which he intended as the base for a military conquest of Samarqand. He too was foiled, in part because of the overextension of Mughal forces, committed as they were to the simultaneous Mughal conquest of the Deccan.

Yet even amongst the Mughals, Jahangir was remarkable for his relentless attention to his dynastic lineage and the maintenance of Timurid political and cultural continuities, regularly referring to Transoxiana (*Turan*) as his *vilāyet-i marūsi*, hereditary territories, and

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁵ Richard C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 134.

²⁶ *Tuzuk*, p. 16.

mulk-i marūsi, ancestral domain.²⁷ In the middle of Jahangir's twenty-four-year reign he made a lengthy nostalgic pilgrimage to Kabul, Babur's longtime capital, which he described in his memoirs as "our home dominions."²⁸ There, Jahangir traced Babur's footsteps, visited his favorite gardens, and added his own name and that of their shared ancestor, Timur, to Babur's dynastic inscriptions. Although he had read them earlier, in the Persian translation, Jahangir wrote touchingly of reading Babur's memoirs in "entirely his own blessed handwriting (*khat-i mubārak*) . . . for although I grew up in Hindustan, I am not ignorant of how to read and write Turkish (*dar goftan u nevishtan Turkī 'āri nīstam*)."²⁹ Jahangir's defensive assertion is probably accurate, for as late as the reign of Aurangzeb (1618–1707) royal children were schooled in the Turkish language of their ancestors.³⁰

Jahangir's obsession with his Timurid lineage was well known, and rival rulers were quick to make use of it in diplomatic exchange. Naqshbandi ambassadors from the Uzbek courts in Harat and Samarqand carried lines of poetry penned by Babur himself as an entrée to Jahangir's inner court. The Portuguese offered Jahangir a portrait of Timur, painted, he was told, by a Byzantine Christian present at Timur's conquest of Ottoman Anatolia. A doubtful Jahangir felt the portrait must be a fake, for it "bore no resemblance to his royal descendants." He wistfully added, "If this had been true, in my opinion there could not have been a more valuable object in my possession."³¹ In a period of tense haggling over control of Qandahar, the Safavid Shah Abbas sent a magnificent ruby that had originated in the treasury of Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg, and was inscribed with his name, that of his father, Shahrukh, and that of his grandfather, Timur, as a gift to the Mughal emperor. "Because it had the names of my ancestors (*nām-i ajdād-i man*) on it," wrote Jahangir, "I took it as an auspicious blessing (*tayamuna ve tubarrugan bar khod mubārak girafte*)."³² He proceeded to have his own name, "Jahangir Shah, son of Akbar Shah" added to the ruby's imperial *silsilah* and presented it to his son Khurram, while determinedly clinging to Qandahar, if for only a few more

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16 and 53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁰ Bakhtawar Khan, *Mir'at-i A'lam*, in *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, 2nd ed. (London: Trubner and Co., 1875; New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), 7:162. Citations are to the AMS edition.

³¹ *Wakī'at-i Jahangiri*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 6:320.

³² *Tuzuk*, p. 369.

years. When Khurram ascended to the throne as the emperor Shah Jahan, he instructed the court ateliers to set the Ulugh Beg ruby into a fabulous, jewel-encrusted chair, which later became known as the Peacock Throne.³³

Even in the near collapse of Mughal power in the wake of mid-eighteenth-century opposition movements and invasions there was near universal agreement among those in power “regarding the divine right of the Timurids to rule,” and as late as the reign of Bahadur Shah (d. 1857), the last Mughal king, hope was expressed in India’s governing circles that an imperial revival could be constructed under the charismatic leadership of a Timurid descendant in order to unite the crumbling empire.³⁴

JAHANGIR AND THE TIMURID SUCCESSION TRADITION

Throughout the period of greatest Mughal prosperity and strength, the absence of a fixed law of inheritance guaranteed regular wars of succession on the death or deposition of each monarch. Yet although these wars are described in Mughal chronicles as destructive, ranging across the land, laying waste and destroying prosperity, the Mughals never successfully constructed an alternative, less traumatic method of ordering succession. While other Turco-Mongolian empires, notably the Ottomans, Uzbeks, and Safavids, initially used similar succession practices (using the tanistry principle linked with the assignment of princely appanages), they eventually created alternative systems that successfully contained succession rivalries within the palace, thereby avoiding expensive and destructive wars between rival princes. That the origins of the Mughal succession system can be directly attributed to the practices of their Mongol-Timurid predecessors is a fact the Mughals themselves were quick to acknowledge, and the Mughals continued to display unwavering loyalty to a principle that was inefficient at best and often critically destructive.

It is possible to identify in Islamic Central Asia the notions of rivalry, loyalty, and political entitlement that were embodied in Mughal imperial traditions and that defined their acceptance of sovereignty and political viability. The nomadic steppe cultures of Cen-

³³ Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnama*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 7:46.

³⁴ Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707–1740* (Aligarh Muslim University, 1959), p. 257.

tral Asia were organized around the basic clan units, patriarchal and agnatic, led by a hereditary military elite. Significantly, all male members of the elite held the right to claim political sovereignty. Leadership of the clan or confederation was confirmed by acknowledgement of members of the elite, but this was often not until after an internal battle had established which of the contenders was able to wrest power and control away from his competitors. This method of establishing royal succession, referred to as *tanistry*, “resulted in frequent internecine struggles and in the inevitable fragmentation of political authority.”³⁵ The system was marked by constant competition for power and fluid, shifting loyalties. Nevertheless, it was a system that “resulted in the regular re-subjugation and reintegration of clans,” affirming their social coherence among the otherwise centrifugal forces of steppe society.³⁶

Forming a critical link to Turco-Mongolian notions of shared claims of political sovereignty, a system of heritable divisions of territory was used within the royal family. “In the presence of strong, charismatic leaders, such as Chingiz Khan or Timur, the right to political sovereignty found expression in the practice of appanage distribution among the male descendants, the principle of seniority of succession often being observed.”³⁷ The appanage system allowed royal sons real political training as governors of the imperial provinces: developing governing skills, managing a treasury, organizing a military force, and representing the royal center in far-flung imperial provinces, although with varying degrees of autonomy.

Timur, having united large portions of the Mongol empire, asserted his political legitimacy through Mongol imperial ideology, associating himself with the particularly charismatic Chinggisid dynasty through marriage and assumption of the title *Guregen*, son-in-law. His descendants retained collective legitimacy as Chinggisid-Timurids, and the Timurid empire was partitioned among the imperial princes, each assigned an appanage to govern.³⁸ As governors the princes maintained their own provincial household modeled on that of the imperial court, including viziers, scribal staffs, tax collectors, and a retinue of bureaucratic and military servants. On his ascension to the throne, the

³⁵ Maria Eva Subtelny, “Babur’s Rival Relations,” *Der Islam* 66 (1989): 106.

³⁶ Joseph Fletcher, “Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3–4 (1979–1980): 239.

³⁷ Subtelny, “Babur’s Rival Relations,” p. 106.

³⁸ Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, p. 15.

prince/successor's household was expected to serve as the nucleus of his imperial household, complete with all of its established internal networks of patronage and loyalty.³⁹ Although Timur's grandson Pir Muhammad Jahangir, governor of conquered Northern India, was officially designated as his successor, Timur's death in 1405 was followed by fifteen years of succession struggles between his sons and grandsons, all of whom could be seen as valid candidates, each with independent bases of power and influence.

Although the princes served as provincial governors, their status remained ambiguous, and their relative political autonomy was dependent on the degree of charismatic power held by the sovereign. Under Timur the princes had been treated as extensions of the imperial center, leading armies and governing at the behest of their ruler, although their assignments seem to have been intended to be permanent. After Timur's death, when political authority in Central Asia became fragmented, some appanages developed into independent territories with only superficial allegiance to imperial successors. The inherently fissiparous tendencies born of imperial partition could only be controlled by leadership capable of demanding complete personal loyalty. While the princes, their territories, treasuries, and armies were intended to be at the service of the emperor, in the absence of clear imperial authority they could emerge in support of the prince-governor, or rebellious amirs "pursuing their own ambition," or that of any other charismatic contender for power.⁴⁰

Timurid scholar Maria Subtelny writes, "It was not so much the succession of battles, victories, and defeats in themselves, as the continual political realignments among the numerous contenders for power that are such an outstanding feature of this period. Indeed, the very notions of loyalty and treason become almost impossible to define, for even personal retainers appear to have been free to leave their masters when it was expedient to do so."⁴¹ Babur's family relationships reflected the complexity of intermarriage and loyalty, with the Chinggisid Mongols represented on his mother's side, Timurid Turks on his father's, and Uzbeks more distantly by marriage.⁴² Babur's grandfather had split his territory into four smaller appanages, assigning one to each of his sons.

³⁹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 43.

⁴⁰ Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 68 and 155.

⁴¹ Subtelny, "Babur's Rival Relations," p. 104.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

When Babur's father died, the twelve-year-old inherited the paternal appanage of Ferghana, but by age twenty-one had lost it to "antagonistic kinsmen and advancing Uzbeks."⁴³

Ambitious and always aware of his own royal lineage and personal right to claim sovereignty as a member of the fifth generation in direct descent from Timur, Babur spent his youth in repeated attempts to conquer the ancestral capital of the Timurids, Samarqand, and recover his lost appanage, Ferghana. His daughter later wrote of his struggle for supremacy, "For eleven full years his wars and struggles against the Chaghatai and Timurid and Uzbek princes in Mawara'un-nahr (Transoxiana) were such that the tongue of the pen is too feeble and weak to recount them."⁴⁴

From the very earliest days of Babur's military success, he implemented the classic Timurid appanage system among his own sons. Shortly after his first campaigns into northern India, while on the road to Kabul, a letter reached Babur from Badakhshan that the governor of the province, Mirza Khan, had died, that his son was too young to replace him, and that the Uzbeks were near. The solution reached by Babur was completely Timurid in character: the young son of the deceased governor would inherit his father's patrimony while the politically critical governorship of Badakhshan was handed over to Babur's eldest son, the thirteen-year-old Prince Humayun. A description of the preparations entailed in establishing a princely household is sadly lacking in the Mughal memoirs and chronicles, but Babur's daughter, Humayun's half-sister Gulbaden, wrote of the affectionate parents escorting their son to Badakhshan, where they "spent several days together. Humayun Padshah remained there and the Padshah, my father, and my lady came to Kabul."⁴⁵

Within the year Babur had conquered Qandahar, to which he immediately assigned his younger son Kamran as governor, while Babur again returned to the family in Kabul. While Babur completed his conquest of northern India, his young sons served as governors of the territories he accrued. At the time of Babur's death in Agra his youngest son, Hindal, was governing in Kabul. Hindal's lifelong *ateke*, Mir Hurd, on a visit to the imperial court, was at the deathbed of the ailing emperor whose anxious questions about his distant son illustrate

⁴³ Dale, "Legacy of the Timurids," p. 44.

⁴⁴ Gulbaden Begum, *Humayunnama (The History of Humayun)*, Persian and English text, ed. and trans. Annette S. Beveridge (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1972), p. 3. (Beveridge, trans., p. 84).

⁴⁵ *Humayunnama*, p. 11.

the lengthy separations between parent and child. “How tall has Hindal Mirza grown?” the father asked, and “What is he like?”⁴⁶

In a letter to his successor, Humayun, Babur articulated his plans for a traditional Chinggisid-Timurid system of royal appanages, in which he seems to be describing princely rule over semi-autonomous territories with one brother dominating the empire. Significantly, long after Humayun had been publicly acknowledged as his successor, Babur enigmatically reminded his eldest that he had always been expected to share with his brothers. In what seems to be an explanation of the intended territorial division, he wrote to Humayun, “As you know this rule has always been observed, when you had six parts, Kamran had five. This has always been the rule and do not change it.”⁴⁷ Babur was uncomfortably aware of the weakness inherent in shared sovereignty, twice quoting Sa‘di’s *Gulistan* in his memoirs, “*Doh darwish dar gilīmi bakhshpanad, ve du padshah dar iqlīmi nakunjanad*” (Ten poor men may sleep under one blanket, but two kings cannot fit into one clime).⁴⁸ Yet while he surely appreciated the latent tensions in territorial divisions amongst the royal sons, Babur seemed driven to retain the traditional Timurid principle of partition of the empire. The degree of political autonomy he intended for his sons in their provincial governorships, however, was not clear to anyone, least of all his successor Humayun.

Like his father, in the tradition of their Timurid ancestors, Humayun continued to use his brothers as projections of the imperial center, yet the princes had little loyalty to his sovereignty. Inexplicably, princely appanages have been consistently ignored in contemporary studies of Mughal succession conflicts, but the degree to which these positions offered Mughal princes an autonomous base of power—military, economic, and political—must be explored as it relates to their ability to wage war and wield influence.⁴⁹ In the absence of strongly charismatic central leadership, as had been evident in Timur and Babur, the system of princely appanage was divisive and threatened the unity of the empire. In an examination of the subsequent rebellions of Humayun’s brothers, it is clear that the princes were driven

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama (Vekayi)*, ed. Eiji Mano (Kyoto: Syokado, 1995), pp. 558–559.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 187 and 285.

⁴⁹ See Munis Faruqi, *Princes and Power in the Mughal Empire, 1569–1657* (unpublished diss., Duke University, 2002).

and inspired by their possession of what were in fact nearly independent territories.

While Humayun may have imagined his brothers to be provincial administrators at the command of the imperial center, they, as territorial governors in command of their own military forces, administrations, and treasuries, clearly thought themselves to be legitimate contenders for imperial sovereignty. In a migration reminiscent of his father's years of wandering, as his inheritance disintegrated, Humayun led his army through the territories of Mughal princes and amirs, some of whom welcomed and fed the emperor's forces while others refused to admit them. While the princes conspired over imperial territory Humayun was bewildered, recognizing the threat to imperial unity and yet unwilling to attack his brothers. Humayun's eventual flight from Mirza Askeri's force of two thousand troops was so frantic that his own young son, the future emperor Akbar, was left behind to be taken hostage by his uncle.⁵⁰

Although he was arguably the "first Indian Mughal ruler," Akbar's childhood political training fell into traditional Timurid patterns. He had been restored to his parents after a rout of his uncle's army left him behind in camp, and as Timurid custom demanded, the ten-year-old prince was granted an administrative household and appanage of his own. On the death of another uncle, Hindal, "all the servants of Mirza Hindal, together with all his *jagirs*, *viz.*, Ghaznan [*sic*], *etc.* were assigned to him [Akbar], so that, by the practice of rule, he might exhibit favor and severity in the management of men; and by administration of a part, he might become accustomed to administer the whole."⁵¹

As emperor, Akbar made two dramatic modifications of Timurid traditions in the political and military training of princes—the disappearance of childhood appanages and the regular rotation of princely governorships. No explanation of this change can be found in the Mughal chronicles, nor much comment of any kind. Abu'l Fazl wrote only that "The wise sovereign kept his children under his own care and did not appoint any guardian to them, and was continually educating them in the most excellent manner of which there are few instances in ancient times."⁵² Akbar's three sons, Selim (the future

⁵⁰ *Humayunnama*, p. 22.

⁵¹ Abu Fazil Allami, *Akbarnama*, trans. Henry Beveridge (1902–1939; repr., Delhi: Ess Publications, 1979), 1:586.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3:105.

Jahangir), Shah Murad, and Danyal, were not given appanages in their youth, and we will not again see the assignment of childhood appanages among Mughal princes. Nor was the status of a princely appanage ever again in doubt, as it had been at the time of Babur's death. From the time of Akbar and through the reigns of his successors, all princely governorships received constant oversight by the emperor, assignments were regularly rotated and Mughal princes serving their father away from the imperial court were regularly recalled to pay homage. In exchange for their demonstrations of fealty—the giving of magnificent gifts and their affirmations of loyalty and even servility—they were regularly allocated larger incomes, higher titles, and new assignments. The capital cities of the Mughal empire no longer contained just the palace of the emperor but the only slightly less lavish palaces of the royal princes who resided nearby their father, the emperor.⁵³

Yet even with modifications to Timurid princely governorships, Mughal wars of succession continued unabated. Jahangir's first assignment to a governorship, that of Ajmer, occurred in 1598 when Jahangir was twenty-nine years old.⁵⁴ He handled independence badly, committing serious acts of sedition, including the murder of his father's closest friend and the production of gold and silver currency in his own name, before being brought to heel again by his father. Jahangir's defenders insisted that Akbar was not entirely displeased by his insurrections, for "through this act His Highness's [Jahangir's] bravery and manliness were noticed."⁵⁵ His two brothers, Danyal and Sultan Murad, died young from "overindulgence in wine," but Jahangir's succession was contested by his own son, Khusraw, who felt he had been Akbar's heir apparent.⁵⁶ In a notable commentary on the Mughal succession, Khusraw justified his filial insubordination by asserting, "I shall certainly not become more criminal by taking arms against Jahangir than he himself was in revolting against Akbar. If I offend, it will only be by following the example of my father."⁵⁷ The emperor composed bitter verses in response to the disloyalty of the royal prince:

⁵³ 'Inayet Khan, *The Shah Jahan Nama of 'Inayet Khan*, ed. W. E. Begley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 537.

⁵⁴ Muhammad-Hadi, preface to *Jahangirnama*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁶ *Tuzuk*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Ram Prasad Khosla, *Mughal Kingship and Nobility* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1976), p. 100.

Who could have known that this youngster
 would get on such bad terms with his elders?
 With the first goblet he brought forth the dregs,
 abandoning my splendor and his own shame.
 He burned the sun's throne in desiring Jamshed's place.⁵⁸

A younger son, Khurram, the later Shah Jahan, exhibited brilliance as a military leader in campaigns in the Deccan and Gujarat and developed a fair degree of political influence and authority both at court and in the provinces, which he eventually abused. At age thirty, his increasingly rebellious acts drove his father to rename him "Bi-dawlet" (unfortunate; wretched), and, in irritation, Jahangir even returned to hunting, which he had foresworn five years earlier for the benefit of Khurram's ailing son!⁵⁹ Jahangir, himself the protagonist in earlier dramatic succession conflicts, complained of his rebellious prince, "About which of my afflictions should I write? In my grief and weakness, and with such warm weather, which is extremely debilitating to my constitution, is it really necessary for me to get on a horse and gallop in this condition after such a villainous son?"⁶⁰

A closer watch on Mughal princes was not enough to control their aspirations to kingship. Even without the political and military independence that sprang from control of a traditional Timurid semi-autonomous governorship in the imperial provinces, Mughal princes were so often employed as extensions of the state that by middle age they were usually experienced administrators and hardened military commanders, possessed of a complete imperial household and positioned to command their own networks of loyalty and patronage. A contemporary witness wrote, "When these princes once leave the paternal house, they work and scheme to make themselves friends. They write secretly to the Hindu princes and the Mahometan generals, promising them that when they become king they will raise their allowances."⁶¹ The memoirs of Jahangir affirm the increasing partisanship of his sons' advisors and refer regularly to the *naukar* (liege men) of the princes, indicating the independent nature and loyalty of their personal retinues.⁶² Sixteenth-century modifications may have reduced

⁵⁸ *Tuzuk*, p. 38; Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ *Tuzuk*, pp. 403 and 595.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁶¹ Niccolao Manucci, *Memoirs of the Mogul Court*, trans. Michael Edwardes (London: Folio Society, 1957), pp. 37–38.

⁶² *Tuzuk*, pp. 394 and 403.

princely access to the potential source of power that was the Timurid appanage, thereby averting declarations of territorial autonomy, but the princes' awareness of their own political viability, the sophistication of their personal patronage networks, and their highly developed administrative and military skills, learned in their role as extensions of imperial power, were only frustrated by heightened paternal control. It is no wonder that tensions and conflicts over sovereignty continued to rock the Mughal court.

Confronted with similar dilemmas, and sharing something of the same Turkic Central Asian origins, the Ottomans and Safavids gradually modified their original succession principles dramatically. Beginning with the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Murad I (r. 1362–1389) and lasting until the mid seventeenth century, each successful Ottoman regent destroyed all possible competitors by executing every prince of the royal blood immediately on achieving the throne. Murad I's near contemporary, the Ottoman poet Ahmadi, explained:

His brothers became enemies to him
The affairs of all of them were ended at his hands
They were all destroyed by the sword.⁶³

Although the modified system resulted in regular bloodshed, it was understandably successful in preventing postaccessional fratricidal threats to the throne. An attempt by Mehmet I (r. 1413–1420) to divide the Ottoman empire amongst his sons, hoping thereby to prevent war between brothers, was skillfully outmaneuvered by an influential palace faction, and the subsequent succession battle raged for three years.⁶⁴

In a further innovation, designed to prevent the wide-ranging and destructive succession wars seen by the Mughals, from the mid sixteenth century Safavid and Ottoman princes were no longer assigned provincial appanages but instead spent their lives in seclusion in the *kafes*, the cage. Isolated within the household of the sultan and shah, the princes were not allowed to father children, establish a public identity, or develop the retinue that might support princely aspirations to the throne. Eventually the Ottomans moved away from accessional fratricide and instead employed a simple system of seniority, although the empowering institution of princely governorships was never rein-

⁶³ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 97.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

stituted. Succession conflicts henceforth remained confined within the palace.⁶⁵

Diplomatic exchange among the Turkic/Persian empires was enough to ensure that the Mughals were aware of the alterations made to Ottoman and Safavid succession patterns. Akbar and Jahangir duly expressed horror at the bloody family dramas of their rivals while their own destructive succession wars continued to rage across the subcontinent. While relatively minor changes can be identified within related Mughal institutions, such as the princely appanage, the fundamental Timurid-Mughal succession tradition based on the principle of *tanistry* remained firmly in place. Protesting a plot within the palace to assign the dynastic succession, Akbar's courtiers who themselves were "descended from an ancient and illustrious Mughal family" declared, "This is contrary to the laws and customs of the Chagatai Tartars and shall never be."⁶⁶ Although it provoked devastating wars between brothers and produced an indirect dynastic line, the principle of *tanistry* remained in place in India, forming a critical link to the Timurid steppe heritage, and defining individual rights to sovereignty and Mughal political legitimacy.

JAHANGIR AND TIMURID RELIGIOUS ETHICS

A further direct inheritance from their Central Asian ancestors was the body of religious and ethical understandings maintained by the Mughals on the subcontinent—a Timurid stew of Perso-Islamic and Chinggisid systems of morality, ethics, and law. Although the two universalist traditions would seem to exist at absolute odds, Timur had managed to successfully merge them into a legitimizing ideology that supported and sustained not only his own imperial pretensions but also those of his successors, first in Transoxiana and later on the subcontinent.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See Peirce, *Imperial Harem*; and Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), for a discussion of the Ottoman succession. See Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and H. R. Roemer, "The Safavids," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), for information regarding the Safavid succession.

⁶⁶ Asad Beg, *Wikaya-i Asad Beg*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 6:170.

⁶⁷ See Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*; and Manz, "Temur and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. 3, 8, no. 1 (1998): 21–41.

The Timurids were Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi *madhhab* who relied heavily on, among other less well known Central Asian works of *fiqh* scholarship, 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Marghinani's classic twelfth-century legal treatise, the *Hedaya*.⁶⁸ Although the *Hedaya* had been applied on the subcontinent through the years of the Delhi Sultans, its central importance in India was confirmed and maintained by Mughal patronage. The *Hedaya* was particularly influential in the evolving presentation of Hanafi *fiqh* in Mughal India and served as the foundation for the later *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*, commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) to serve as the ultimate compendium of Mughal legal understanding. However it was to the original *Hedaya* that British officials turned to supply the standard legal authority in the Muslim courts of the East India Company, where the preferred *fiqh* scholarship of the Timurids remained the basis of Islamic law on the Indian subcontinent throughout the colonial period.⁶⁹

The Mughals additionally were careful to nurture the important historical Timurid political and social alliance with the Naqshbandiyyah order of sufis. Babur and his father had both been Naqshbandi *murids* of the fifteenth-century Sheikh Khwaja 'Ubaydullah Ahrar of Samarqand, and after taking Kabul, Babur had "inherited" its Ahrari Naqshbandi community. The extensive local properties of the Naqshbandis of Kabul adjoined royal demesne in an indication of their close relationship with the previous rulers in Kabul, which had until recently included Babur's own uncle, Ulugh Beg Kabuli.⁷⁰ Accumulated under the sponsorship of devoted Timurid rulers, these *waqf* properties offered a crucial base from which the Naqshbandi order would, on the heels of Babur's conquest, launch an expansion into northern India.⁷¹ Until the mid seventeenth century, their base in Kabul would remain the Naqshbandi's most important center, anchoring a vital Kabul-Agra axis within Babur's Timurid empire.⁷²

Apart from personal spiritual considerations, Mughal patronage of the Naqshbandi order increased Mughal religious and political legiti-

⁶⁸ 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Marghinani, *The Hedaya or Guide: A Commentary on the Muslim Laws*, trans. Charles Hamilton, 2nd ed. (1870; repr., Lahore: Premier Book House, 1963).

⁶⁹ Alan M. Geunther, "Hanafi *Fiqh* in Mughal India: The *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*," in *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 210.

⁷⁰ Stephen F. Dale and Alam Payind, "The Ahrari Waqf in Kabul in the Year 1546 and the Mughul Naqshbandiyyah," *JOAS* 119, no. 2 (1999): 210–233, 223.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

macy in the eyes of both Central Asian and South Asian subjects. With Babur's increased success, the relationship between the Timurid and Ahrari families grew closer, and the powerful and influential Naqshbandis achieved the status of spiritual nobility in the royal court of Babur, resulting in the establishment of "an informal aristocratic Naqshbandi lobby at the Mughal court."⁷³ In what has been described as a "new phase of Timurid-Naqshbandi relations," the Ahrari Naqshbandis of Kabul, already economic and political allies, became further entwined in Timurid family affairs through a series of intermarriages with the Mughal dynasty.⁷⁴

The expansion of the Naqshbandiyya onto the subcontinent had been facilitated by Mughal patronage during the imperial conquest, and Naqshbandi immigration to India from Transoxiana was steadily maintained through the entire Mughal period. A Naqshbandi *tekke* in the southern Indian city of Awrangabad maintained strong Central Asian *khwajagan* Naqshbandi affiliations until the end of the eighteenth century. Even through the period of Mughal imperial decline, the most important members of the community continued to be recent immigrants from Transoxiana, affiliated with the order because of their place of origin in Balkh or Bukhara.⁷⁵ Their models for proper behavior remained the great fifteenth-century *khwajas* of Transoxiana, and the writings of the order, in their descriptions of behaviors and use of Persianate idioms and anecdotes, seem to have been modeled on earlier Naqshbandi texts of Central Asian origin.⁷⁶

By the time of Jahangir's reign, rich gifts and lines of poetry were regularly being exchanged⁷⁷ between the Mughal court and the Transoxiana-based order, and Jahangir described himself as "one of (the) devotees and sincere servant" of the hereditary leader of the order.⁷⁸ When an important Naqshbandi sheikh, Khwaja Abdul Rahim, arrived as emissary from Transoxiana, Jahangir honored him by exempting him from *korunush* and *taslim*, the traditional performance of obeisance before the emperor.⁷⁹ Jahangir's generous and affectionate attentions to the Naqshbandi leadership would seem to indicate

⁷³ Dale, "Legacy of the Timurids," p. 47.

⁷⁴ Dale and Payind, "Ahrari Waqf," p. 225.

⁷⁵ Simon Digby, *Sufis and Soldiers in Awrangzeb's Deccan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁷ *Tuzuk*, pp. 175–176.

⁷⁸ Mutribi al-Asamm Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*, p. 40.

⁷⁹ *Tuzuk*, p. 503.

that his imprisonment of the infamous Naqshbandi Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, known by the sobriquet *Mujaddidi-i ālf-i sāni*, Renewer of the Second Millennium, was not motivated by a rejection of his family's close alliance with the Naqshbandi order but rather by Jahangir's passionate mistrust of insincere piety in any form, in addition to a perhaps well-founded fear of public disturbance.

Describing Sirhindi as *shā'iyad*, imposter or hypocrite, and his collected writings, the *Maktūbāt*, as *jenq-i muhimmilāt*, a war of nonsensical rhetoric, which would lead to *kafir ve ridda*, infidelity and apostasy, Jahangir claimed that Sirhindi and his followers had spread *dam-i zarg u sālūs*, a net of deceit and deception, peddled mysticism, and hoodwinked a gullible public.⁸⁰ In order that "the confusion and madness in his mind would accept quietude, and likewise the tumult amongst the common folk," the emperor had Sirhindi imprisoned in the fort of Gwalior.⁸¹ A chastened Sirhindi was released after one year, remaining at court for some months in seeming amity with Jahangir, and all the while the traditional social alliance between Naqshbandi and Timurid remained comfortably intact.⁸² It can be no wonder that a disgruntled Chishti *sheikh*, frustrated at ineffective attempts to influence the sixth Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, wrote that "the Emperor of Hindustan is a descendant of Amir Timur and Amir Timur was spiritually attached to Shah-i Naqshband. These Turanians, all and every one of them, are connected with the Naqshbandi order and they do not attach value to any other *silsilah*."⁸³

Yet for all of their traditional religious loyalties, shared in large part by their contemporaries, the Ottomans, the Mughal kings in fact represent a Timurid symbiosis. While Jahangir and the other Mughal kings did not hesitate to define themselves in classic terms of Perso-Islamic kingship, this dynastic presentation was coupled with a seemingly careless disregard for narrower understandings of Islamic jurisprudence. As we shall see, this Mughal casual religious pragmatism may be attributed less to their position on the periphery of the Islamic heartland or to influences from the Indian environment than to Mughal retention of late Timurid ethical and political values.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 309.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Maktubat-i Kalimi, Letters of Shah Kalimullah of Delhi*, Delhi, 1302 AH, 75, in *State and Culture in Medieval India*, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1985), p. 160.

Timurid political philosophy was most heavily influenced by a thirteenth-century Persian treatise on political ethics, the *Akhlāq-i Nasīri*, composed by Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi.⁸⁴ Originally intended as advice literature for Ismaili rulers in Iran, Tusi adjusted to political realities and instead offered his treatise in its original form to Iran's Mongol invaders. Tusi's work spread widely in the Islamic world, gaining acceptance and influence in Timurid Transoxiana, where a local version of Tusi's political philosophy was formally presented to Babur himself, to serve as guide to the last independent Timurid prince and his descendants.

In Tusi's ethical construct, human reason was granted precedence over established religious legal code and the requirement of royal justice diluted the absolute power of the ruler in the interests of the subjects' well-being. In contrast to Nizam ul-Mulk's support for the suppression of political dissent as the critical component of royal justice,⁸⁵ Tusi described justice as the act of balance among diverse and sometimes conflicting special interest groups within a single state. "The affairs of living thus must be administered through cooperation (*shirkat-o-mu'awant*) which in turn depends on justice (*'adl*). If *'adl* disappears each will then follow his own desire. . . . But *Shari'a* cannot work without it being administered by a just king, whose principal duty is to bring the people in control with affection and favors."⁸⁶

Tusi's tolerant humanism suited well the character of the Timurid-Mughal kings who ruled over a diverse and polyglot empire, in which Islam was a minority religion. It became a staple in the curriculum of Mughal madrasas, and Emperor Akbar's chief minister, Abu'l Fazl, had the treatise regularly read aloud to Akbar, confirming the administration's commitment to Tusi's religious tolerance in a letter of instruction that was sent to local Mughal administrators across the empire.⁸⁷ Referring to Tusi's writings, as well as Jalal al-Din Davvani's *Akhlāq-i Jalali*, and the *Gulistan* and *Bustan* of Hoja Mosleh al-Din Sa'di, a noted Hindu poet of Shah Jahan's court wrote that "It was by imbibing the code of life enshrined in these texts that the learned in Mughal culture were expected to earn their capital (*dast-e māya-ye khwod*) and

⁸⁴ Nasir al-Din Tusi, *Akhlāq-i Nasīri*, 5th ed. (1373; Tehran: Shirket-i Salami-ye Intisharat-e Khorazm, 1994).

⁸⁵ Nizam ul-Mulk, *Siyaset Nama (The Book of Government)*, trans. Hubert Darke (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁸⁶ Muzaffar Alam, "Akhlāqī Norms and Mughal Governance," in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, ed. Muzaffar Alam et al. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), p. 78.

⁸⁷ Alam, "Akhlāqī Norms," pp. 84–85.

be blessed with the fortunes of knowledge and good moral conduct (*sa'ādat-e 'elm bā 'amal*).⁸⁸

Tusi's tolerant spirit found fertile ground in a society already informed by the Islamic mysticism and Persian poetic culture which was ubiquitous in Timurid Transoxiana. Sufi doctrine commonly emphasized the ideology of *wahdat al-wujud*, unity of being, which was interpreted by many, particularly the popular and influential medieval Persian poets, to imply equality of religious expression and encourage the accommodation of diverse religious traditions. The *masnavi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi, which Emperor Akbar is said to have nearly committed to memory, contained the verse:

*To barā-ye vasl kardan āmadi
Na barā-ye fasl kardan āmadi
Hindiyān-rā estelāh-e Hind madh
Sindiyan-rā estelāh-e Sind madh.*

Thou hast come to unite,
Not to separate.
For the people of Hind, the idiom of Hind is praiseworthy,
For the people of Sind, their own is to be praised.⁸⁹

In the spirit of Rumi and Nasir al-Din Tusi, the late Timurid milieu in Transoxiana seems to have allowed an arena for a degree of fluidity in individual religious identity, at least among the ruling elites. Husain Bayqara, the powerful and influential late Timurid ruler of Harat (1438–1506), had at one time toyed with conversion to Shi'ism. Ever pragmatic, the Mughal dynastic founder Babur himself converted to Shi'ism in an effort to gain the support of the Safavid Shah in one of his attempts to conquer the Timurid capitol of Samarqand, although he abruptly dropped his Shi'a allegiances after again losing control of the capital city. His son Humayun, in his own desperate battle to reclaim his patrimony, followed in his father's footsteps and bowed to religious conversion in exchange for Safavid assistance in his ultimately successful attempt to reconquer Northern India. He too reverted to the family's traditional Sunni allegiance as soon as the

⁸⁸ Chandra Bhan, *Chahar Chanan*, and Bendraban Das Khwoshgu, *Tazkera*, quoted in Muzaffar Alam, "State Building under the Mughals: Religion, Culture and Politics," in *Cahiers D'Asie Centrale*, 3–4, *L'Héritage Timouride*, ed. Maria Suppe (Tashkent and Aix-en-Provence, 1997), p. 116.

⁸⁹ Jalal al-Din Rumi, quoted in Muzaffar Alam, "State Building under the Mughals," p. 119.

need for Safavid aid had passed. Humayun's son Akbar was renowned for his wildly heterodox religious allegiances, and Jahangir seems to have been quite willing to concur with his father's lack of interest in conservative Islam. Pragmatic political and personal manipulation of what seems to have often been a deeply felt, yet remarkably fluid, religious identity reflects a high degree of continuity between the Timurid and Mughal dynasties.

Mughal flexibility and tolerant understanding of religious loyalty was applied to others at their court. The religious affiliations of Mughal women similarly reflect the family's high degree of spiritual insouciance—Jahangir's mother was a Hindu princess of Rajasthan, and his celebrated wife, Nur Jahan, was the Shi'a daughter of Persian immigrants to India. The wives of Mughal kings, in common with their courtiers, were not expected to convert to Sunni Islam, and a variety of faiths coexisted harmoniously within an imperial palace that housed mosques, Christian chapels, and Hindu temples. Jahangir celebrated his dynasty's acceptance of diversity, religious tolerance, rejection of narrower political codes, and patronage of political writings, which, like that of Tusi, emphasized the independent nature of justice. Describing his father's imperial court, and by extension his own, Jahangir proudly wrote, "Just as all groups and the practitioners of all religions have a place within the spacious circle of God's mercy . . . in my father's realm, which ended at the salty sea, there was room for practitioners of various sects and beliefs, both true and imperfect, and strife and altercation were not allowed."⁹⁰

Jahangir's image of himself as a classic Perso-Islamic ruler was further tempered by his father's personal legacy. The emperor Akbar is renowned for his creation of a tolerant balance in a multiethnic, multi-religious empire, establishing a remarkably stable and unified nobility that included Rajput nobles, Persian intellectuals, Arab scholars, Turkish and Uzbek military men, local lineage chiefs and caste leaders, and an eclectic imperial court that included Jesuit missionaries, diplomats, mercenaries, and merchants. It has been cogently argued that rather than a new religion, as he was reputed to have attempted in his *din-i-illahi*, Akbar was creating a Sufi order with himself as *pīr*.⁹¹ The enlistment of a small number of disciples was an important component of Akbar's religious system, and, although Akbar's was a more formal

⁹⁰ *Tuzuk*, p. 32; Thackston, *Jahangirnāma*, p. 40.

⁹¹ Stephen Blake, "The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals," in *The State in India, 1000–1700*, ed. Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 287.

process, it not incidentally hearkens back to Babur's warnings to his descendants to socialize intimately with their imperial retinue in order to tie them to the throne.⁹² In Akbar's case this resulted in the creation of a body of intensely loyal courtiers in an intimate relationship with the emperor, regardless of ethnic or hereditary service loyalties.⁹³

Jahangir imitated his father's enrollment of loyal courtiers and seems to have dabbled in identifying himself as a near deity or Sufi *pīr*, while relinquishing his father's more extreme religious interpretations. In the middle of his reign he had his ears pierced and strung with pearl earrings, as evidenced in palace portraits, an act that seems to have been replicated by his closest courtiers as a mark of discipleship.⁹⁴ Jahangir not only accepted an inherited *murshīd* status, but his memoirs suggest that he felt himself sincere in his role of spiritual leader to the young palace courtiers who bound themselves to him through oaths of loyalty.

The emperor's routine and habitual public patronage of sincere piety in all of its incarnations, Muslim or non-Muslim, may have been particularly valuable in the face of the Mughal's lack of an intimate relationship with the *ulema*. By contrast, seventeenth-century Ottoman Istanbul was marked by the growth of an entrenched religious *ilmiye* aristocracy, coupled with an emerging reactionary fundamentalist movement known as the *Kadıızadelis*, who ranted against Sufism and such innovations as eating utensils, and who managed for some decades to control the Ottoman throne.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the contemporary Mughal court displayed varying degrees of disinterest in proponents of conservative Islamic legalism. While mosque construction was a commonly asserted act of piety by members of the dynasty from the time of Timur, attendance at religious services almost entirely escapes comment in family chronicles. While mentioning regular visits to various Sufi shrines, neither Babur nor Jahangir referred in their memoirs to more than a single visit to a mosque. On his ascension to the throne, Jahangir decreed that the allowances of the women of the family be raised from between 20 and 100 percent, but in contrast the emperor only confirmed the salaries of religious clerics, offering them no

⁹² Stephen Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 182.

⁹³ John F. Richards, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir," in *Power, Administration and Finance in Mughal India* (Brookfield, Vt.: Varorium, 1993), pp. 268–269.

⁹⁴ *Tuzuk*, p. 152.

⁹⁵ Madeline C. Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988).

increase in salary at all.⁹⁶ Although allowed a place at court, the *ulema* continued to be denied substantial influence and played a minor role in establishing the religious or political credentials of the Mughals.

On the other hand, Jahangir's memoir contains regular references to Mughal awareness of Mongol law, the *yasa* and *tamgha* of Chinggis Khan. It has been argued that the codification of a coherent body of law by Chinggis Khan in the early thirteenth century was more imagined than real, its content representing ancient Mongol custom rather than *kanun*.⁹⁷ Yet, as early as the period of the Ilkhanate, "the *Yasa* remained, apparently, in the Mongol consciousness as a symbol of the Shamanist, primitive, simple and perhaps (to some) 'purer' past, which had gradually been eroded by conquest and world empire."⁹⁸ For much the same reasons, it seems, the fourth Mughal emperor seems to have had no more qualms or concerns over the awkward reconciliation of Islamic and Mongol legal systems than had his illustrious ancestors. Jahangir describes punishments at his court as *be resmi-u tūra-i Chingīs Khān*, "in accordance with the custom and code of Chingis Khan," and while there is little reason to believe that any particular body of canonized Mongol law was regularly applied in Mughal India, it is clear that Jahangir felt it important to articulate his own respectful allegiance to Chinggisid tradition, affirming its place in the Mughal court, while steadfastly remaining silent as to his own attendance at the Friday mosque.⁹⁹ In India, as in Central Asia and Iran, "if the 'Great *Yasa* of Chingis Khan' did not exist it was evidently necessary to invent it."¹⁰⁰

While much attention was paid to affirming the Mughal emperor's legitimate role as a classic Perso-Islamic king, within his own self-conscious presentation of self and empire Jahangir's Central Asian Turkic dynastic lineage remained a central component of Mughal imperial identity on the subcontinent. In fact, Jahangir's religion and ethics most closely resemble those of his late Timurid ancestors: pragmatic, informal, and statist. Religion offered legitimacy and a useful model for kingship, but Jahangir's true obsession lay less in religion than in lineage; his memoirs make it clear that it was his Timurid-Turkish

⁹⁶ *Tuzuk*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ David O. Morgan, "The 'Great "Yasa" of Chingiz Khan' and Mongol Law in the Ilkhanate," *Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies, In Honor of Ann Lambton*, 49, no. 1 (1986): 163–176.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁹⁹ *Tuzuk*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, "Great 'Yasa' of Chingiz Khan," p. 173.

dynastic identity that remained of central importance to Jahangir's understanding of himself and the empire he had inherited.

JAHANGIR AND TIMURID COURT CULTURE: LIFE IN THE GARDEN

Much has been written about the classical Timurid garden, described as "the pinnacle of the art of garden design in medieval Iran and Central Asia."¹⁰¹ While the generic garden (*bagh*) was admired in a variety of shapes and styles, the formal *chahar-bagh* was considered by many in Timurid Transoxiana to be the most estimable landscape form. The *chahar-bagh* was composed of a rectangular grid split by symmetrical waterways to form four garden areas of fruit trees, herbs, flowers, and even vegetables, usually centered on a pavilion or other garden structure. Of Persian provenance, originating in the Sassanid era or earlier, the *chahar-bagh* was embraced and appropriated by Timurid society, already heavily dominated by Iranian motifs and models "whose conventions and connotations would be recognized by the elites of the Iranian world."¹⁰² Timurid fascination with Persian forms, both literary and visual, was perhaps due in part to their value as universal symbols which marked the Timurid "transformation from a military caste into monarchs in the Iranian Islamic mold, who recognized the necessity of cultural prowess as an ideal of rule."¹⁰³

One of Timur's biographers describes the construction of what seems to have been a classic *chahar-bagh*, en route from Timur's winter quarters to the capital city: "Along the way is a mountain, approximately seven *parasangs* from Samarqand, and at the pass flows a river. When the mighty emperor reached that mountain, since his realm-adorning mind never missed an opportunity to build something in any place that was worthy of a structure, he ordered a garden laid out there in such a way that the sweet waters of the river would flow through the garden . . ."

Highland and lowland, steppe and plain, were
Turned into pleasure parks like the gardens of
Paradise.

¹⁰¹ M. E. Subtelny, "Mirak-i Sayyid Ghiyas and the Timurid Tradition of Landscape Architecture," *Studia Iranica* 24 (1995): 20.

¹⁰² Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, p. 168.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Forage herbs became tulips, stones became
 Rubies and pearls, grass became elixir, and the
 Ground became gold.¹⁰⁴

Yet while the *chahar-bagh* was admired in fifteenth-century Central Asia for its sophisticated geometric form and physical beauty, it is possible that the enormous prestige, even reverence, it acquired in late Timurid Transoxiana was due in some measure to the function of the garden as a popular site of artistic and social expression. It was the life within the garden, as much as the garden itself, which resonated in the Timurid psyche. Inspired by the relative freedom of their open spaces, the beauty of their lush yet tightly controlled flora, the prestige of ownership, and not least the implications for membership in elite literary circles, leading personalities of Harat developed a taste for large and sophisticated classical gardens, which became recognized as important urban architectural landmarks.¹⁰⁵

Babur, himself an aspiring poet, arriving in Harat in 1506 after the death of its renowned Timurid ruler, Mirza Husain Bayqara, and the emigration of the glittering literati of Bayqara's court, toured many of the city's *baghs* and *chahar-baghs*, confirming his deep personal admiration for the gardens and the late Timurid social milieu the landscapes had come to symbolize. It was his romantic vision of late Timurid courtly life, exemplified by the classical garden and the life played out within it, which Babur and his descendants would attempt to reproduce in his conquered territories.

As the ruler of Delhi, Babur expressed appreciation for India's vast wealth and uncountable numbers of skilled craftsmen, yet for the Timurid prince, India's failings—its heat and dust, its lack of melons and *medreses*—seem to have centered on and become encapsulated in the region's utter lack of a classic garden or appropriate space upon which to build one.¹⁰⁶ "Everywhere I looked," he wrote, "was so unpleasant and desolate (*karāhat ve nākhōshlūk*). . . . Because the place was so ugly and unpleasant I abandoned my dream of building a *chahar-bagh*."¹⁰⁷ Yet life without gardens was unthinkable and, while Babur could not improve India's climate or native flora, with Timurid

¹⁰⁴ Sharifuddin Ali Yazdi, *Zafarnama* (Book of Triumph), in Thackston, *A Century of Princes*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁵ Subtelny, "Mirak-i Sayyid Ghiyas," 1995.

¹⁰⁶ *Baburnama*, p. 468.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 482; and *Baburnama*, 3 vols., trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Chaghatai, Persian, and English) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 642.

pragmatism and willingness to compromise, a proper garden could be constructed. Eventually, Babur was to order a classic Timurid garden built in every place he settled. "There was nothing to do but work with the space we had. . . . Thus in unpleasant and unharmonious India (*bī safā ve bī siyāq Hind*), marvelously regular and geometric gardens were introduced."¹⁰⁸ Babur was not the only immigrant from Transoxiana who admired and longed for the classic *baghs* of Transoxiana. "All who had acquired lands on the [Yamuna] river," Babur added, listing his Turkish companions by name, "also built geometric and beautifully planned gardens and pools." Babur confirmed the originality of the Timurid garden in India, adding, "Since the people of India had never seen such planned or regular spaces they nicknamed the side of the Yamuna on which those structures stood, *Kabul*."¹⁰⁹

Babur's descendants maintained his passion for the classic Persian gardens of Transoxiana throughout their 250 years of rule in India. In contrast to their Ottoman contemporaries, the Mughal's conquest of India "came to be expressed hardly at all in religious monuments but pervasively as the imperialism of landscape architecture, the civilized ideal of the Timurid period"—the most famous example being the classic *chahar-bagh* design of the Taj Mahal, the tomb of Shah Jahan's beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal.¹¹⁰

Almost one hundred years after Babur and his soldiers began to landscape the banks of the Yamuna River, the emperor Jahangir affirmed the continued importance of the Timurid garden to the Mughal dynasty. On a nostalgic journey to Babur's former capitol, he reverently toured seven of Kabul's gardens, including the Shahrara, the Mahtab, the Orta Bagh, another garden nearby which had been built by Jahangir's grandmother, the Suratkhana, and the largest garden in Kabul, the Chaharbagh, writing afterward, "I don't recollect that I ever walked so much."¹¹¹ Jahangir spent his time in Kabul at the Shahrara Garden, which he claimed was so delicate, "that to put a shod foot on its surface would be tasteless and unnatural."¹¹² Under its cherry trees he conversed with his companions and the ladies of his court, and organized noodle-cooking sessions, archery contests, and dances for Kabul's religious students. Spying "an excellent piece of ground," nearby, the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ *Baburnama*, p. 483; and Thackston, *Baburnama*, p. 644.

¹¹⁰ Dale, *Garden of the Eight Paradises*, p. 186.

¹¹¹ *Tuzuk*, pp. 62–63.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 62.

Timurid Jahangir ordered the construction of yet another garden, with a “beauty and elegance that would have no equal in all the world. I named it Jahanara, World Adorner.”

The Peripatetic Court

It was not enough for the Timurids to visit their gardens occasionally—it was a regular practice for the entire imperial court to move itself out of their lavish palaces and reside within the gardens surrounding them. The Portuguese ambassador to Timur’s court, Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, reported that Timur granted audiences in a series of classic *chahar-baghs* surrounding the imperial palaces, complete with artificial waterways, orchards of fruit and shade trees, raised paths, and imported deer.¹¹³ Timur’s foreign visitors were first offered tours of the palace interiors but were then led outside to the gardens, where they feasted sumptuously in the luxurious tents of Timur, his wives, and courtiers. Clavijo was first greeted in the garden known as Dilkusha (Hearts-ease), where Timur was residing in silken tents and from which he moved in a few days to the garden called Bagh-i Chinar (Plane Tree Garden), and then to a third in a seeming endless series of classic palace gardens.¹¹⁴ Throughout the gardens numerous pavilions of silk and embroidered tapestry were erected, and “all of these enclosures aforesaid were occupied either by the wives of Timur, or by the wives of his grandsons, and these princes and princesses have their abode therein, as does also his Highness likewise, both summer and winter.”¹¹⁵

Like the Timurids, the Mughals of India possessed luxurious palaces, but equally luxurious tent encampments were as common on the subcontinent as they had been in Transoxiana.¹¹⁶ On visiting Delhi in the time of the emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627–1659), Mughal notables erected tents in Delhi’s gardens rather than reside in one of the city’s palaces.¹¹⁷ Tent life not only offered constant contact with the natural world, but also allowed the Mughals to maintain what has been called a “peripatetic” court. With duplicate imperial camps leapfrogging

¹¹³ Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*, trans. Guy le Strange (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), p. 216.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Tavernier (104) (2), I, pp. 96–97. in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, by Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), I: 446.

across the countryside, “the capital and court were wherever the emperor happened to be at the moment.”¹¹⁸ An observer of the imperial procession described “All theis moevinge in one, on soe many huge Eliphants seemed like a fleet of shippes with flagg and streamers. . . . Soe that all theis together made a most majesticall, warlike and delightsome sight.”¹¹⁹ Yet this mobility had a purpose: the “peripatetic court” was a classic Turco-Mongol strategy for political control and centralization, as a reminder and a threat of imperial power. Additionally, in the frequent wars of succession and princely mutinies, the emperor’s constant movement meant that the control of any particular city by a rebellious prince would not be a serious threat to the sovereignty of the emperor. The mobile Mughal emperors, who well understood the threat of a princely uprising, even carried along all or much of the royal treasury.

Even by the standards of his nomadic ancestors, Jahangir was unusually restless; on one occasion remaining away from his capital at Agra for a total of five years and seven months while ponderously moving at an elephant’s pace through the provinces of his empire. His occasional stays in Agra had the flavor of visits more than homecomings. The emperor remained on the move during more than half of his reign, with no real capital city, yet the constant rambling of the royal encampment was often pure pleasure for Jahangir, who comfortably combined his imperial duties with life in a garden setting. His court wove slowly through magnificent countryside, pausing regularly for pleasure trips to famous sights, visits to local mystics, the personal distribution of alms, dispensation of imperial justice, and the daily hunt. A journey in his eleventh regnal year, from Ajmer to Mandu, was traveled in forty-six stages over more than four months, during which “the rest stops were all delightful places on the banks of ponds or irrigation canals and magnificent rivers edged by trees, greenery, and fields of blooming poppies, and not a day passed, whether marching or halting, without hunting. We came the whole way by horseback or elephant, seeing the sights and hunting.” As if in affirmation of the dynastic passion for landscapes, the emperor added, “The arduousness of a journey (*mishqat-i sefer*) was never apparent. It was as if we were moving from garden to garden.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Thackston, Translator’s Preface, *Jahangirnama*, p. xix.

¹¹⁹ Peter Mundy, *Travels*, 2, 188ff. as quoted by Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, p. xix.

¹²⁰ *Tuzuk*, p. 207.

Social Life in the Garden: Poetry and Intoxicants at the Timurid Majlis

In late Timurid Transoxiana, as in most of the Islamic world, poetry was the skill most highly prized among aristocrats and intellectuals. While the royal courts were filled with professional poets busily writing panegyrics of praise for their patrons, most members of the elite classes tried their hand at composition as well. It was a culture in which “ambitious Turko-Mongol aristocrats were expected to be able to compose verse.”¹²¹ “People . . . played with poetry, did tricks with poems, showed off their talents with poetry, were funny, insulting and naughty in poems. . . . Everyone from ruler to peasant, from religious scholar to rake and drunkard aspired to be a poet.”¹²² It seems entirely possible that Babur’s search for empire was no more essential to him than his aspirations to literary renown as the author of more than six hundred poems.

In late Timurid Transoxiana, the arts were not a solitary pleasure but a communal affair to be enjoyed in a gathering of close companions. The Timurid vehicle for public expression of artistic skill was the *majlis*, a literary soiree that could take a number of forms, from that of a formal courtly recitation in a private household to most often a wildly competitive poetry slam combined with rambunctious drinking and drug taking in any one of Harat’s myriad magnificent gardens.¹²³ The classical garden served as the social center of the artistic elite, becoming a symbol of the golden age of late Timurid society, and as such was memorialized in miniature paintings and venerated in verse.

Social gatherings in the garden were the “principal communal institution of late-Timurid social, political, and cultural life,” and to Babur one of life’s greatest pleasures.¹²⁴ As an old warrior in an unfamiliar clime, suffering from failing health and an oft-regretted vow of temperance, Babur waxed nostalgic about his years as ruler of Kabul, and his reminiscences most often revolved around riotous drinking parties and poetry readings surrounded by his boon companions in a Timurid garden. “In truth the longing and craving for a wine-party (*chāgīr majlisi*) has been infinite and endless for two years past, so much so that

¹²¹ Dale, *Garden of the Eight Paradises*, p. 255.

¹²² Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaki, eds. and trans., *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹²⁴ Dale, *Garden of the Eight Paradises*, p. 180.

sometimes the craving for wine brought me to the verge of tears,"¹²⁵ he wrote, only a few years before his death, adding, "Parties and wine are pleasant with comrades and boon companions" (*Sohbet ve chāgīr hemsohbet ve hemkāsa bile khoshtur*).¹²⁶

While poetry and comradeship remained constant vital components of the garden gathering, Babur's memoirs are rife with references to parties in which the Mughal founder describes drinking and drug taking to the point of physical collapse. Babur offered his sons and posterity a political justification and defense for the ruler's participation in these regular drinking parties. In a lengthy chiding letter to his eldest son, Babur complained of gossip that Humayun tended to remain aloof, a loner, and he directed his son to socialize regularly with his followers. Regular intimate contact served a critical political purpose, for the garden party was an effective device with which to establish personal ties with the imperial elite and affirm the loyalty of the ruler's retinue, an opportunity to develop social cohesion and camaraderie.¹²⁷ Jahangir used a similar justification in his own memoirs, describing regular wine parties (*majlis-i sharāb-i tertīb*) in which his courtiers became "intoxicated with the wine of loyalty" (*sharāb-i marhamat*).¹²⁸

The generous use of intoxicants seems to have been a critical component of the Timurid *majlis*, and Babur's lack of inhibition in describing his drunken escapades can perhaps be better understood in the context of his heavy-drinking ancestors.¹²⁹ Timur's court had been known for the vast quantities of alcohol consumed, as described by the Portuguese ambassador in Samarqand. "It is the custom with the Tartars to drink their wine before eating, and they are want to partake of it so copiously and quaffing it at such frequent intervals that the men soon get very drunk. No feast we were told is considered a real festival unless the guests have drunk themselves sot. . . . And further he who refuses to drink must be made to drink, and this whether he will or no."¹³⁰

Babur's father, Umar Shaykh, had been a "great drinker," and his

¹²⁵ *Baburnama*, p. 576; and Annette Susan Beveridge, trans., *The Baburnama in English* (London: Luzac & Co., 1969), p. 648.

¹²⁶ *Baburnama*, p. 576.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 560; and Dale, *Garden of the Eight Paradises*, p. 148.

¹²⁸ *Tuzuk*, p. 212.

¹²⁹ For a fascinating discussion of Iranian drug and alcohol usage, see the new monograph by Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹³⁰ Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*, p. 231.

successor and eldest son, Humayun, freely admitted to opium addiction.¹³¹ According to contemporary reports, Akbar too had been an opium user; learning of the murder of his close friend and biographer, Abu'l Fazl, Akbar “neither shaved nor used opium” in his grief.¹³² As a Timurid king, social life for Jahangir included the usual Timurid reverence for poetry, formal gardens, male camaraderie, and a steady diet of intoxicants. A nineteenth-century historian declared himself aghast at the vast amounts of alcohol and drugs consumed at the court of Babur’s great-grandson. Referring to Jahangir’s memoirs, he exclaimed, “There are as many drinking bouts noticed as in the Memoirs of Jahangir’s great-grandfather Babur, and the extraordinary potations to which he [Jahangir] confesses would have shamed even that immoderate toper.”¹³³ Unapologetic drug use, and only slightly embarrassed alcoholism, received regular references in Jahangir’s writings. In the year 1621 the emperor regretfully recorded the death of “an old and trusted servant,” whose sole charge at the Mughal court seems to have been the care and keeping of the imperial intoxicants. Immediately after this servant’s death Jahangir appointed a new steward for opium and another for wine.¹³⁴

On the occasion of his son’s revolt, Jahangir described racing across the countryside to catch the fleeing prince, and seemed to blithely affirm that both were addicted to opium. “When it was noon and the heat was at its hottest,” he wrote, “I stopped for a moment in the shade of a tree and said to Khan A’zam [his companion], ‘Inasmuch as I, my composure notwithstanding, have not yet had my regular dose of opium I should have had at the beginning of the day, and no one has reminded me of it, imagine what state that wretch must be in!’”¹³⁵ This most unfortunate Timurid inheritance cost the Mughals a terrible price. Mughal princes of every generation died of alcohol abuse, including Babur’s two brothers; Akbar’s half-brother, Mirza Hakim; both of Jahangir’s brothers, Danyal and Sultan Murad; and his nephew, Parvez. When Akbar locked his son in the palace in order to prevent his gaining access to alcohol, “friends” of the prince smuggled drink to him, “concealing it in the barrels of muskets, and sometimes in their

¹³¹ *Humayunnama*, p. 38, Beveridge, trans., p. 131.

¹³² Asad Beg, *Wikaya*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 6:155.

¹³³ Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 6:260.

¹³⁴ *Tuzuk*, p. 360.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Thackston, *Jahangirnama*, p. 50.

turbans.”¹³⁶ Only a month later, Prince Danyal died at the age of thirty-three, “an event which caused both friends and strangers to sit down in grief and mourning.”¹³⁷

Yet in defense of the *majlis*, it is important to note that the Mughals, obsessed as they were with the replication of Timurid symbols of legitimacy and the pursuit of Perso-Islamic imperial models, clung to Timurid patterns of cultural patronage. In Timurid Transoxiana, renowned artists had circulated among the competitive princely courts, developing close personal relationships with the rulers for whom they were often referred to as “boon companions.”¹³⁸ Beneficent Timurid patronage patterns were driven to heights of generosity, enhancing the reputations of the princes of the house of Timur and eliciting awed admiration from rival dynasties. The fifteenth-century Timurid ruler of Harat, Husain Bayqara, through a remarkable degree of royal patronage, gained universal admiration and fame when he developed a glittering court society populated by the leading artistic figures of the day, including such notables as the poets ‘Ali Shir Nava’i (1501) and Abd’ul Rahman Jami (1492), and the painter Bihzad. Late fifteenth-century biographies of the city’s poets list more than three hundred living in Harat in this period. The visual arts were represented by painted portraits and miniatures, which were passed around the salons of Husain Bayqara, for appraisal and criticism by Harat’s court society.¹³⁹ A member of this elite circle described Bayqara’s Harat as “characterized by a universal preoccupation with the arts (*chunarmandi*) and patronage of them (*hunar-parvani*).”¹⁴⁰

Even non-Timurid contemporaries of the Mughals—the Ottomans, Uzbeks, and Safavids—shared the sense that perhaps the greatest legacy of the late Timurids had been their extraordinarily intimate and generous artistic patronage. At the Ottoman court of Murat IV, awareness of late Timurid artistic patronage was demonstrated by the admiring palace cleric, Mustafa Ali, who urged the Turkish sultan to emulate the style of Husain Bayqara of Harat by patronizing artistic and literary court favorites and holding similarly fabulous salons. “The years of his [Husain Bayqara’s] government,” Mustafa Ali advised, “passed under discussion of poetry and prose. . . . In the rose garden of

¹³⁶ Inayatulla, *Takmila-i Akbar-Nama*, in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, 6:114.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, p. 165.

¹³⁹ Necipoglu, “Serial Portraits of Ottoman Sultans,” p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ Maria Eva Subtelny, quoting Dawlatshah in “Arts and Politics in Early Sixteenth Century Central Asia,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 27, nos. 1–2 (1983): 121–148, 123.

his reign of justice nobody moaned except perhaps the moaning night-
ingale, and in his happy days nobody wept except perhaps the stream
that waters the meadow.”¹⁴¹

The Timurid garden party, with its heavy emphasis on competitive poetic skills, encouraged munificent Mughal patronage of the literary arts. Poets who showed themselves comfortable with classical poetic forms and able to build on their established model were welcomed at the Mughal court, finding themselves included within the intimate circle surrounding the emperor for whom literary prowess could trump any ethnic, social, or class barriers. Eventually the relatively benevolent and extremely wealthy Mughal court became a refuge for those who fled Iran and Central Asia because of religious intolerance or were drawn to the Mughal court by the promise of wealthy benefactors.

In fact, the Mughals did not passively await the arrival of artists and intellectuals but, in exactly the manner of the royal courts of their Timurid forefathers, actively sought them out.¹⁴² A *ferman* from the court of Akbar to Chelebi Beg of Shiraz not only offered a generous degree of Mughal patronage to the renowned scholar, but requested that Chelebi Beg invite other worthies to the imperial court. Akbar found amusement in “the wisdom of God, which had necessitated a situation of interdependence in which not only do the rulers pay attention to the group of learned men but the latter also seek royal patronage which is a source of permanent honour and gain.”¹⁴³ Thousands of Persian and Central Asian artists and intellectuals found patrons not only at the emperor’s court but, as had been the case in Timurid Transoxiana, within the wealthy households of the nobility, adding to an artistic and literary efflorescence that has been described as “a Timurid renaissance in India.”¹⁴⁴

JAHANGIR, EMPEROR OF INDIA

A recent study of Babur’s memoirs describes his writings as an effort to demonstrate his legitimate right to rule due to his nature as “the perfect man, or perfect ruler.” In late Timurid Transoxiana the perfect

¹⁴¹ Mustafa Ali, *Council for Sultans of 1581*, ed. and trans. Andreas Tietze (Wein: Verlag Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), p. 28.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Abu’l Fazl, *Insha’i Abu’l Fazl*, pp. 52–54, in *Mukatabat-i-Allam (Insha’i Abu’l Fazl)*, Mansura Haider (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1998), p. 116.

¹⁴⁴ Dale, “Legacy of the Timurids,” pp. 43–51.

ruler was a “Persianized, Islamicized Turco-Mongol aristocrat . . . an *adib*, a cultured, civilized man and therefore, partly for that reason, qualified to rule.”¹⁴⁵ It is clear that, through the device of royal memoirs, first Babur, then Jahangir, was describing his right to rule in the model of his ancestors. Jahangir’s careful presentation of himself as a legitimate ruler, however, illustrates little modification in the generations since Babur’s reluctant conquest of northern India, reflecting with a remarkable degree of continuity the values of the late Timurid rulers of Transoxiana.

Yet if Jahangir saw himself as an Islamic king, benevolent and tolerant, dispensing justice and charity, and a Timurid ruler descended from the mythical goddess Alanqua through a line of Turkic empire builders and statesmen, he was also an Indian emperor, born of a Rajput mother and raised in a palace housing Hindu temples. When Jahangir hunted, it was as often on elephants as on ponies, and although he defensively claimed to know the Chaghatai Turkish of his Timurid ancestors, his memoir, unlike that of his great-grandfather, was composed in the court Persian of India. His memoir is sprinkled with Hindi vocabulary and it seems very likely that he had some degree of proficiency in the language, particularly in light of his regular mention of private religious debate with Hindu “yogis and pundits.” In contrast to his contemporaries, the Ottoman sultan, Safavid Shah, and the Uzbek and the Afghan khans, Jahangir controlled immeasurable wealth, derived from the taxation of one of the world’s largest populations as well as from India’s carefully protected and highly profitable export trade. His memoir includes lengthy and painstaking descriptions of the valuables presented at court, where regular public gift exchanges tied the nobility to the throne, with all of the goods carefully evaluated in both Indian and Persian measures so that the reader might have no doubt of the value. As the emperor of India, Jahangir publicly affirmed his riches and the power they brought him through the device of his memoir.

Yet there are few clues in his personal writings that Jahangir identified himself as an Indian emperor rather than Turco-Timurid. In fact, in composing his memoirs, Jahangir seems to have defined and presented his own identity and the character of his empire in direct response to the advice and example of his imperial predecessors. His ideas of kingship and empire can be viewed as a reflection of the loom-

¹⁴⁵ Dale, *Garden of the Eight Paradises*, p. 466.

ing Timurid legacy of his dynasty. His great-grandfather had left him with an obsession for his lineage that seems to have overwhelmed the possibility of another, alternative identity formation, even when the Timurid cultural package no longer was sufficient to define the Mughal dynasty of India.

When the Central Asian prince Babur first conquered northern India he had complained bitterly about the Indian climate and culture, the lack of melons and of *medreses*, but when, over one hundred years later, Shah Jahan sent armies north to reconquer Transoxiana his son, Murad Baksh, fled the city of Balkh, returning to India in disgrace. In a telling commentary on the adaptation of the Timurid-Mughals to their subcontinental empire, when the outraged emperor demanded to know for what reason his son had deserted the Mughal army, the prince replied that he could not bear the cold; he and his nobles “were dreading the hardship of passing a winter in that clime.”¹⁴⁶ Although the reconquest of Samarqand remained an evocative dream and the Mughal emperors continued to cling to their charismatic lineage, it is clear that by the end of the seventeenth century the Mughals had adapted to South Asia, and Timurid steppe culture had become simply a component of the Mughal-Indian synthesis.

All the same, one can imagine Jahangir’s feelings, were he alive today, at the vagaries of history that have positioned him and his dynasty as an Indian monarchy, “born entirely of the Indian experience,” rather than the Persianized, Islamicized, Turco-Mongol Timurids of his, and their own, imagining. The field of Timurid-Mughal studies requires a better understanding of their historical, cultural, and political context, not simply to affirm the Mughal inheritance of a Central Asian fusion of religious and political traditions but to explore the migration and retention of a charismatic genealogical identity, which had been carried to the subcontinent by this dynasty in the interests of imperial legitimacy, where it was passionately, even compulsively, retained as an affirmation of the dynasty’s central position in the larger early modern Islamic community.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Inayat Khan, *Shah Jahan Nama*, p. 356.