
*The Empire of Tamerlane as an Adaptation of the
Mongol Empire: An answer to David Morgan, “The
Empire of Tamerlane: An Unsuccessful Re-Run of the
Mongol State?”*

BEATRICE F. MANZ

Abstract

I write this article in the spirit of the Persian poetic tradition, in which an answer to an earlier work takes off from the original and charts its own course. I will suggest that Tamerlane’s recreation of the Mongol Empire was symbolic, and was part of his successful creation of a regional state which was at once Turco-Mongolian and Perso-Islamic. His experiment was continued and elaborated by his successors, and the resulting state provided a highly useful model for later dynasties in the Middle East and Central Asia.

*Through my long engagement with Mongols and Turks, David Morgan’s influence and aid have been a constant advantage and his friendship a recurring pleasure. Our acquaintance began in 1987 with a kind letter he sent me after reading the manuscript for *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* for the Cambridge University Press. Since then I have profited from his scholarship, have used his two books to teach generations of students, and have called on him for uncountable letters of recommendation, always generously given. I also want to thank David for asking me to write the Mongol chapter for the *New Cambridge History of Islam*, and thus attracting me into the Mongol period. It may seem odd to express my gratitude by writing an answer to David’s article which is not entirely in agreement with his conclusions. I trust in the well-known openness of his mind and assume that he will take this in the spirit in which it is offered, as the continuation of many years of discussion.*

The Mongols and the Caliphate

No one could have staged a re-run of the Mongol state; this was a one-time phenomenon which transformed Eurasia and established a dynasty of unequalled charisma. It also transformed the Mongols, whose ruling class converted to Islam throughout the western regions. With the division of the Mongol empire and Mongol conversions we see the creation of a new political culture which combined Mongol administration with Persian chancellery practice. Legitimation was at once Islamic, Persianate and Chinggisid. The Mongol Empire and the Islamic caliphate were both imperial systems claiming universal sovereignty, and they were based on competing codes. It is thus worth asking how the two combined over such a large area, and why the charisma of the Chinggisids lasted so long. I will suggest in this

paper that Mongol rule offered solutions to several political problems in the Islamic world but later, in its turn, it created new problems of legitimacy. The rule of Tamerlane and his stature as a dynastic founder offered correctives to these issues and a workable legitimation for Turco-Mongolian rule in Islamic lands.

What made the Chinggisids the ultimate sovereigns was first of all the enormity of their impact. The destructive success of Chinggis Khan's campaigns evoked horror but also awe and grudging admiration, even among inimical writers. Jūzjānī, writing about 1260 for the Delhi sultanate, celebrated Chinggis's extraordinary powers even while consigning him and most of his progeny to hell.¹ Ibn al-Athīr used eschatological language to describe the catastrophe of the Mongol invasion; it could be explained only as the will of God. Thus Chinggis succeeded through God's design.² The famous Qur'anic statement, that God gives sovereignty to whom he will, reinforced this understanding and indeed was not far from Chinggis's claims that he conquered the world by the will of God. The prestige of later Chinggisid rule rested also on the grandeur of the undivided Mongol empire as it existed through the reign of Möngke – a realm of unparalleled size and power.

The rule of the Mongols brought some useful changes to Islamic political culture. A crucial element in Mongol success was the destruction of the caliphate in 1258. The historian need not bemoan this development, despite the destructiveness with which it was carried out. Even at the height of its power, the territory of the caliphate had been too large to rule effectively from one center and by the time of the Mongol conquest the office of caliph may have been most important as a hindrance to full legitimacy for actual rulers. With its disappearance, the way was opened to sovereign regional rule and to the great states which ushered in the modern period: the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals and Uzbeks. In the absence of the caliphate Baghdad lost its position as symbolic centre of the Islamic world and became a second-rank power. Here again, the change had advantages. The Mesopotamian lands could no longer provide sufficient food for an imperial centre. From the founding of Baghdad, the city had depended on wheat from the Jazīra, which was not easy to control.³ Mismanagement and competition over the lands of the Sawād, with the proximity of dissidents enjoying refuge in marsh, desert and mountain, made local politics exceptionally messy. Once Baghdad ceased to be the seat of the caliphate, ambitious rulers could seek more advantageous capitals.

The end of the Islamic caliphate opened the way both for the rule of Mongols as sovereigns within the Middle East and for the conversion of their khans to Islam. A ruler could now become Muslim without placing himself beneath a higher power. As it happened, the unified Mongol empire survived only one year beyond the death of the last caliph; after the death of Möngke in 1259 it broke into several separate khanates. In China, Qubilai made himself a Buddhist reincarnation and a Chinese emperor, while over the course of the fourteenth century most khans in the western regions converted to Islam. These royal conversions created regional identities with a positive mythology which mediated between

¹Minhāj al-Dīn 'Umar Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, (ed.) 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī (Kabul, 1343/1964), II, 144-145; translated by H.G. Raverty, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī: A General History of the Muḥammadan Dynasties of Asia, including Hindustan, from A.H. 194 [810 A.D.] to A.H. 658 [1260 A.D.] and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islām*, Biblioteca Indica 78 (London, 1881), pp. 1077-1079.

²Ibn al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the Crusading Period from al-Kāmil fī'l-tārīkh*, translated by D.S. Richards (Aldershot, 2006-8), III, pp. 204, 208, 307.

³Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London and Totowa, NJ, 1981), pp. 87-90.

an increasingly Muslim elite and the Chinggisid past to which it owed its position.⁴ Despite political and religious regionalism the Mongol world retained a sense of the whole; the different khanates were actors on the same stage, acutely aware of each other. Throughout the former empire people honoured the same codes, used the same institutions, and derived sovereign power from a single person.

Turco-Mongolian Islamic Culture

By the fourteenth century we can say that a new era had begun in the Islamic world, which was at once Turco-Mongolian and Perso-Islamic. Although there were clear tensions, often trenchantly expressed, the new political culture functioned over a very large area. Muslim Mongol rulers combined two imperial systems, each of which had universal claims and a code which granted legitimacy while demanding precedence. As Mongols the khans had to honour the Mongol *yasa* and *töre*, whose infringement was grounds for invasion and loss of power. As Muslim rulers they were bound to honour the Sharī'a.

How could this balancing act work so well for so long? Most comparisons between the Islamic and Mongol system – medieval and modern – emphasise their differences. Juwaynī, writing about 1260, provided the classical points of friction between the *yasa* and the Sharī'a, describing the Mongol prohibition against bathing in water or cutting the throat while slaughtering animals. He further set up an inherent opposition between the two by portraying Chinggis's second son Chaghatai as both the strict keeper of the *yasa* and *siyāsat*, and the great enemy of Muslims, forbidding them to slaughter animals in the prescribed way.⁵ Mongol and Perso-Islamic political culture, however, also had common traits which are less frequently discussed. The divine favour claimed by Chinggisid khans was not that distant from ancient Persian ideas of kingship, or from the claims of the Shī'ī *imām*. The 'Abbasid caliphs had already found Iranian concepts and court ceremonial useful. In both traditions, a divinely sanctioned autocracy was combined with an underlying egalitarianism which allowed considerable social mobility, and with a belief in the importance of consultation.

The presence of such commonalities may well have made it easier for the two systems to combine into one political culture. Despite the rival positions of *yasa* and Sharī'a, after the conversion of the Mongol rulers the two codes could coexist, at least in the eyes of most rulers and their followers. Some tenets of the Sharī'a – notably those on taxes and on alcohol – had long been honoured in the breach by Islamic rulers. As for the *yasa*, it appears to have been a usefully shadowy entity. As David Morgan has pointed out, we do not know much about the actual contents of the *yasa* or *yasas*, and it is quite possible that the Mongol and Persian elite of the fourteenth century did not know much either. Moreover the *yasa* was a changing concept, which adapted over time to Muslim norms.⁶

⁴See Devin DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire", in Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank and Peter B. Golden (eds), *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: the Chinggisid Age* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 120–134.

⁵'Alā' al-Dīn Aṭā Malik Juwaynī, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, translated by John Andrew Boyle (Manchester, 1958), pp. 40, 204–206, 272.

⁶David Morgan, "The 'Great Yasa of Chinggis Khan' revisited", in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (eds), *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 297–304.

We should recognise that in combining Mongolian and Islamic traditions, rulers were not placating different populations, since by the time most rulers converted, many of their Mongol followers were already Muslims.⁷ For a significant number of Mongols both *yasa* and *Shari'a* were binding codes. We should not see the ethnic lines within this society as absolute, either in religious affiliation or as a divide between the ruling class and the ruled.⁸ Arabs and Persians were part of the elite, holding high office, sometimes military as well as civil. On the other side, Turks and Mongols were not all part of the ruling class; both the lower echelons of the military and common Mongols suffered poverty and oppression along with Persian peasants.⁹

Problems of the Mongol Legacy

While both Perso-Islamic and Turco-Mongolian traditions were now strongly intertwined, significant tensions remained. Muslim Turco-Mongolian rulers downplayed contradictions between *yasa* and *Shari'a*, but many *ulama*, especially in the Mamlūk Sultanate, continued to consider the *yasa* and many aspects of Mongol practice as an affront to the *Shari'a*. However much the *yasa* may have developed to adapt to new conditions, its role as a code of conduct legitimising Mongol rule set it in competition with the *Shari'a*. Moreover, the lack of clarity about the contents of the *yasa* cut both ways, since unattractive practices could be found and attached to it.¹⁰

Another problem for Mongol legitimation was the fact that Chinggis Khan, though accepted as supremely charismatic, had not been a Muslim. This fact was widely remembered and vividly recorded in two histories of enduring popularity: the *Tārīkh-i Jahān-gushā* of Juwaynī, and Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī'l ta'rīkh*. Chinggis Khan's paganism did not block his charisma but it did create embarrassment, leading to attempts to present him as someone who would have been Muslim had he had the chance, or as a quasi-prophet in his own right.¹¹ Chinggisid rulers still had to honour the Mongol *yasa*, associated directly with Chinggis and with earlier Mongolian custom, thus linking their rule directly to a pagan past.¹²

The enormous charisma of the Chinggisid house came to pose a problem in another direction. Mongol rule had freed the Islamic world from the burdens of the caliphate and an economically challenged capital, and had allowed the formation of independent regional states. Over time, however, the Chinggisid stranglehold on power itself became a difficulty, in much the same way that the caliphate had been earlier.

⁷DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire", *passim*.

⁸See Jean Aubin, *Émirs mongols et vizirs persans dans les remous de l'acculturation*, *Studia Iranica*. Cahier 15 (Paris, 1995).

⁹Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jami'u't-tawarikh: A Compendium of Chronicles*, translated by W.M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA, 1998-9), pp. 708-709, 714-718, 735-736, 740.

¹⁰See, for example, Morgan, "The 'Great Yasa of Chinggis Khan' revisited", pp. 305-307; David Ayalon, "The Great Yāsa of Chingiz Khān: A Re-examination. A", *Studia Islamica* 33 (1971), pp. 105-108.

¹¹The mythologising of Chinggis Khan is well described in Michal Biran, *Chinggis Khan* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 118-121.

¹²See, for example, Ayalon, "Great Yāsa. A", pp. 176-177. One of the characteristics that Juwaynī ascribes to the descendants of Tolui to justify their accession to power is their strict adherence to the *yasa*, contrasted to infringements by other houses: Juwaynī, *World Conqueror*, pp. 243-244, 551-552.

The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century

Over the course of the fourteenth century, Chinggisid rulers lost power in both China and Iran and found themselves challenged by tribal powers in several other places. Nonetheless, the lineage of Chinggis Khan remained for Turco-Mongolians the only dynasty that could legitimately wield sovereign power. This situation gave rise to the creation of new systems of legitimation using Chinggisid prestige at second hand. The fall of the Ilkhans in Iran led to a scramble for power among local leaders, including two Turco-Mongolian powers in western Iran: the Chobanids and Jalayirids, both from families closely intermarried with the Ilkhans. For the first years their leaders ruled through puppet khans, but there were surprisingly few satisfactory Chinggisid princes available. In Khurāsān, Taghai Temür, a descendant of Chinggis Khan's brother Jochi Qasar, was elected by a council of Turco-Mongolian emirs and prominent Sufi shaykhs.¹³ By the 1340s Chinggisid legality was weakening in western Iran; the Chobanids began to claim Iranian descent for their khans, while the second leader of the Jalayirids, taking Azerbaijan in the 1350s, dispensed with Chinggisid puppets and ruled in his own name.¹⁴

Within the Chaghatayid regions, Chinggisid prestige remained intact and the tribal leaders who took power over the western part of the khanate in 1347 ruled through Chinggisid khans, while in the eastern section Chinggisids retained power, though with some interruptions. It was within this milieu that Temür began his career. Coming to power in 1370 over the Ulus Chaghatai – the western section of the former Khanate—Temür continued the practices of the previous emirs. He reserved sovereign titles for his Chinggisid puppet – not only the Turco-Mongolian title of khan, but also the Arabic *sultān* and the Iranian *pādshāh*. He further bolstered his standing by marrying several Chinggisid women and adopting the title *güregen* – royal son-in-law.

At the time that Temür rose to power the two imperial systems he belonged to still defined the world view and ambitions of those within them, but both had split into several separate political and cultural regions. The difference between the traditions of western and eastern Iran is symptomatic of growing regional diversity. Mongol rule had revived the idea of Iran as a separate entity and strengthened the division between the Arab west and the Persian east; on taking power as a Muslim, Ghazan Khan declared himself “*Pādshāh-i Īrān wa Islām*”.¹⁵ The Turco-Mongolian world was likewise divided culturally and politically. With the fall of the Ilkhans their two power centres in Azerbaijan and Khorāsān began to follow different paths, the west influenced by the non-Mongol Turkmen population of Anatolia and Azerbaijan.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, separate western sections of the Mongol empire had begun to develop local versions of the Mongol tradition as new rulers looked for legitimation not only to Chinggis Khan and the early empire, but also to the recent Muslim khans of their own region. Chinggisid prestige remained high but Mongol identity had

¹³Jean Aubin, “Le quriltai de Sultān-Maydān (1336)”, *Journal Asiatique* 279 (1991), pp. 175–191.

¹⁴Patrick Wing, “*The Jalayirids and Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Ilkhanate*”, doctoral dissertation (University of Chicago, 2007), pp. 168–169.

¹⁵Bert Fragner, “Ilkhanid Rule and its Contributions to Iranian Political Culture”, in Linda Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 71–73.

become divided. Some groups claimed superiority because of their adherence to steppe norms, while others prided themselves on greater sophistication. The nomads of the western Ulus Chaghatai called themselves Chaghatai and denied this name to the nomads of the eastern Chaghataid regions, whom they called Mughals or more disdainfully, *chete* (robbers). The eastern Chaghataid Mughals, in their turn, liked to call the western Chaghatai *qara'unas*, denoting impure blood. The Chaghatais also distinguished themselves from the “Uzbeks”, a term that denoted not only the followers of Abū'l-Khayr Khan and his family but also more generally nomads of a lower cultural niveau.¹⁶

Within the Middle East, the Ilkhanid heritage held particular prestige. Ghazan Khan had fully embraced his Islamic identity; both he and his successors attempted to rival the Mamlūks as Islamic monarchs.¹⁷ The Ilkhans were further noted for their cultural patronage. The tomb centre at Sulṭāniyya had great symbolic prestige, while the world history of Rashīd al-Dīn provided a benchmark for subsequent dynasties. Thus when the Jalayirids fashioned their legitimation, they attached themselves to the Chinggisid tradition specifically through the Ilkhans. Setting out to conquer Iran Temūr likewise aligned himself with the Ilkhans, claiming their territory and their name, though without abandoning his Chaghataid identity.¹⁸ In this world it was natural to dream of world domination, but the reality was regional.

Tamerlane and the way out of the Impasse

Tamerlane was not a modest man, and his ambitions went far beyond the lands within which he came to power. He was not a Chinggisid, but had a strong taste for sovereign power. Not surprisingly, he soon found ways to present himself as a charismatic figure in his own right. The first, and most important, was his extraordinary career of conquest at the head of an unequalled army. Other methods were more symbolic: his deliberate imitation of Chinggis Khan, his claims to something like supernatural power, and his symbolic recreation of the Mongol empire. I have discussed these strategies in several previous articles.¹⁹ In addition, Temūr turned to astrology and adopted the epithet *ṣāḥib qirān*, Lord of the Fortunate Conjunction.²⁰ Together, these claims made it possible for him to achieve a place among the state founders of the Islamic and Turco-Mongolian world.

In his conquests Temūr deliberately revived the memory of the Mongol invasion. In this regard, he can be said to have equalled his model. By the time he began his conquest of Iran Temūr led a disciplined army commanded by his personal followers and his sons. The

¹⁶Beatrice F. Manz, “The development and meaning of Čagatay identity”, in Jo-Ann Gross (ed.), *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change* (Durham, 1992), pp. 37–39; eadem, “Multi-ethnic empires and the formulation of identity”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003), pp. 85–87.

¹⁷Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol worlds* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 77–80, 97–98.

¹⁸Beatrice F. Manz, “Mongol history rewritten and relived”, in Denise Aigle (ed.), *Figures mythiques des mondes musulmans* (Aix en Provence, 2001 = *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89–90), pp. 138–140.

¹⁹See, for instance, “Mongol history rewritten and relived”; “Tamerlane and the symbolism of sovereignty”, *Iranian Studies* 21, no. 1–2 (1988) pp. 105–122; “Tamerlane’s career and its uses”, *Journal of World History* 13, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–25.

²⁰Michele Bernardini, *Mémoire et propagande à l’époque timouride*, *Studia Iranica*. Cahier 37 (Paris, 2008), pp. 53–57.

high reputation that nomads have held as soldiers may blind us to the exceptional character and success of the armies that Chinggis and Temür led. The ability to amass, command and control such large numbers of troops and to use them for major conquests over decades was just as rare in nomad societies as it was in settled ones – probably rarer. Both Chinggis and Temür were extraordinarily gifted military commanders, and almost equally talented in theatrical display. The most clearly remembered aspect of Chinggis's campaigns was his treatment of cities, in particular the systematic destruction of those that rebelled, entailing the division of populations into groups for various purposes and massacres with a quota of severed heads assigned to each soldier. These aspects Temür deliberately imitated while creating also a new spectacle, minarets built of severed heads.²¹ The usefulness of such atrocities in forming a charismatic image is shown by the prominent place they were given in histories written for Mongol and Timurid rulers.

In state building Temür followed both Mongol and Islamic precedents. He had to show his equality to great leaders of the past, the Mongol Chinggis and the Muslim Maḥmūd of Ghazna, and his superiority to rulers of the present, from Toqtamish to Yildirim Bāyezīd. He also had to take realities into account. His solution was to operate on two planes, separating symbolism from practical administration. From an early period he began to collect Chinggisid khans as protégés, starting with his own puppet, descended from those of the previous rulers of the Ulus Chaghatai. Interestingly, this khan was a descendant not of Chaghatai but of Ögödei. In 1377–9, Temür helped the Jochid Toqtamish take the throne of the Blue Horde to his north, thus hoping to add a Jochid subordinate. In 1384 he acquired another Chinggisid vassal: Luqmān, son of Taghai Temür, who had earlier been enthroned by the Turco-Mongolian powers of Khurāsān.²² Luqmān was a descendant not of Hülegü, but of Chinggis Khan's brother Jochi Qasar; in 1398 Temür did acquire a Toluid protégé, when he welcomed an unsuccessful claimant to the throne of the Northern Yüan. Some years after this Temür set out to restore China to the fold, and presumably this man to his throne.

Temür often imitated Chinggis Khan; but he also differentiated himself in important ways. While he appeared to aim at a recreation of the Mongol empire, the restoration was symbolic. In his administration he remained practical and much more restricted. By the time of his greatest Mongol victory – his decisive defeat of his Chinggisid rival Toqtamish in 1395 – he had established his sons as governors over the former Ilkhanid realm and the southern Chaghatayid lands, with regional administrations and provincial armies. These lands were now formally part of his realm. When he took Toqtamish's realm however, Temür simply installed a different khan and left, making no provision for continued control. The victory over the Jochid steppe was managed like those over the Delhi Sultanate, the Mamlūks and the Ottomans. In all of these areas Temür established his superiority but did not attempt to uphold the new order he installed.

²¹Jean Aubin, "Comment Tamerlan prenait les villes", *Studia Islamica* 19 (1963), pp. 118–119; Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, *Histoire des conquêtes de Tamerlan intitulée Zafarnāma par Nizām al-Dīn Šāmī*, (ed.) Felix Tauer (Prague, 1937–56: I [text of Shāmī]; II [additions by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū]), I, p. 91; Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, *Zafarnāma*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abbāsī, 2 vols (Tehran, 1336/1957), II, p. 263.

²²Manz, "Mongol History rewritten and relived", p. 139.

We should not let the theatricality of Temür's career blind us to his talent for practical calculation. While he was merciless in his destruction, within the lands he chose to rule he also rebuilt, sometimes leaving his army behind to repair the agricultural infrastructure of conquered cities, thus preserving his tax base. In reorganising his governorships in 1403, he set out the borders of his realm quite clearly, encompassing Iraq, most of Iran, the Transcaucasus, the lands of the Ghaznawids, Khwārazm, Transoxiana, and neighboring regions north to Tashkent and Ashpara, east to Kāshghar.²³ Temür thus chose not to recreate the Mongol empire but to center a limited realm around his own homeland. Another important contrast to Chinggis Khan was Temür's identity as a Muslim ruler. His architectural patronage of religion was on a grandiose scale, as befitted his image in other aspects of his life. He also brought to his court three of the great religious scholars of his period, Sayyid 'Alī Jurjānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Taftazānī, and Muḥammad al-Jazarī, showed them honour and demonstrated his ability to understand their teachings. Just as he claimed to fight against usurpers of legitimate Mongol power, he initiated campaigns in the name of the Shari'a.

The Fifteenth century and the Creation of New Models

Temür died in 1405, having defeated the conquerors Toqtamish and Yildirim Bāyezīd, and humbled the Mamlūks and Delhi Sultans. The period that succeeded was one of more modest aspirations and of experimentation in dynastic traditions. There was an increase in religious legitimation, both through the caliphate and with the rise of religious movements. In western regions rulers created a new genealogical myth going back to the Turkic Qaghanate. In the east, Temür's successors kept their connection to the Chinggisid house, while turning Temür into a dynastic founder in his own right.

After the death of his last puppet khan in 1402, Temür had not appointed a new khan. His successors abandoned the institution of a Chinggisid puppet and assumed sovereign titles for themselves, as the second generation of Jalayirds had done earlier. A number of scholars have seen the abandonment of a puppet khan as a turn away from Turco-Mongolian government to a more fully Islamic state. However Temür's son and successor, Shāhrukh (1409-47), did not abandon Chinggisid traditions.²⁴ What changed with the absence of a puppet khan was the handmaiden aspect of Chinggisid legitimation.

Towards the end of his career Temür had developed a new genealogical tradition which his successors elaborated. This formulation neatly connected the Timurid lineage with that of Chinggis Khan and the royal Mongol line, while making Temür less directly dependent on the person of Chinggis. Temür's genealogy was traced back to a common ancestor with Chinggis. Within their line the Timurids emphasized the Barlas ancestor, Qarachar Noyan, who had been attached to Chaghatai. He was said to have acted as judge and senior advisor, and to have passed this office to his descendants serving successive Chaghataid khans.²⁵ The

²³The one region Temür did not succeed in holding was Azerbaijan, ruled by tribal powers.

²⁴John E. Woods, "Timur's genealogy", in Michael Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (eds), *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson* (Salt Lake City, 1990), p. 116 and n. 129 at p. 124-125. Khalīl Sulṭān attempted to justify his usurpation of power by appointing as khan a son of Temür's first choice as successor, the deceased Muḥammad Sulṭān b. Jahāngīr, by a Chinggisid princess: Beatrice F. Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 20.

²⁵Manz, "Tamerlane and the symbolism of sovereignty", pp. 110-111.

fullest exposition of the new legitimization is found in the works of Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, writing during Shāhrukh’s reign. In the prologue to the *Zafarnāma*, his history of Temūr, Yazdī gave a full account of Temūr’s genealogical myth. In the history itself he suppressed mention of the puppet khans while glorifying the figure of Temūr. Yazdī presented Temūr as a ruler connected with the divine, whose actions were clearly backed by the will of God.²⁶ On the cenotaph which Shāhrukh’s son Ulugh Beg provided for Temūr’s grave, he gave an Islamic twist to the Mongol khans’ myth of supernatural origin, identifying the shaft of light which impregnated their ancestress as an incarnation of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.²⁷ Thus Temūr was still within the Mongol tradition, but now a dynastic founder capable of passing on sovereignty to his descendants.

In western Iran and Anatolia, the continued prestige of Chinggis Khan’s dispensation and its use by the Timurids posed a challenge and brought forth new forms of legitimization. The three major Türkmen dynasties — the Ottomans, Aqqoyunlu and the Qaraqoyunlu — turned to the legendary Oghuz Khan connected with the Turkic Qaghanate, who became the subject of a myth incorporating the ancestors of all three dynasties. This tradition emphasized the Islamic roots of the Türkmen, since Oghuz was said to have adopted and promoted Islam. According to legend, he refused his mother’s milk until she agreed to convert to Islam.²⁸ Thus the Turkic-speaking nomad dynasties of the Middle East were divided into two distinct groups, each claiming steppe heritage through a different ancestral myth.

The Timurid Dynasty as Model

However impressive Temūr’s career was, it is unlikely that his renown would have lasted so long had he left nothing behind him. For Temūr, as for Chinggis Khan, the success of the dynasty mattered. Scholars usually portray Temūr’s successors as accomplished cultural patrons but military failures. I followed this tradition in my book on Tamerlane, stating that the realm Temūr’s successors inherited at the end of their struggle for power was a smaller and poorer one.²⁹ Since then I have researched the reign of Shāhrukh and have changed my mind. While the borders of the Timurid realm retreated in the northeast, elsewhere the territories held effectively by Temūr remained within Shāhrukh’s realm. For almost forty years Shāhrukh ruled over a well-organized, prosperous, and relatively peaceful realm. That is no minor achievement. Reviewing Islamic history over the last years, I have found myself crossing off one golden age after another. I speak here of political and economic history. There were certainly periods of prosperity and effective central government, but they rarely lasted more than a few decades before the next succession struggle or the next change of dynasty. Shāhrukh’s reign can take an honorable place within this history.

²⁶Ilker Evrim Binbaş, “The histories of Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī: A formal Analysis”, *Acta Orientalia* 16, no. 4 (2012), p. 414; John E. Wood, “The rise of Timūrid historiography”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46, no. 2 (1987), pp. 104-105.

²⁷Woods, “Timur’s genealogy”, pp. 87-88.

²⁸Devin A. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, PA, 1994), pp. 85-86; John E. Woods, *The Aqqoyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, revised and expanded edition. (Salt Lake City, 1999), pp. 7-9.

²⁹Beatrice F. Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 147.

The story of the Timurid dynasty after Shāhrukh's death is less happy, but it does include the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, in which intensive agriculture and cultural production made up for restricted size and imperfect centralisation.³⁰ The court of Sulṭān Ḥusayn was famous during his lifetime, and it broke up while it was still at its apogee. Its illustrious scholars and artists had to look for new homes and wherever they went they commanded respect and set the standards of excellence. Among them was the famous historian Khwānd-Amīr, who continued the historical tradition of Rashīd al-Dīn.

In the sphere of Islamic learning and piety the later Timurids also won a strong reputation. The works of the great scholars Temür brought to Samarqand, al-Jurjānī and al-Taftazānī, became part of the standard madrasa curriculum across the central Islamic lands.³¹ These scholars or their progeny continued active through the reign of Shāhrukh, who also gained renown for his exceptional personal piety. The reputation of the later Timurid rulers benefited from the lasting prestige of the Naqshbandī order, with two luminaries of particular fame – the poet 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī and the shaykh Khwāja Aḥrār.

Temür as a lasting source of prestige

The Timurid dynasty brought a new Turco-Mongolian model into being, allowing the continued use of Mongol prestige within an Islamic society no longer ruled by Chinggisids. The former Mongol empire remained a stage upon which Turco-Mongolian rulers saw themselves. Temür had played a leading part here and though his figure might not equal that of Chinggis Khan, for many dynasties it proved more useful. He was a great conqueror, a man of exceptional charisma, and equally a Muslim conversant in Perso-Islamic culture who had founded a solidly Islamic dynasty. In attaching themselves to Temür, subsequent rulers could place themselves within the Turco-Mongolian sphere and at the same time share in the prestige of a dynasty remembered for patronage of religion and for cultural brilliance. The Mughal dynasty founded by Babur stressed its Timurid identity more than its maternal Chinggisid descent, producing lavish copies of the history of Temür's life and a set of spurious memoirs. The Ottomans avidly collected manuscripts from Timurid workshops, and the sixteenth-century Ottoman historian Muṣṭafā 'Ālī places Temür with Alexander the Great and Chinggis Khan among the three true *ṣāhib qirān* – world conquerors who established universal dominion. Chinggis Khan is tarnished by his non-Muslim origins, but Temür is to be admired, despite his defeat of Bāyezīd.³² Under Shāh 'Abbās, the Safavids also chose to associate themselves with Temür, and in the eighteenth century Nādir Shah invoked the memory of Temür through history, myth and imitation in much the same way that Temür had done with Chinggis Khan.³³

³⁰See Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*, Brill's Inner Asian library 19 (Leiden, 2007).

³¹Francis Robinson, "Education", in Robert Irwin (ed.), *New Cambridge History of Islam*, IV (Cambridge, 2010), p. 514.

³²Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Āli (1541-1600)* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), pp. 280-285.

³³Manz, "Tamerlane's career", pp. 12-14; Maria Szuppe, "L'évolution de l'image de Timour et des Timourides dans l'historiographie safavide, XVIe-XVIIIe siècles", in Szuppe (ed.), *L'Héritage timouride Iran - Asie centrale - Inde XVIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Tashkent and Aix-en-Provence, 1997 = Cahiers d'Asie centrale), pp. 315-322; Sholeh A Quinn,

In Central Asia Temür's usefulness came later. When the Uzbeks took Transoxiana from the Timurids, they presented their rule as a restoration of Chinggisid tradition; thus Temür was downplayed in the histories of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. However in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as tribal leaders gained power in Bukhara, Khiva and Ferghana, Temür became an important figure for dynastic legitimation.³⁴ His popularity was not limited to the ruling class. Over the eighteenth century a spate of semi-mythical histories of Temür appeared; it is interesting to note that the Chinggisids were often negatively portrayed in them. Temür is here not the preserver of the Chinggisid tradition, but the hero who saves his region from Mongol rule.³⁵

The Timurid dynasty ruled a relative short time: about a hundred and thirty years. Its lasting influence and its use as a source of legitimacy are due partly to the towering figure of Temür himself and to his evocation of both Chinggis Khan and the glory of the Mongol empire. Some of the lasting appeal however is due to Temür's differences from Chinggis and the early Mongol khans. He was a Muslim and he was not a Chinggisid. While Temür honored the *yasa* he also honoured Sharī'a, and was a conspicuous patron of religion. He aimed to establish his superiority over the whole of the Mongol empire, but limited his rule to the area which he could rule effectively; thus he helped to form the pattern of regional empires in the Middle East. After his death, his descendants successfully turned his figure into that of a dynastic founder who could be used without embarrassment in a political culture formed from a synthesis of Turco-Mongolian and Perso-Islamic traditions. Thus the Timurid dynasty at once helped to preserve the political heritage of the great Mongol experiment and to overcome the problems posed by the unique prestige of a dynasty founded by a non-Muslim conqueror. Beatrice.Manz@tufts.edu

BEATRICE F. MANZ

Tufts University

Historical Writing during the reign of Shah 'Abbas: Ideology, Imitation, and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles (Salt Lake City, 2000), pp. 45, 85; Ernest Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL, 2006), pp. 9-10, 13, 37-38, 68-75.

³⁴Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 16-19.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 19-21, 28, 54-55.