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Mongol or Not?: The Rise of an Islamic Turkic Culture in Transoxiana

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Prior to the rise of the Mongol World Empire, Transoxiana was perenially caught between the ambitions of numerous groups such as the Karakhanids, the Kara-khitays, and other groups from the east seeking to control this territory, its population, and its resources. Most of these groups represented a nomadic Turkic group entering into the sphere of Muslim Iranian sedentarists and forming a nomadic-sedentarist symbiosis. This also resulted in a new cultural synthesis, as in the case of the so-called Karakhanids, who created an original but short-lived Islamic Turkic high culture based on the local culture of Balasaghun in eastern Turkistan. The ruling elites of the earlier conquest dynasties had not sedentarized fully, since rulers in the pre-Mongol period often established themselves in nomadic encampments outside major cities such as Bukhara. In the late 12th century C.E. the Khwarezmshahs, whose state was centered around Ürgench in Khwarezm, had become only the most recent dynasty to dominate the social, political, and economic life of Transoxiana. Even though the cities of Khwarezm developed considerably under the Khwarezmshahs, the majority of the nomadic Qipchaq Turkic component in the state (that is, the Qipchaqs or the Qanglı) who were controlling the trans-Eurasian trade across the steppe territories, led their lives separated from the sedentary communities.

In the early 13th century, during the process of the establishment of the Mongol World Empire, Chinggis Khan assigned his sons various territories as their patrimonies (ulus). He assigned his second son, Chaghatay, the territories from the beginning of the region of Turkistan to the mouth of the Amu Darya river. Among the various accounts of how Chinggis Khan assigned troops to each son to serve as the core army of each patrimony, we read in the universal history written by Rashîd ad-Dîn (early 14th century) that Chaghatay's army consisted of four units of one thousand troops each. These included the one thousand troops of Qarachar (or Barlutay Qaraldjar), who was from the Barulas tribe; the thousand of Möge Noyan, who was from the Djalayir tribe (according to another version he was from the Qongrat); and two other units of one thousand whose names are not recorded. These four thousand troops constituted the core of the army of Chaghatay and his successors in Central Asia. These armies increased in size owing to births, and there were probably some other tribes of non-Mongolian origin added to this core group. The names Barlas and Djalayir continued to be recorded more than a century later in Ibn `Arabshâh's well known description of Tamerlane's (d. 1405) origins as a tribal leader.

The troops assigned to Chaghatay Khan introduced new ethno-linguistic elements into the fabric of Transoxianan society; in all likelihood other populations were also transferred during the 13th-14th centuries as military units or to create an infrastructure for the state, just as elsewhere in the Mongol World Empire. Yet, it would be a mistake to assert that the state established by Chinggis Khan and his second son Chaghatay was responsible for introducing a Mongolian population into Central Asia. After all, in Rashîd ad-Dîn's universal history the Djalayir are considered to be one of the Turkic tribes known as Mongol in his day, while the Barulas are one of the Turkic tribes who were formerly known as Mongols. (If we are to consider the variant tribal name Qongrat to substitute for the Djalayir, they are also listed as one of the Turkic tribes formerly known as Mongol.) Although we do not know the names of the other tribes on the basis of these earlier sources, according to Ibn `Arabshâh's account (cited above), two of the other tribes of the Chaghatay Khanate in Tamerlane's day were the Arlat and the Qavdjin. According to Rashîd ad-Dîn, the Arulat is an important tribe descended from the Uryaut from among the Turkic tribes formerly known as Mongol. Thus, based upon information concerning those tribes whose names are known to us from the sources, there is very little

evidence to suggest that there was an ethnic Mongol presence in Transoxiana in the 13th-14th centuries.

The establishment of a regional khanate in Central Asia under Chaghatay manned by troops originally from lands further to the east initiated once again the pattern followed under the earlier states conquering Transoxiana. First, it introduced a new nomadic population while the pre-existing sedentary centers continued their separate existence (when they were not destroyed). Over the course of time, this would be followed by the gradual sedentarization of the newly-arrived nomadic ruling elite and the cultural assimilation of the nomads to the culture of the traditional sedentary centers. In the patrimony assigned Chaghatay, however, this process seems to have lagged behind parallel developments in the other regional khanates such as the Golden Horde. This means that even more than a century following the Mongol conquest of Transoxiana, there was still a sharp division between the traditional lifestyle of the Turkic and Mongol nomads newly arrived in this territory and the highly-developed urban centers prior to mid-14th century.

One of the sources upon which we may base this conclusion is the richly-detailed travelogue of Ibn Baṭṭûṭa, who traveled through parts of the Golden Horde and then arrived in the Chaghatay Khanate in 1333. Although Ibn Baṭṭûṭa offers a description of the close ties between members of the Chinggisid elite and the local religious elite in the vibrant city of Ürgench in Khwarezm, we should recall that in this period Khwarezm was still a part of the territories of the Golden Horde. In effect, this city was part of a political unit that had undergone a different path of development than the patrimony of Chaghatay. Elsewhere in Central Asia we know that the cities were were struggling to continue their centuries-old role as seats of Islamic learning and civilization based on the Arabic and Persian literary languages. Although this had been true of a city such as Bukhara since the time of the Samanids, during his visit to that city Ibn Baṭṭûṭa found that this former capital city had suffered greatly following its destruction during the campaigns of Chinggis Khan. In 1333 its mosques, colleges, and bazaars were almost all in ruins. The city's inhabitants were looked down upon, and nobody in the city possessed any religious learning or showed any interest in acquiring any. The most notable figures of the city, such as Imâm Bukhârî, compiler of one of the classical collections of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, were by then all dead. The most impressive site he visited in that area was the tomb of the famous mystical leader of the Kubravî order Sayf ad-Dîn Bâkharzî, where there was a large Sufi hospice supported by a vast endowment. It was only there that the traveler met people with a higher level of religious education.

Samarqand, on the other hand, was a more impressive city for our traveler, though it, too, was in a sorry state of repair as a result of the invasions during the time of Chinggis Khan. Ibn Baṭṭûṭa found Samarqand to be of the greatest, finest, and most beautiful cities. Most of the palaces of earlier times had been destroyed, and the city had not city wall or gates. It appears from Ibn Baṭṭûṭa's account that he had a more favorable impression of Samarqand and the quality of its religious figures, including the qadi (or religious judge) bearing the title Ṣadr al-djahân appointed by Tarmashirin (r. 1326-1334), the first ruler of the Chaghatay patrimony to convert to Islam. He was also impressed by the tomb of Qutham, who was supposedly martyred at the time of the Muslim conquest of Samarqand in the late 7th century. The inhabitants of Samarqand visited this tomb on the eve of every Tuesday and Friday to bring offerings, which the local Sufi hospice then used to host travelers and the support the maintenance of the hospice and thee tomb. It is interesting to note that the Tatars (the Turkic and Mongolian population that came to the patrimony of Chaghatay during the time of the campaigns of Chinggis Khan) also regularly visited this richly-furnished tomb. Thus, from Ibn Baṭṭûṭa's account we understand that the cities of Transoxiana may not have even begun to serve as a permanent residence for the Chinggisid ruling elite (in contrast to the situation in the Golden Horde in the same period). Indeed, the only connection between the ruler and the urban centers that we have seen so far is that he appointed the local qadi in Samarqand and that some Tatars visited a local shrine there.

Ibn Baṭṭûṭa visited the camp (ordu) of the ruler Tarmashirin on his way from Bukhara to Samarqand. Although there is a mention of a mosque there, it seems in every other respect that

this was a nomadic camp. (Perhaps the mosque was not a fixed building either, as is suggested by the fact that all the other shelters mentioned in the camp were tents.) It appears from this account that Tarmashirin was a devout Muslim who regularly attended the prescribed prayers. He had present at his court religious and legal scholars, and he was also under the sway of ascetic Muslim shaykhs. Yet, there was no evidence that his court had begun a process of sedentarization. This view also is supported by the fact of the neglect of the major urban centers of the time, in contrast again to the healthier urban centers in other parts of the Mongol World Empire at the time. Needless to say, without thriving centers of learning and courtly patronage, it would be premature to speak of a Turko-Islamic high culture developing in Transoxiana in the 1340s-1350s parallel to developments in Saray, the capital of the Golden Horde.

The political situation in the patrimony of Chaghatay changes markedly over the course of the century, when the integrity of the Chaghatay Khanate is severely undermined. Shortly after Ibn Baṭṭûṭa's visit to the court of Tarmashirin, he was overthrown in 1334, and the traveler reports this news on the basis of information that reached him two years later in India. The tribal leaders of the patrimony of Chaghatay met in the eastern part of Tarmashirin's realm near China, where the bulk of the troops of the khanate were stationed. They agreed to swear allegiance instead to Buzun, Tarmashirin's cousin who was also a Muslim, but apparently nowhere near as devout as Tarmashirin. The supposed reason for the overthrow of Tarmashirin was that he had broken the supposed law code of Chinggis Khan known as the Yasa/Yasaq. Whether we consider that the Yasa was an actual code of laws or not, the story is that Tarmashirin did not hold the annual meetings supposedly prescribed by Chinggis Khan. In fact, he had abolished this annual assembly and had stayed in Khurasan for four years without visiting the eastern territories of the patrimony of Chaghatay. When the forces under the command of Buzun advanced from the east, Tarmashirin was forced to flee to India. One of the tensions that this episode illustrates is the conflict between the adherents of nomadic traditions and those favoring the adoption of certain sedentary traditions. Members of the ruling elite, including khan Tarmashirin, had come under the sway of the religious culture of the sedentary centers propogated by the missionary Islam of the mystical orders. This conflict between the yasa of Chinggis Khan on the one hand and sharî`a (Islamic religious law) on the other would not be resolved for centuries to come.

This episode was just the first stage in the division of the patrimony of Chaghatay into two parts, the eastern territory known as Mogholistan and the western territory known as Transoxiana (what Manz refers to as the "Ulus Chaghatay"). By the late 1340s, the former Chaghatay Khanate falls into complete disarray. Although the reasons for this fragmentation of the patrimony of Chaghatay have yet to be fully elucidated, we should consider that the waves of the epidemic of bubonic plague known as the Black Death, which struck Italy and Egypt from Kaffa beginning in 1347, first traversed the territories of Eurasia. It has been argued that the Black Death struck China in the 1330s and the territory around Issyk-kul in the late 1330s-early 1340s. We may assume that it passed through Central Asia before it devasted the territories of the Golden Horde and the cities of Russia beginning in the 1340s. Just as this natural catastrophe decimated the population, disrupted political authority, and inaugurated a cultural decline in the Golden Horde, it may have had the exact same consequences in Central Asia.

Depopulation must be considered one of the most significant results of the Black Death and other pandemics in history. In many areas of East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, bubonic plague resulted in the decline of the population by one-fourth or one-third or more. Although there is little explicit textual evidence concerning the Black Death in Central Asia, Arabic and Russian sources suggest that the epidemic reached the Golden Horde from the east. The fate of the Chaghatay Khanate itself is indirect evidence of the ravages of this epidemic. Since many of the political structures in the Mongol World Empire were based on kinship relations, the sudden disruption of clear lines of succession and other power relationships led to the emergence of competing political factions. The strife leading to Tarmashirin's downfall and the subsequent collapse of the Chaghatay Khanate have all the markings of a state fragmenting through the decimation of its population, including the emergence of separate political centers

in Transoxiana and in Mogholistan. It is against this backdrop of chaos in the mid-14th century we can understand Tamerlane's (d. 1405) rise to prominence beginning in 1360.

The sources recognize that Tamerlane, whose real name was Timur or Temür (Tamerlane, from Temür-i leng "Temür the Lame", an epithet which Tamerlane himself did not favor), was married to the daughter of a ruler descended from Chinggis Khan. It is as a result of this marriage that Tamerlane was often referred to as the "son-in-law", but his authority was not based on descent from Chinggis Khan. Rather, he was leader of the Barlas tribe in the former patrimony of Chaghatay, and his authority was based initially on this fact. As was the case for the other tribal leaders in the Chaghatay Khanate and the other states of the Mongol World Empire, each tribal leader forged a marital alliance with the dynastic ruling line descended from Chinggis Khan; his status as a "son-in-law" would have been true of any of the other major tribal leaders as well. The fact of his non-Chinggisid status did not, however, prevent him from taking advantage of the turmoil of the mid-14th century to establish his own pre-eminent role as a tribal leader holding the real power in the state. In this regard his historical role is more comparable to the role of Noghay (d. 1299) or his contemporary Edigey (Edigü), both prominent tribal figures in the territories of the Golden Horde. The coverage in the sources of Tamerlane's career at the expense of the descendants of Chinggis Khan in the patrimony of Chaghatay is clear evidence of the fact that his contemporaries considered him to be the most powerful figure in Central Asia and everywhere else he undertook campaigns.

One of the sources offering a version of Tamerlane's rise to power, the travelogue of Ruy González de Clavijo, describes that Tamerlane was originally a relatively unimportant figure who gained notoriety and followers by attacking and plundering the countryside and highways. He gained significant wealth by capturing a rich caravan (we might recall that this is exactly what the followers of Muhammed Khwarezmshah did in Otrar over two centuries earlier). Finally, he took advantage of dissatisfaction with the ruler in Samarqand to overthrow the ruler and establish his rule in Samarqand. As in the case of Chinggis Khan, this was a classic example of a leader who was able to recruit followers through his ability to reward them.

One recent author, Manz, has argued that Tamerlane reorganized the military population of the Chaghatay patrimony into new tribal units. First of all, he transformed specific groups of population into new military units with new chains of command answering directly to him. He then relocated these units into areas that suited his own military needs. Manz argues that in time, these new units came to form new tribes and that this process contributed to his military success. Indeed, the most remarkable aspect of the political career of Tamerlane is the long list of successful military campaigns of world-historical significance. Early in his career Tamerlane concentrated his efforts on Transoxiana, including Khwarezm, and the other former part of the patrimony of Chaghatay, that is the neighboring region of Mogholistan. Beginning in 1380-1382, he expanded his campaigns beyond the territories the former Chaghatay Khanate into Khurasan, capturing Herat. He then continued a serious of campaigns on various centers in Iran and eastern Anatolia until 1388, followed by a first campaign on the territories of the Golden Horde in 1388-1391. He continued campaigns against Iran, Anatolia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and India.

What is notable about the first campaign against the Golden Horde in 1388-1391 and the second campaign in 1395 is that it is very clear from the historians of Tamerlane's campaigns that his attacks were aimed against the commercial centers of the northern Silk Road such as Sughdaq and Saray, which he practically destroyed during these campaigns. The northern silk road went from the Crimea to Saray and other cities along the Volga, skirting the northern shore of the Caspian to finally reach Khwarezm and points east. In contrast, the southern silk road extended from the southeastern Black Sea or the Mediterranean to Central Asia by passing south of the Caspian Sea. One of Ruy González de Clavijo's routes passed south from Trebizond on the Black Sea coast to Arzinjan, and from there east to Tabriz. The route then continued southeast passing through towns such as Sultaniya, Tehran, Damghan, Nishapur, and Meshed to finally reach Merv and Balkh. Another branch of this route turned northeast from Jajarm via Abivard to Bukhara and Samarqand. One could also travel from Samarqand to Balkh via Tirmiz after passing through one of the so-called "Iron Gate" in Central Asia.

These commercial centers could not survive the combination of the devastation of the Black Death followed by the ravages of Tamerlane's campaigns. The major result of these campaigns was to shift commerce for at least a century to the southern Silk Road, which passed through the territories he controlled, including his capital of Samarqand. Another important development in this period is that in contrast to the earlier rulers of the realm of Chaghatay, Tamerlane fully appreciated the importance of urban centers and contributed to the development of Samarqand as an urban center.

By destroying competing trade routes and diverting trade to those territories which he controlled, Tamerlane stood to profit immensely. This would create the economic basis for the renaissance of an Islamic high culture in Transoxiana under Tamerlane and his successors. The account of Ruy González de Clavijo gives us a good idea about routes followed by merchants following the southern Silk Road leading from the Black Sea through Tabriz, Sultaniya, Tehran, and Damghan leading finally to Bukhara and Samarqand. Samarqand was also situated at a particularly felicitous site controlling a major pass known as the "Iron Gate" leading south to Afghanistan. Thus, it served as a crossroad linking trade routes not only from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea passing across Iran heading further east, leading south from Central Asia via Samarqand to Afghanistan as well. In this regard, Samarqand served not only as an imperial center, but as a valuable commercial center controlling access along a major trade route.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to claim that Tamerlane merely profited from the favorable geographical situation of his imperial capital Samarqand. In fact, he agressively promoted commerce on the territories he controlled, especially in Samarqand. Many of these policies remind us of the policies followed by the khans of the regional khanates of the Mongol World Empire a century earlier. First of all, Tamerlane transferred population on a large scale to Samarqand and prevented them from leaving. Ruy González de Clavijo estimates that the number of people moved to Samarqand might number as high as 100,000, and that as a result the population of the city had climbed to 150,000, which is certainly a very high figure for that period. In particular, he brought the finest craftsmen from the areas in which he led campaigns. He brought from Damascus all the silkweavers, makers of crossbows, armorers, and craftsmen in glass and porcelain. From Turkey he brought gunsmiths, smiths, masons, and representatives of other crafts. He also brought to Samarqand specialists in artillery, both engineers and bombardiers, as well as the people who make the ropes for these machines. He even introduced the cultivation of hemp and flax for the first time ever in Samarqand to supply the needs of these specialists. Tamerlane even took measures to create facilities in Samarqand to attract and serve the needs of merchants. He ordered that a broad new street be laid out with shops lining the street, with all the work paid for by the city council. These few examples illustrate the importance that Tamerlane attached not just to exploiting commerce, but to actively seeking to exand it.

From the booty gained on his campaigns, but especially from the profits that he derived from the taxation of commercial activity, Tamerlane was able to accumulate a vast fortune. Some of this wealth can be seen in the large quantities of expensive silk, cotton, and other fabrics of which he made use for ceremonial tents as described by Ruy González de Clavijo. Another was the intensive activity of constructing monumental architecture that is one of the best-known legacies of the reign of Tamerlane, which is of course yet another indicator of a state's prosperity. Tamerlane, but especially his successors, also sponsored a wide range of artists, artisans, and men of letters now centered in Samarqand. In fact, Tamerlane and his descendants ushered in one of the most significant chapters in the history of Islamic and Turkic civilization through their sponsorship of the arts.

Ruy González de Clavijo writes that the country over which Tamerlane ruled was known as Mongolia and that the people spoke Mongolian, which was written in an unusual script. There is much confusion in the sources for this period concerning the uses of terms such as Mongol, Moghol, etc. One thing is for sure: there is even less evidence for the presence of Mongols in Central Asia in the late 14th century than during the time of the Mongol conquests. Clearly, what Ruy González de Clavijo called "Mongolian" was the Central Asian Turkic dialect of the

time, while the script referred to could easily have been the Uyghur script, which was adapted under the Chinggisids for writing Mongolian as well. Perhaps it would be fair to say that Tamerlane did not promote a Turkic Islamic high culture as much as he did the Islamic culture of his time, which in Central Asia relied on Persian as the major literary language. Certainly the major chronicles written to record his campaigns, the works by Sharaf ad-Dîn `Alî Yazdî and Nizâm ad-Dîn Shâmî, were written in Persian. It may also be fair to say that in the second half of the 14th century a Turkic Islamic high culture had suffered a major setback.

The rise of a Turkic Islamic high culture, especially in the field of belles-lettres, can be associated with the cities of the Golden Horde, especially Saray and Khwarezm. Following the ravages of the Black Death, however, there was a sudden cessation in the production of literary works in Turkic from about 1360 on. In addition, in roughly the same period two other nascent literary languages, Syriac Turkic and Volga Bulgharian, also disappeared completely. This is connected with the destruction of the literary and religious elites working in the urban centers across Eurasia. Some people argue that this is also to be connected with the political turmoil as a result of Tamerlane's campaigns. It is only in the time of Tamerlane's successors beginning around the 1420s that there is a series of new works that come to be written. The most notable name in the literary history of the 15th century in Ali Shir Navai, who was actually an administrator centered in Herat, but over the course of the century many of Tamerlane's own descendants such as Husayn Bayqara and Babur, founder of the Moghol state, had left their own mark on the development of a Turkic Islamic literature. It is difficult, however, to precisely define the role that Samarqand played in this process. Moreover, Khwarezm, which from the late 14th century was to be connected with political life in Transoxiana rather than with Western Eurasia, also played an important role in this development of a new Turkic literary language.

To return to Samarqand, the legacy of Tamerlane's efforts to build the population and infrastructure of his capital bore fruit for many years following his death. We can consider Mukminova's words that following the disintegration of Tamerlane's empire upon his death and the transfer of the political center to Herat, Samarqand "was now a center of economic and cultural life solely for Transoxiana and its adjacent provinces". Samarqand suffered from the struggles between the successors of Tamerlane, including repeated attacks on the city. Nevertheless, the foundations that Tamerlane had laid for the craftsmen and guild life continued, perhaps even expanding. Some of the crafts for which Samarqand continued to be famous can be traced back to the transfers of population under Tamerlane, such as the weaving industry. Others, such as the manufacture of paper for which Samarqand became quite famous, appear to have a separate origin.

Following the death of Tamerlane, the tensions between nomads and sedentarists, between yasa and sharî`a did not die with Tamerlane; rather they grew over time as centralized authority in Central Asia continued to collapse further and states fragmented. With the later discovery of new trade routes to India, the commercial importance of Central Asia declined. In the end, we may note that Tamerlane created the basis for a commercially successful state, but that he did not achieve the creation of a new Islamic Turkic cultural synthesis. Perhaps this was not a goal he had even considered, and certainly it would have been a difficult goal to achieve given the decline of specialized knowledge in the field of letters beginning in the mid-14th century. Nevertheless, he left an imprint on Samarqand, whose social and economic life was forever altered by his contributions to the development of the city as an imperial capital. Equally important is that his descendants carried his support for the arts further, perhaps with different motivations than their militaristic forefather, but at the same time achieving the creation of a form of literary expression which has survived through several periods of transformation down to our own day.

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