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CENTRAL ASIA UNDER TIMUR FROM 1370 TO THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY*

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One of the most extensive military empires in the medieval Islamic East was that of Timur, the fruit of his long years of campaigning and the resultant destruction of many towns and regions. Into this empire were incorporated, in addition to Transoxania and Khwarazm, the regions around the Caspian Sea, Iran, Iraq, part of the southern Caucasus, and the territory of present-day Afghanistan and northern India. The heart of the empire was Transoxania, incorporated after the death of Chinggis Khan, and under the terms of the arrangements made by him, into the appanage of Chaghatay.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, bitter disputes arose between the princes of the other territories of the former Mongol empire and the Chaghatay Khans. In their

* See Map 8.

struggle to increase their power, the Khans sought support not only among the leaders of the Mongol tribes and clans (leaders known as *noyans* in Mongolian, *begs* in Turkish), but also among the local feudal landowners and to some extent the urban notables. Kebek Khan (1318–26), settling, contrary to nomadic custom, in Transoxania, in the valley of the Kashka Darya river, built himself, at a distance of 2 *farsakhs* (about 12 km) from Nakhshab (Nasaf), a palace (*qarshi* in Mongolian) around which the town of Karshi later grew up. The monetary system he introduced, in imitation of that of the II Khanid ruler of Iran, Ghazan Khan (1295–1304), of the house of Hülegü, was designed to extend trade relations and curb the abuses of officials and swindlers. In accordance with Mongol tradition, Kebek Khan divided Transoxania into military-administrative districts, or *tümens* (in Persian orthography, *tūmān*), that is, ‘10,000’ (the original meaning being a group of 10,000 fighting men or a territory providing that number of warriors). The holdings of many local landowners became *tümens*, and the landowners themselves hereditary governors.

An important step in the acceptance of local cultural tradition by some of the Mongols was the adoption of Islam by Tarmashīrīn (1328–34), brother and successor of Kebek Khan. This gave rise to a new wave of dissatisfaction on the part of the nomadic Mongols. Tarmashīrīn was killed and the headquarters of the Khanate was transferred to Semirechye. The upholder of the ‘settler tradition’, and the last Chinggisid of the Chaghatay *ulus* (domains in Mongolia), Kazan Khan, brought the seat of the Khanate back to Transoxania only to be killed in a battle in 1346 against one of the Mongol leaders, the amir Kazagan. Kazagan, not being a Chinggisid, did not assume the title of Khan, and ruled on behalf of the titular Khan of Chinggis’s line. Kazagan’s power did not extend beyond Transoxania. The remainder of the disintegrating *ulus* of Chaghatay (Semirechye and East Turkistan) came to be called Moghulistan; here the military-nomadic aristocracy of the Mongol tribes held undisputed sway, under the leadership of Khans of the Dughlat clan. In 1358 Kazagan was killed by one of the *noyans* of the Khan of Moghulistan, Kutlugh Timur. Transoxania was now divided into a few mutually hostile fiefs, belonging to the leaders of the Mongol and local nobility. Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, author of the earliest of the better-known accounts of Timur’s life, the *Zafar-nāma* [Book of Victories] written on Timur’s instructions and during his lifetime, names some of them. Kazagan’s grandson Amir Husayn ruled part of the *wilāyat* (region) of Balkh, together with the town of Balkh. The remainder of this region belonged to the head of the Sulduz tribe. Kish and its region were under the sway of Hājjī Barlas. In Shiburghan, Badakhshan and Khuttalan, similar independent leaders established themselves. Their dissension and strife, according to the historian, sowed confusion in the affairs of Transoxania.¹

¹ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, p. 15.

Formation of Timur's empire

In 1360 and 1361 the Khan of Moghulistan, Tughluq Timur, campaigned in Transoxania. One of his followers was the future 'conqueror of the world', the 'second Alexander', as the authors of eulogistic histories dubbed their hero, Timur of the Barlas tribe.² This Mongol tribe had settled as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century in the valley of the Kashka Darya, intermingling with the Turkish population, adopting their religion (Islam) and gradually giving up its own nomadic ways, like a number of other Mongol tribes in Transoxania.

The official histories of Timur – written at his command by Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, by Ghiyāth al-Dīn °Alī, the author of the *Journal of Timur's Campaign in India*, and by the historian Sharaf al-Dīn °Alī Yazdī, who lived at the court of Timur's son and successor Shāh Rukh – say nothing about his early years, although it is known that he was born in 1336. According to Ruy González de Clavijo, ambassador of the king of Castile, who visited Samarkand, Timur's capital, in 1404, the father of the 'Emperor of Samarkand' (*el Emperador de Samarcante*) was a notable personage (*home fidalgo*), but not wealthy, and had no more than 2 or 3 horsemen in his service. Timur had approximately the same number ('4 or 5') of hired horsemen. With their help he seized from his neighbours 'one day a sheep, the next day a cow, and when he was able, he feasted with his followers'. Gradually, thanks to Timur's bravery and 'magnanimity', a force of as many as 300 grew up around him, and with them 'he began to scour the countryside, robbing and stealing all he could, for himself and his followers; he also travelled the roads robbing merchants'.³ The historian Ibn °Arabshāh, who is extremely hostile to Timur, writes that his father was a shepherd.

After the attack on Transoxania, Tughluq Timur heaped 'all manner of attentions and kindnesses' on Timur. The Kashka Darya *tümen* of the fugitive Hājji Barlas was bestowed on him in 1361. But Timur soon broke off relations with the Khan of Moghulistan and his son Ilyās Khōja, who had been left as ruler in Transoxania.

Now that he was a ruler and amir of a rich *tümen*, Timur made contact in 1361 with one of the pretenders to power in Transoxania, the chieftain of Balkh, Amir Husayn, sealing the relationship by marrying his sister Ulday Turkan-aga. At the head of their troops, the amirs carried out predatory raids on the territories of their neighbours. During one of these they were taken prisoner by the Javuni-Qurbani Turkmens and escaped by a lucky

² Ghiyāth al-Dīn °Alī, 1915, pp. 133, 139, 183.

³ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 238–9.

chance.⁴ In a later battle in Sistan – where the local prince had invited the amirs to help fight his enemies – Timur received arrow wounds in the arm and leg. Lamed for life, he was given the nickname Timur-Leng (literally ‘Iron Cripple’), rendered by European writers as Tamerlane.

The increase in power of amirs Husayn and Timur threatened Ilyās Khōja. Expelled from Transoxania after the death of Tughluq Timur, he was proclaimed his successor in Moghulistan and in 1365 reappeared in Transoxania with a large army. On the banks of the River Chirchik near Tashkent, a battle was fought that has gone down in history as ‘the battle in the mud’. Heavy rains had turned the ground into a bog, in which the horses of the allied forces stuck fast. But the Mongols spread large pieces of felt under their horses’ hooves, and their cavalry, manoeuvring freely, carried the day. The amirs fell back towards Samarkand and then retreated across the Oxus (Amu Darya).

The Sarbadar movement

Meanwhile, a host of *jete* (bandits), as the Mongol nomads were called in Transoxania, appeared in the vicinity of Samarkand. In those days, the city was unfortified and its capture was, it seems, inevitable. An active role in the organization of the defence of the city was played by the townspeople themselves, among whom the ideas of the Sarbadars had spread (see further, below). The Sarbadar movement, with its varied composition – it embraced artisans, the urban poor, peasants and small landowners and contained messianic Shi‘ite elements – had originated in Khurasan. Having ousted Mongol power from a number of towns and districts, the Sarbadars in 1337 set up their own state with its centre at Sabzavar which survived until 1381. A Sarbadar state also sprang up in Mazandaran (1350–92). The ideas of the Sarbadars were evidently propagated secretly in Transoxania too; it is known that the ideologue of the Sarbadar movement, Shaykh Khalīfa, won many adherents in Sabzavar and preached for some time not only in Khurasan but also in Central Asia. According to the fifteenth-century historian Hāfiz-i Abrū, author of the anonymous, no longer extant, *History of the Sarbadārs*, Sarbadar (in Persian, literally ‘head in the noose’ or ‘gallows-bait’) was the name adopted by the members of anti-Mongol popular movements who were ready to die in the cause of deliverance from tyranny. However, it is not impossible that participants in uprisings were called ‘gallows-bait’ by their opponents, who considered that the ‘rebels’ deserved the gallows.

The historians also gave the name ‘Sarbadārs’ to the citizens of Samarkand who had taken the control of the city into their own hands. Their leaders were the *madrasa*

⁴ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, pp. 20–1.

student Mawlānā-zāda; the headman of the cotton-scutchers' district Abū Bakr; and Mawlānā Khurdak-i Bukhārī, nicknamed 'the archer' and known as a brave man of respected lineage. Night and day, the citizens of Samarkand worked to fortify the alleyways of the town, erecting barricades and leaving only the main artery open to free passage. Entering by this route, the Mongol horsemen found themselves in a trap: the townsmen attacked them from all sides, showering them with arrows, stones and sticks. The Mongols, unused to street fighting, retired. On the following days they renewed their onslaught. Unable to claim victory, they dug in around the city for a long siege, but an epidemic broke out and many of their horses died. The Mongols were therefore compelled to leave the environs of Samarkand, where the conflict among the various social groups seems to have intensified. It is not impossible that the Sarbadar faction (representing the democratic elements of the population) attempted to put into effect their doctrines, which were similar to those popular among the Sarbadars of Khurasan, i.e. equal rights to property and repeal of taxes that were contrary to the *shari'ah*. Hence, no doubt, the indignation of the historians at the actions of the Samarkand Sarbadars. In the words of Khwāndamīr, the Sarbadars 'followed the path of wickedness and sedition and laid avaricious hands on the property of the citizens'. 'O God,' implores Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī, 'let not a beggar become a respected man.'

News of the retreat of the Khan of Moghulistan's troops from Transoxania reached Timur, who hastened to inform Amir Husayn. But the allies did not march immediately on Samarkand, which remained in the hands of the Sarbadars, whose 'extreme audacity', in the words of Khwāndamīr, alarmed them. Meeting at the village of Baghlan, the amirs worked out a plan of action. Through their agents they established contacts with the 'Samarkand gallows-birds', welcomed them with gifts and noble apparel and issued a document in the name of Amir Husayn recognizing the Sarbadar leaders as lawful chieftains. Only in the spring of 1366, several months after the Mongols' departure from Transoxania, did Timur and Husayn march on Samarkand. Anticipating no easy victory, they resorted to treachery and invited the Sarbadar chiefs to meet them at the village of Kani Gil. On their arrival, bearing gifts, the Sarbadars were seized and put to death. If the historian ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī is to be believed, Timur interceded for Mawlānā-zāda and saved him from the gallows, but the others were executed.⁵

Balkh and Samarkand under Timur

Amir Husayn established himself in Samarkand, assuming the rulership of Balkh also. Timur took control of Kish (Shahr-i Sabz) and Karshi. Their alliance quickly soured and

⁵ Stroevea, 1949; Gafurov, 1972, pp. 477–81.

turned to enmity. Each saw the other as the one resolved to strike the first blow. Timur besieged Balkh: the fortifications were breached and on 10 April 1370, the city was taken. Husayn tried to hide in one of the minarets beyond the fortress wall, but was captured and killed by one of Timur's allies.⁶ It would seem that a contributing factor in Timur's success was Husayn's unpopularity with the inhabitants of his domains. In the words of Clavijo, 'this king of Samarkand was not loved by his subjects, especially the ordinary people, the city-dwellers and some notables'.⁷ The fortress was demolished and the city sacked by the army, which also received a share of the rich treasury seized from Husayn. After the capture of Balkh, Timur summoned, in the city itself, a *kurultay* (meeting of the military chiefs and nobles of the tribes). To the title of amir was added the honorific Güregen, since Timur married one of Husayn's widows, Mulk-khānum (Bībī-khānum), who was the daughter of the Kazan Khan, a descendant of Chinggis Khan.

In deference to Mongol tradition, Timur, in the words of Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, handed over control of the state to the house of Chaghatay and restored their 'rights'. He proclaimed Soyurghatmish, a descendant of Chaghatay, as Khan.⁸ After Soyurghatmish's death in 1388, another Chinggisid, Sultān Mahmūd, was appointed titular Khan by Timur. When this Khan also died in 1402, Timur named no successor and continued to mint coins bearing the name of Sultān Mahmūd; his name was also commemorated in the *khutba* (Friday worship oration), and the signature of the Khan appeared on the *yarlighs* for raising armies and announcing campaigns.⁹

In 1370 Timur made Samarkand his capital, 'the residence of the sultans, home of the Khans, dwelling of the saints, homeland of the dervishes or Sufis and capital of the learned'. He 'brought under his sway the whole of Transoxania' and 'set in order the affairs' of the region so that 'there was no room for rebellion there'. 'The people became prosperous, and, it seems, both the nobility and the mob were pacified under the generous and kindly protection of the Khan.'¹⁰ In these words, the historian-panegyrist tells how Timur became the sole ruler of Transoxania.

The main prop of Timur's administration was the warlike nomadic and semi-nomadic Mongol nobility of Transoxania (particularly the Barlas). These tribes were called Chaghatays, since they inhabited the *ulus* of Chaghatay, although they did not belong to

⁶ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, pp. 59–60.

⁷ Clavijo, 1881, p. 240.

⁸ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, pp. 57–8, 65.

⁹ Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Alī, 1915, pp. 54, 55, 125, 126.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

his house, as Clavijo correctly notes.¹¹ The Mongols' contemptuous name for them was *qaraunas* (half-breeds). According to Clavijo:

These Chaghatays are especially favoured by the king [Timur]; they can go everywhere they want with their herds, graze them, sow crops and settle anywhere they wish, winter or summer; they are free and pay no tribute to the king, for they serve him in war when he calls on them. And let it not be thought that they leave their wives, children and herds anywhere; they take with them everything they have, whether they go to war or move from place to place.¹²

Conscious of the need to broaden his social base, Timur sought the support of the local landowning nobility, the urban notables and the Muslim clergy. This trend was reflected in his predilection for Islam and the *sharīʿa* even to the detriment of the *Yasa* of Chinggis Khan. It is not by chance that the historians portray Timur as an enthusiastic defender of Islam (which quite possibly he was not), a *ghāzī* (fighter for the faith).¹³ It is well known that Timur was generous to the representatives of the Muslim clergy, even in conquered countries. When he sacked a town, he forbade the pillage of the property of Muslim religious institutions and severely punished anyone guilty of it.¹⁴ As his spiritual adviser he chose the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, Sayyid Baraka, who, legend has it, foretold his victories.

Nevertheless, in Timur's kingdom, where Islam held undisputed sway, neither paganism nor Mongol custom was completely superseded. To orthodox Muslims, Timur's Chaghatay soldiers, wearing their pigtailed, seemed *kāfirs* (unbelievers, hence 'savages'). At Timur's court, contrary to Muslim law, feasts were held with copious entertainment, wine and merriment; princesses and queens were present at the banquets, and sometimes gave banquets themselves. On the walls of Timur's court at Samarkand, Köksaray, Clavijo saw cornices with representations (contrary to the precepts of the *sharīʿa*) of figures from Timur's victories, his sons, grandsons and amirs.¹⁵ At the weddings of princesses only a few elements of Mongol ceremony were observed (for example, cups of koumiss, or fermented mare's milk, were served). Official correspondence was carried on in Persian, but among the clerks whom Timur kept by him there were 'some clerks, who read and can write in Mongol characters for all his purposes'.¹⁶

¹¹ Clavijo, 1881, p. 214.

¹² Ibid., pp. 195–6.

¹³ Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī, 1915, pp. 153 et seq.

¹⁴ Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī, 1915, p. 132; Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, 1972, pp. 241–2.

¹⁵ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 289–90.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

Reorganization of Timur's army

Timur saw in the waging of uninterrupted wars of conquest the principal means of increasing his power. 'Not the whole inhabited part of the world is valuable enough to have two masters' are the words attributed to him by the historian Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī. In these wars – a source of wealth and booty – the military nobility of the tribes, and the tribes themselves, were deeply involved in support of Timur. But the purpose of the war was not only to win booty but also to gain control of the major trade routes linking Europe and western Asia to India and China. Both the tribal military nobility and the urban patricians – the local landowning nobility who were engaged in trade and the town's leading traders and money-lenders – took part.

The instrument of conquest was the army. Its basic striking force was the cavalry, recruited from the tribal population. The infantry was recruited from the settled peoples (*tājīks*),¹⁷ who were assigned to work the catapults, battering-rams and other siege-engines used in the storming of cities. To defend themselves against the enemy, the foot-soldiers would form up in front of their troop, dig ditches, build defensive shields and screens, and under cover of these would shoot arrows and throw spears at the foe.¹⁸

The basic weapons of pitched battle were bows, both large and small (the arrows being kept in quivers of plate metal). For close combat the soldiers used swords, curved sabres (*shamshīrs*), throwing spears, and clubs. By the second half of the fourteenth century, firearms began to make their appearance in the Near East, but nothing is known of their use in Timur's armies. The soldier's equipment included shield, body armour and helmet. On the occasion of Timur's triumphal entry into his Samarkand palace (*el castillo*), Clavijo saw carried in front of the amir, at his command, all the weapons and armour used during the time he had been away from the town. Among other items there were '3,000 suits of body armour, decorated with fine cloth, of very fine workmanship; though they do not make them strong enough and do not know how to temper iron [properly]'. There were also many helmets 'round and tall'. Attached to the helmet was a plate, two fingers in breadth, that descended to the wearer's brows and protected the face against sideways strokes. At that time Timur gave out armour and helmets to 'knights and other individuals' (*a los caballeros y otras personas*).¹⁹ The coat of mail – an expensive article – was obviously worn only by the amirs and Timur himself. More popular, but still only affordable by the captains, was the *kayak*, a protective cloak of velvet, lined with close rows of metal

¹⁷ Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī, 1915, pp. 168, 212.

¹⁸ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, pp. 121, 159.

¹⁹ Clavijo, 1881, p. 293.

plates, fastened in such a way that the cloak retained its elasticity and did not hamper the wearer's movements.

When fortifications were to be stormed, siege-engines were used, and by means of catapults or ballistas breaches were made in the walls, tunnels were dug under them and fires started in the tunnels. To storm fortress walls, the warriors used siege-ladders and ropes, which they threw over the projections of the walls. They were skilled at building pontoon bridges, which after the river had been crossed were usually demolished. Before battle was joined, the king's great drum and the war drums were beaten, the kettledrums sounded and the trumpets blown. The air reverberated with the soldiers' war cries. The *kalima*, 'There is no God but Allah', was heard and the thunderous cry of 'Allah is great' 'made the hearts of the huge lion and the mighty elephant shrink'.²⁰

The decimal system traditional among the Mongols was adopted by Timur also. The army was divided into *tūmens* ('ten thousands'); *mingliks* (in Mongolian) or *hazārs* (a Persian word that came into use early among the Mongols and Türks), that is to say, thousands; *yüzlüks* (hundreds); and *onluks* (tens). Small formations (up to 500 men) were called *khoshuns* in Transoxania. The *yüzlüks* and the *mingliks* were commanded by *yüzbashis* and *minbashis*. The larger formations were commanded by amirs and princes (*mīrzās*). Those dispatched to raise armies in the provinces were known as the *tavachis*; they had other important functions as well, for example, the division of spoils among the warriors, the assignment of sectors for digging of defensive ditches around the camp, and so on.

The army had two wings, the centre (here, as a rule, was to be found the headquarters, or *borgah*) and a vanguard, surrounded by outposts (*kanbuls*), which were often the first to engage the enemy. The various formations had different coloured clothing, red, white, blue, etc. Scouts (*khabargīrs*) reported on enemy movements. The army was accompanied by porters (*kachars*). The army camp, if it was pitched close to the enemy's position, was surrounded by entrenchments, and large defensive works (*chapars*), as well as mobile towers, were erected. In extreme cases, linked carts (*arabas*) were also used as well as screens.

The sources give inflated numbers for Timur's army; Sharaf al-Dīn °Alī Yazdī says that there had not been so large an army since the days of Chinggis Khan. In the campaign against China in 1404, the army allegedly numbered 200,000 fighting men. It was encumbered by a large baggage-train, as the fighters were accompanied by their families. 'These folk,' says Clavijo, 'wherever they are called to war by their king, set off immediately with all their belongings, their flocks, their wives and children.'²¹

²⁰ Ghiyāth al-Dīn °Alī, 1915, p. 154.

²¹ Clavijo, 1881, p. 191.

In the baggage-train were the *yurtchis*, whose task it was to set up the yurts and lay out the encampment 'in accordance with accepted rules',²² and a whole 'army' of traders and artisans. According to Clavijo:

In this horde [of Timur's] there are always butchers and cooks, selling boiled and roasted meat, and others who sell barley and fruit, and bakers, who set up their ovens, knead and sell bread. Whatever artisans or craftsmen are needed can be found in the horde, all located in their separate streets. And that is not all; wherever the army goes they take with them baths and bath attendants, who set up stalls, build houses for the iron, that is, hot baths, with cauldrons inside for storing and heating water, and everything needful.²³

Because of this cumbersome baggage-train, the army moved slowly, especially when it had to transport booty and drive along captives. The soldiers therefore carried out raids lightly burdened, leaving the baggage-train behind.

Timur, though mainly continuing Mongol military traditions, introduced certain innovations in the dispositions and tactics of his army. According to Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, when Timur was preparing for his decisive encounter with Toktamish in 1391, he disposed his forces (seven traditional *kuls*, or corps) 'in such a way that no one had ever seen or heard the like'. Timur's regular inspections of the army helped to maintain the men's fighting spirit and tighten up discipline, qualities that were responsible for the success of many of their military undertakings.

Timur's military campaigns

Believing two rulers for the inhabited world to be one too many, Timur devoted his own time as ruler to constant and pitiless wars of conquest. The Turco-Mongol military chiefs who were Timur's mainstay were the chief beneficiaries of the seizures of ever more lands and riches, while the local magnates of Transoxania were also drawn into supporting him by the prospect of the advantages to be gained. No sooner had Timur consolidated his hold on Samarkand than he advanced against the White Horde, which occupied the territory from the region of Yangi-Talas to the borders of Kashghar. The White Horde formed part of the *ulus* of Jöchi (the eldest son of Chinggis Khan), the other part of which consisted of the Golden Horde. This division stemmed from the way in which the Mongol forces had originally been organized: the Golden Horde manned the right flank, the White Horde the left. As time went by, the White Horde broke away and came under the rule of its own Khans, who were constantly raiding Turkistan and Transoxania. Urus Khan (1364–83) became so powerful that he attempted to unite both parts of the *ulus* of Jöchi under his

²² Ghiyāth al-Dīn °Alī, 1915, p. 159.

²³ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 233–4.

own authority. This was of great concern to Timur, who fought repeatedly against the White Horde. 'He [Timur] frequently did battle with them [the Mongols] of the White Horde, until finally they chose the right path and accepted the role of cringing servility and expressions of submission.'²⁴

In 1372 Timur launched a campaign against Khwarazm. The Sūfī dynasty of the Kungrat tribe, which had joined forces with the White Horde, had made Khwarazm its base in the 1350s and early 1360s. The pretext for the campaign was the seizure by Husayn Sūfī, the founder of the dynasty, of Khiva and Kath in southern Khwarazm, which formed part of the *ulus* of Chaghatay. Timur, who laid claim to the whole *ulus* of Chaghatay, demanded the return of the captured territories. When this was refused, he advanced into Khwarazm. Kath was captured and Husayn Sūfī shut himself up in the fortress of Urgench, where he soon died. His successor, Yūsuf Sūfī, entered into peace talks with Timur but after the latter had left Khwarazm, he retook Kath. Timur mounted a second campaign against Khwarazm (1373–4), but no actual fighting took place because Yūsuf Sūfī offered his apologies. Southern Khwarazm passed into the hands of Timur. In 1388, however, the ruler of Khwarazm led a revolt stirred up by Toktamish. The son of an amir of the White Horde who had ruled over Mangi'shlak and was slain by Urus Khan for insubordination, Toktamish, with Timur's support, had succeeded after several reverses in routing Urus Khan and gaining control of the White Horde in 1379.

In 1380–1 Toktamish was victorious over Mamai, the Khan of the Golden Horde (who had just been defeated by Prince Dimitri Donskoy of Moscow at the battle of Kulikovo), thus uniting the White and Golden Hordes under his own rule. Timur had been hoping to establish a vassal relationship between himself and Toktamish, but found in him a strong and wily adversary. In 1387–8 Toktamish invaded Transoxania, acting in collusion with the ruler of Khwarazm, who withdrew his allegiance to Timur. Timur seized Urgench, the capital of Khwarazm, in 1388 and overthrew the Sūfī dynasty. He ordered the inhabitants to move to Samarkand and had the plundered and devastated city razed to the ground and its site sown with barley. Only a handful of fine buildings remained of what had been a great city. In 1391 Timur ordered the restoration of Urgench, but only one part of the city was rebuilt.²⁵ As a result of the subjugation of Khwarazm, all the lands of Central Asia with the exception of Semirechye and the lower reaches of the Syr Darya fell into the hands of Timur.

In 1381 Timur unleashed his forces on the Kart principality in northern Afghanistan. The founder of this local dynasty was Rukn al-Dīn (d. 1245), who had been appointed ruler

²⁴ Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Alī, 1915, p. 30.

²⁵ Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, 1972, p. 32.

of Ghur by Chinggis Khan. In 1248 Herat had become the capital of the much strengthened principality of the Karts. When the II Khanids established themselves in Iran, the Kart rulers, who had previously been subordinate to the Great Khans in Karakorum, became vassals of the II Khanids. The collapse of the II Khanid state shortly after the death of Abū Saʿīd (1318–35) enabled the Karts to gain their independence. After the havoc wrought by the Mongols, irrigation systems were gradually restored and towns and villages rose again from the ruins. Herat at that time was a major trading and crafts centre. In early 1381 Timur's forces appeared beneath its walls. Having cut it off from Ghur and other Kart possessions, they proceeded to besiege it. The ruler of Herat, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Pīr ʿAlī, withdrew into the citadel, but the townsfolk did not support him and took no active part in the defence of the city – no doubt because of Timur's promise to spare the lives and property of those who did not resist.²⁶

Although, realizing his helplessness, the ruler came to Timur's tent and threw himself on his mercy, the same fate befell Herat as other captured towns. A heavy tribute was imposed on it and many leading citizens were deported to Transoxania. Timur confirmed Ghiyāth al-Dīn's position as ruler of Herat, but it was a nominal appointment only, since he had to remain in constant attendance upon Timur, at the latter's insistence. Shortly afterwards he was executed on Timur's orders even though he had made no attempt to forswear his allegiance.²⁷

Such was the oppression imposed by the conquerors that in 1382–3 the citizens of Herat rose in rebellion. They were led by a native of Ghur, nicknamed Ghūrībachcha (Son of Ghur), and their rebellion was supported by strong detachments of fighting men from Ghur. The officials appointed by Timur to administer Herat were driven out and the troops garrisoned there were slaughtered. Timur entrusted the task of putting down the revolt to his son Mīrānshāh, who routed the contingent from Ghur at the battle of Herat and overran the city.²⁸ Taking the bulk of his army with him, Timur left Herat for Kalat in Khurasan. The rulers of Kalat, Merv and several other cities, terrified by Timur's successes, submitted to him.

Timur now turned his attention to subduing the Sarbadarid amirate, whose spiritual leaders were Shaykh Khalīfa and subsequently his pupil Hasan Jūrī. Concealed beneath the mystical doctrine – with Shiʿite overtones – that they preached was a call to throw off the yoke of the II Khans and the powerful Iranian nobles who supported them. The followers of this teaching called themselves the Sarbadars (see above). An uprising broke

²⁶ Masson and Romodin, 1964, pp. 24–5.

²⁷ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, Vol. 1, pp. 82–4.

²⁸ Bartol'd, 1918, p. 29.

out in 1337 in Bashtin (Khurasan) under the leadership of a follower of Hasan Jūrī, a local landowner called °Abd al-Razzāq. The punitive expedition mounted by the II Khanid *wazīr* of Khurasan was defeated by the rebels, and the *wazīr* was captured and put to death. The uprising spread to other towns and villages of Khurasan. Sabzavar, which was taken by the Sarbadars, became their headquarters. In 1338 Wājih al-Dīn Mas°ūd, the successor of °Abd al-Razzāq, assumed the title of sultan.

Towards the middle of the fourteenth century, under their ruler Yahyā Qarābi, the Sarbadars wrested Tus and Mashhad from the Mongols and on 13 December 1353, invited by Tughay Timur Khan to his encampment at Gurgan, they took control of the Mongol camp and executed the II Khan. As time went by, there were increasing divergences between the radical wing of the Sarbadar movement, represented by craftsmen, town-dwellers and the peasantry of the surrounding countryside, and such moderate elements as small local landowners. As the struggle for power intensified, one °Alī Mu'ayyad laid claim to the supreme authority. Seizing power in 1364, he inflicted a crushing defeat on the Sarbadars representing the rank and file of the population. The loss of their support weakened his own position, however. In the war with the Kart ruler he lost the eastern lands of the Sarbadars, including Nishapur. From the west he was threatened by one of the Mongol amirs, Walī, who had consolidated his position in Astarabad.

In the conflict between °Alī Mu'ayyad and Amir Walī, the fortunes of war fluctuated. There were even periods when the adversaries became allies, as a result of the revolt of the radical wing of the Sarbadars in Sabzavar in 1378, under the leadership of the Darvīsh Rukn al-Dīn. In alliance with Amir Walī, °Alī Mu'ayyad put down the revolt, but enmity soon sprang up again between them. Amir Walī besieged Sabzavar, whereupon °Alī Mu'ayyad took a step that was to prove fatal. In 1381 he appealed for help to Timur, who was quick to take advantage of this convenient pretext for interfering in the affairs of the Sarbadarid state. °Alī Mu'ayyad met Timur in Sabzavar as his humble vassal. He was allowed to retain his title, but was invited to the conqueror's headquarters, while one of Timur's lieutenants was appointed to Sabzavar. Shortly afterwards, °Alī Mu'ayyad was stealthily slain on the orders of his new overlord.

Two years later, in 1388, an uprising against Timur took place in Sabzavar and the surrounding area under the leadership of Shaykh Dāwūd Sabzavārī. It was mercilessly put down; the town's fortress was demolished and, on the orders of Timur, 2,000 people were walled up alive in the towers. That same year, having pacified the 'rebels' of Sabzavar, Timur annexed Kandahar and a number of other towns and districts in Khurasan and Afghanistan. The following year, he conquered Gurgan, thereby putting an end to the reign of Amir Walī.

Between 1386 and 1404 Timur's hordes repeatedly raided the Trans-caucasian countries from northern Iran. The kingdom of Georgia, which had gained its political independence after the death of II Khan Abū Sa'īd in 1335, was witnessing a period of economic and cultural expansion. Georgia put up a stiff resistance to Timur, who crossed its borders with his troops seven times, but Tiflis fell to him and in 1404 King George VII was compelled to acknowledge Timur's suzerainty. Armenia, which had lost its own statehood and become part of the Jalayirid principality, had gone into decline under the rule of Turk and Kurd nomadic tribal overlords and Timur's invasion proved to be a fresh calamity for the country. An eyewitness describes events as follows: 'By hunger, the sword, captivity, indescribable tortures and inhuman treatment they [Timur's hordes] turned the populous Armenian province into a desert.'²⁹

In 1386 Timur captured Tabriz in southern Azerbaijan, a city that had been laid waste by Toktamish the previous year. Sultan Ahmad Jalāyir, the ruler of the Jalayirid lands, which comprised the bulk of Persian Iraq with the cities of Hamadan, Qazvin and Sultaniyya, as well as Kurdistan, southern Azerbaijan, Karabagh, Armenia and Arabian Iraq, fled, leaving his domains to their fate. Timur's next victims were the Muzaffarids (1313–93). In 1387 Timur captured their capital Isfahan. The exactions of the tax-collectors appointed by him caused the city to rebel. The main insurgents were the craftsmen and the poor, led by a blacksmith. They were mercilessly suppressed: historians recount that Timur's soldiers received orders to deliver a prescribed number of severed heads, and minarets were built with the heads of 70,000 slaughtered citizens.³⁰ The struggle with the Muzaffarids in southern Iran continued until 1393. By 1392 Timur's hordes had conquered the Sayyid state in Mazandaran, which had come into being in the 1340s during the mass uprising against the Mongols. Its ruler was Sayyid Qawām al-Dīn, and in social structure and ideology it differed very little from the Sarbadars.

The conquest of Iran was completed by 1393 and the country was divided into two vicegerencies. Timur's son Shāh Rukh was made vicegerent of the region, comprising Khurasan with Gurgan, Mazandaran and Sistan, with its centre in Herat, while his brother Mirānshāh became the vicegerent of western Iran, including Azerbaijan and Armenia, with its centre in Tabriz. Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes were brought in from Central Asia to settle in northern Iran and Azerbaijan.

The purpose of Timur's conquests was not merely to acquire loot but to gain control of the lucrative major international trade routes. The Golden Horde, subordinate to Toktamish, was stationed astride the trade routes leading from Europe and Asia Minor to

²⁹ Thomas of Metsop^c, 1957, p. 58.

³⁰ Nizām al-Din Shāmī, 1937–56, Vol. 1, p. 105; Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, 1972, p. 320.

Central Asia, Iran, Mongolia and China. After seizing control of the Golden Horde in 1381, Toktamish put an end to the rivalries that had torn it apart. He put a great deal of effort into maintaining the Horde's dominion over the Russians. His chief adversary was Prince Dimitri Donskoy, whose policy consisted in unifying the Russians around Moscow. Toktamish succeeded in winning over the princes of Nizhniy Novgorod and Ryazan to his side and in 1382 attacked Prince Dimitri, laying waste north-eastern Russia. As the chronicler Nikon records, Moscow, at that time 'a great and wondrous city at the height of its wealth and glory', was captured by Toktamish and put to the torch. Dimitri Donskoy was forced to pay tribute to the Khan.³¹

The struggle between Timur and Toktamish was a long and stubborn one. It was only after three major campaigns, in 1389, 1391 and 1394–5, that the Golden Horde was finally crushed. During the last of these campaigns Timur destroyed Astrakhan and other towns along the Volga, including Berke Saray, the capital of the Golden Horde, and ravaged the Crimea with fire and the sword. Toktamish fled to Bulghar on the Volga and, after Timur's departure, fought with other contenders for the throne of the Golden Horde until his death in 1406 or 1407. The defeat inflicted on the Golden Horde by Timur was a blow from which it never recovered. For the next three decades or thereabouts, trade between the Mediterranean and Asia was confined to routes passing through Iran, Bukhara and Samarkand, which were controlled by Timur and the Timurids.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the Delhi Sultanate, once a powerful state, entered a period of decline. Following the death of Sultan Fīrūz Shāh Tughluq (1351–88), the heirs of the house of Tughluq battled successively for the throne. In 1394 Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd was put on the throne by one of the noble factions, but his real power extended no further than the district round the capital and some adjacent regions (see above, Chapter 14, Part Two). Timur's Indian campaign was heralded by the appearance under the walls of Multan of the forces commanded by his grandson, Pīr Muhammad, who overran and looted this wealthy city. In September 1398 Timur himself crossed the Indus. Reducing towns and fortresses to 'heaps of ashes and debris' as they went, his forces headed for the capital, Delhi. Before the decisive battle on the banks of the Jumna (17 December 1398), Timur ordered the execution of all prisoners held by his armies – the sources speak of 100,000 captives – fearing that they would side with the Sultan of Delhi during the fighting.

The battle for Delhi was bloody: 'The battlefield was piled high with mountains of dead and wounded . . . blood flowed in streams.'³² Sultan Nāsir al-Dīn Mahmūd fled to Gujarat. On 18 December the *khutba* was read out in the mosques of Delhi, mentioning Pīr

³¹ Nasonov, 1940, p. 136.

³² Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Alī, 1915, p. 119.

Muhammad by name. The inhabitants of the city resisted the intruders, who were looting and pillaging, seizing prisoners and killing: 'Hindu heads were piled as high as they could go and their bodies became food for wild animals and birds.' It took several days to escort the captives out of the city; among them were several thousand master craftsmen, including stonemasons whom Timur intended to use for the construction of mosques in Samarkand.³³ On 1 January 1399 the warriors began to leave the city. They overwhelmed and pillaged several further provinces and towns in north-western India, including Mirath (Meerut) and Kangra. Timur recrossed the Indus in March 1399 and had soon left India behind. As his vicegerent over Multan, Lahore and Dipalpur he appointed Khidr Khan Sayyid, who mounted the throne in ruined Delhi in 1414 and founded the short-lived Sayyid dynasty.

While his Indian campaign was in progress, Timur lost many of the cities he had previously seized, including Baghdad and Mosul. In September 1399 he rode out of Samarkand at the head of his armies on a new western campaign. Leaving Transoxania by northern Iran, he led his horde across the Trans-caucasus, ravaged Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia and made for Syria, which together with Egypt was ruled by the Mamluk sultans. Factional strife among the latter prevented the military forces of the two provinces from uniting, with the result that only the amirs of Syria opposed Timur. They were defeated in battle near Aleppo, which was captured and laid waste. After taking several more Syrian cities, Timur laid siege to Damascus in January 1401. Failing to receive assistance from the Mamluk sultan Faraj (1399–1412), Damascus threw itself on the conqueror's mercy. It was sacked and set on fire. Timur did not stay long in Syria, but left the province in a ruinous and devastated condition so that it was several years before the land recovered, while the Mamluk state became weakened by factional strife between the sultan and the great amirs. Timur, meanwhile, in 1401 turned eastwards to deal with the Jalayirid capital Baghdad, besieging the city for six weeks and sacking it savagely.³⁴

Heading northwards, Timur entered Asia Minor. As a result of the wars of conquest of the Turkish sultans Murād I (1361–89) and his son Bāyazīd I (1389–1402), nicknamed Yildirim ('the Thunderbolt') because of his lightning military successes, the Ottoman state had become the most powerful in Anatolia and the Balkans by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Bāyazīd I had completed the subjugation of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Asia Minor (except Cilicia and the Greek empire of Trebizond), but Timur's hordes, having been triumphant in Syria, turned northwards, invaded Asia Minor and reached Ankara. Timur demanded the sultan's submission. In response, Bāyazīd marched against him. In the decisive battle of Ankara on 20 July 1402, the betrayal of the sultan by the levies from

³³ Ibid., pp. 127–9.

³⁴ Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, 1972, pp. 262–3.

the former Asia Minor amirates (which had been defeated by the Ottomans and incorporated into their sultanate) tipped the balance. The Ottoman army was routed and Bāyazīd sought safety in flight, but he was taken prisoner together with his two sons. In the spring of 1403, learning that Timur intended to carry him off to Samarkand, he took his own life. The invasion by Timur had serious consequences for the Ottoman state. In order to weaken it, he dismembered it, restoring the independence of seven out of the ten amirates of Asia Minor, while the territory that remained in the possession of the Ottomans was divided up among Bāyazīd's four sons, among whom internecine warfare soon broke out; the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans was thus postponed for half a century.³⁵

Timur's last great military undertaking was to have been his projected campaign against China, but this was interrupted by the death of the 'conqueror of the world' in 1405, aged 70.

Socio-economic conditions under Timur

Timur's empire was a conglomeration of states and tribal territories. The peoples inhabiting them belonged to a variety of civilizations and represented various stages of socio-economic evolution. Well-developed relationships of dependence existed side by side with disintegrating tribal ones; the traditions of centuries-old Islamic Persian government structures with loose Turco-Mongol systems of state organization in the process of growth; and regions of ancient urban and farming culture with the nomadic life of the steppe. The nomadic way of life showed remarkable stability. Clavijo writes:

These folk, who live in tents and other shelters, possess only their tents and they wander summer and winter over the plains. In summer they go where water is to be found, and they sow their grain and cotton . . . and the king with his whole army wanders the plains summer and winter alike.³⁶

Timur, a tribal chieftain, became the ruler of a great empire of which the component parts possessed no uniformity of economic and cultural life. This in turn prevented the growth of a centralized system of government and the establishment of effective control by the state over the territories included within its boundaries. Instead it gave rise to the extremely widespread practice of bestowal as *soyurghals* of regions and districts upon members of the ruling house, the sons and grandsons of Timur, his retainers and military commanders, as well as those common soldiers who had distinguished themselves in war.

The *soyurghal* (in Mongol, literally 'gift' in the widest sense of the word, viz. gifts of clothing, weapons, money, rank, privilege) in the form of a grant of land, in exchange for

³⁵ Petrosyan, 1990, pp. 25–8.

³⁶ Clavijo, 1881, p. 190.

service (often military) to the state, was analogous to the later *iqṭāʿ* of the Mongol period. From being, in the pre-Mongol period, a non-hereditary ‘grant of support’ or tenure of land with the right to appropriate a part of the taxes due to the state, the *iqṭāʿ* no later than the beginning of the fourteenth century became de facto a military fief, linked to the hereditary ownership of lands and irrigation installations; the owner enjoyed immunity from taxation. These rights were enjoyed by the holder of the *soyurghal* not only de facto but de jure, that is, with the sanction of the state in fifteenth-century documents, particularly the 1417 charter of the Ak Koyunlu Kara Yūsuf given in the *Sharaf-nāma* chronicle.³⁷

Unfortunately, not a single document attesting to a grant in *soyurghal* by Timur has been preserved. Nevertheless, to judge from narrative sources, such grants were quite frequent in his time and the recipients enjoyed the rights enumerated above. Individuals enjoying tax exemption were known as *tarkhāns*. Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī reports that in 1390–1, at the time of the campaign in the Dasht-i Kipchak against the Golden Horde, Timur singled out, favoured and rewarded all those who had displayed bravery and ordered them to be exempted from taxes. The order was given:

that they be not hindered from approaching his greatness, that they and their children be immune from prosecution for up to ten misdemeanours, that their horses be not taken for fulfilment of transport obligations (*ulagh*) and that they be considered exempted and discharged of all obligations (*takalluf*).³⁸

Yet in spite of the substantial rights enjoyed by the holders of *soyurghals*, they remained a form of servile landholding under the aegis of the state, in its capacity as the supreme proprietor of the lands conveyed. In addition to these lands, the state and the sovereign had at their disposal state or crown lands (*khālisa-yi mamlaka*).

In the second half of the fourteenth century and the early part of the fifteenth, appreciable landed properties remained at the disposal of private individuals and represented their private holdings (Arabic-Persian *mulk*, pl. *amlāk*). In Transoxania, as in other neighbouring lands, *amlāk* were both peasant (i.e. based on private labour) and landlord holdings. Unlike the *soyurghals*, the *amlāk* were generally subject to state taxation and were divided, according to their area, into *kharāj* (land tax) and *ushr*. It was only at the end of the Timurid period that the ‘unencumbered’ *mulk* (i.e. the *mulk* exempt from taxes, known as *mulk-i hurr*, *mulk-i khālīs* or *mulk-i hurr wa khālīs*) became widespread.³⁹

Under Timur, practices of land transfer inherited from the past were preserved, as was the other form of ownership of the *waqf* type by the Muslim religious foundations –

³⁷ Petrushevsky, 1949, pp. 233–4.

³⁸ Nizām al-Dīn Shāmī, 1937–56, p. 123; see also Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, 1366/1987, pp. 379–80.

³⁹ Makhmudov, 1966, p. 53.

mosques, *madrastas*, *mazārs* (burial shrines), and so on. At times of political instability, one of the most widespread types of *waqf* was the *waqf-i awlādī* (family or hereditary *waqf*), when those in whom the *waqf* was vested collected their share from the property conveyed as *waqf*. The only document of Timur's reign that has come down to us, however, is a *waqf* conveyance drawn up, in the opinion of its editor, O. D. Chekhovich, no later than 1383. Under Timur, the *waqfs* evidently enjoyed tax exemption, but under his successors a different practice obtained.

Of peasant *ra'īyyat* (land tenure) in the time of Timur, little is known from authentic sources. From indirect data it may be assumed that there already existed in Transoxania a rural community, known in the Muslim East by the Arabo-Persian name of *jamā'at*, and communal institutions. In the *waqf* deed mentioned above, the donor names, among the lands bordering on the landed properties being transferred in the *waqf*, 'the land of a specified community' (*zamīn-i jamā'at-i mu'ayyan*) and 'land at the disposal of a village'.⁴⁰

Slave labour for cultivation, as well as in the trades, though practically extinct in the pre-Mongol period, obtained a new lease of life during the Mongol conquest and the conquest by Timur. Tens and hundreds of thousands of prisoners (*bardas*) were enslaved. In India, in particular, after Timur's capture of Delhi, prisoners continued to be led out of the city gates for several days: 'Each warrior led out of the city 150 men, women and children, considering them [his] prisoners, so that the least of the soldiers found himself with 20 captives.'⁴¹

We do not know to what extent the *Yasa* of Chinggis Khan forbidding the nomads to leave the *il* (large tribal grouping) of their leader spread among the settled population of Transoxania. It is known from Clavijo's journal that, at the passage across the Oxus (Amu Darya), the frontier guards demanded a certificate showing whence and for what purpose the traveller was leaving the confines of 'the kingdom of Samarkand'. Entry into the capital area was free, since Timur made every effort to populate that region. Nevertheless, serfdom, in the sense of a legally sanctioned peasant status, was unknown in Transoxania, as in many other countries of the East, possibly because of the absence of private estates of great landowners. However, the peasants were bound to the land by the burden of taxation.

The basic tax was the land tax, *māl* or *kharāj*, but nothing is known of any government rescripts fixing its level. A *kharāj* at the rate of one-third (two *dāngs*, or two parts in six) was levied, according to Sharaf al-Dīn Yazdī, in Iraq and Azerbaijan, which in Timur's time were governed by his son Mirānshāh. This appears to have been the officially established rate in Timur's empire. In addition to the *kharāj*, the peasants paid other

⁴⁰ Chekhovich, 1951, p. 59.

⁴¹ Ghiyāth al-Dīn 'Alī, 1915, p. 129.

taxes, considered to be formally ‘illegal’ since they were not prescribed by the *sharīʿa*. Fifteenth-century writers refer to levies by a whole army of officials – the *dābitān*, the *muhassilān*, the *dārūghān*, the *mushrifān* and others. Other taxes that seem to have been levied were a capitation tax (*dūdī*) and a poll tax (*sar-shumār*); a particularly heavy burden was the *ulagh* (literally ‘beast of burden’), the obligation to provide government couriers with relay horses and also to furnish heavy transport.

Clavijo was witness to the cruel treatment of the population by the knights (*caballeros*) accompanying the embassy of the king of Castille:

Those who saw them on the road and realized that they were royal servants, and guessing that they were the bearers of some royal command, would take to flight, as if pursued by the devil; and those who were in their shops selling their wares, hid them and also fled, locking themselves in their houses, and passers-by would say to one another, *elchi*, which is to say, envoys, for they knew already that with the coming of envoys black days were in store for them; and they would flee as if the devil were at their heels... They act thus not only towards (foreign) ambassadors, but also whenever anyone is on royal business; for whatever someone on royal business does, everyone must keep silent, and raise no objection...; for that reason the emperor (*Señor*) is so feared throughout the whole country, that it is a marvel.⁴²

The jurisdiction of the central *dīwān* (council) extended only over Transoxania. The rulers appointed by Timur in the conquered regions had their own staff of officials.

Timur could not but be aware that the volume of revenue collected by the state was directly dependent on the condition of agriculture. This was the reason for the measures taken during his reign for the repair and construction of irrigation works. Extensive irrigation works were carried out on the Mughan steppe and in the Kabul valley.⁴³ The fifteenth-century historian and geographer Hāfiz-i Abrū gives a list of twenty canals, nine of which bore the names of high officials of Timur’s government, perhaps the builders of the canals in question.

Urban development, crafts and trade

The huge receipts flowing into Timur’s treasury from taxes in Transoxania, the more or less regular inflow of tribute from the conquered territories governed by his deputies, the heavy taxes laid upon the subject populations and, finally, the undisguised robbery that followed his conquests enabled him to spend large sums on the beautification of his capital, Samarkand, to which were relocated, in addition to material wealth, craftsmen and scholars, poets and painters. Samarkand became a great centre of craftsmanship and trade,

⁴² Clavijo, 1881, pp. 189, 190.

⁴³ Bartol’d, 1914.

medieval learning and culture, and surrounding settlements were drawn upon to enhance the greatness of the capital. The fortress of Samarkand was completed, palaces surrounded by immense gardens were erected in the town and its environs and work was started on the construction of the Shah-i Zinda necropolis, a complex of mausoleums of the feudal aristocracy and the family of Timur.

Across the whole city was laid 'a very wide street', with shops on either side; at fixed intervals reservoirs were situated. According to Clavijo, the builders worked in relays, so that the work went on uninterruptedly day and night:

Some broke down houses [i.e. those situated on the roadway], others levelled the ground, still others did the building, and all made such a noise day and night that they seemed very devils. In less than 20 days so much had been done that it was a marvel.

Construction also began on several other cities of Transoxania. In particular, Urgench, destroyed by Timur in his battle with the Khan of the White Horde and sown with barley, was restored. In Kish, the mosque and palace of Ak-Saray were built. Clavijo considered the interior apartments of the palace, finished in gold and azure and faced with glazed tiles, to be 'astonishing work'. 'Even in Paris,' he adds, 'where there are past masters, this work would be considered very beautiful.'⁴⁴

Essential to the growth and productive activity of the cities was a rich agricultural hinterland:

This land [writes Clavijo of the region around Samarkand] is rich in all things: grain, fruit and various meats . . . bread is as cheap as it could possibly be, and there is no end to the rice available. So rich and abundant are the town and its surroundings that one can only marvel.⁴⁵

To the city from its hinterland came not only foodstuffs but also industrial crops, especially cotton, which served as the raw material for weaving, the most important branch of urban handicrafts. The towns produced a variety of metal articles: weapons, all kinds of implements, copper vessels, and so on. There was a widely varied production by wood-workers, leather-workers, potters, jewellers; in the towns lived and worked cotton-carders, stone and alabaster carvers, carpet-makers, bakers, cooks, confectioners and other tradesmen.

The craftsmen were a heterogeneous group, since many of them hailed from distant towns and countries and had been brought to Transoxania as captives. The employment of artisans from a variety of countries for building work contributed in no small degree to the blending on Transoxanian soil of the artistic and architectural styles of the various peoples of the East. The bulk of urban craftsmen were free tradesmen. They were organized in guilds and worked in their own shops, with the help of apprentices and members

⁴⁴ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 209, 279

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 285.

of their families. For heavy or dirty work, the craftsmen might engage ancillary workers. There were also craftsmen of royal workshops (*kārkhānahs*), especially armourers. In Köksaray, one of the villages on the outskirts of Samarkand, surrounded by a deep ditch and to all intents and purposes impregnable, Timur kept his treasury. Here ‘the emperor kept about 1,000 captive craftsmen, making armour, helmets, bows and arrows, working the year round’.⁴⁶

Samarkand and a series of other Transoxanian towns became major centres of international trade. Through them passed the most important trade arteries, linking China and India with Europe and the Near East. The development of the external caravan trade involved not only merchants but the Turco-Mongol nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal nobility and many representatives of the local landowning aristocracy, among them the Muslim clergy. To Samarkand came ‘from Rush [Rus] and Tartary hides and linen, from China silken stuffs, which in that country are made better than anywhere else; and especially satins, considered to be the best in the world’; from India were brought spices, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon and ginger. If Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī is to be believed, the trade routes, which had previously been ‘impassable’ because of ‘the depredations of thieves and bandits’, during Timur’s reign were made safe and merchants traversed them freely.⁴⁷

Despite the high level of development of their craftsmanship and trade, the cities of Transoxania remained completely in the power of the ruling lords. These owned houses, lands, caravanserais and other lucrative property. *Shihnas* (municipal officials with specific police powers as well as other functions) were appointed by Timur himself or his local representatives. The craft and trade guilds, though they took decisions in matters relating to production and some everyday social questions concerning their members, had no political rights whatever. Their headmen, who were responsible for the collection of taxes and the discharge of obligations, were often subjected to physical coercion and other forms of oppression on the part of the ruling powers. Representative institutions of citizens and a civil law, which had grown up in Europe, were non-existent in Transoxania. Cities and country localities alike were handed over by the monarch as gifts to the princes and amirs.

The power of the ruling interests was especially manifested in a variety of levies upon the trading and artisan population. A special tax levied on craft and trade was the *tamgha*, which in the Mongol period came to replace the *zakāt*, the *sharīʿa*-sanctioned tax traditionally levied in Muslim countries on such activities. Tolls were exacted from travelling merchants at river crossings and in mountains passes; ‘a great revenue’ was derived from

⁴⁶ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 289–90.

⁴⁷ Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī, 1915, p. 28.

the tolls at the famous ‘Iron Gates’ on the caravan route from India to Samarkand.⁴⁸ The arbitrariness of the authorities was a source of great distress to the townsfolk. An example was the laying, by Timur’s order, of a commercial highway from one end of Samarkand to the other. The princes (*mīrzās*) in charge of the project:

started the works and began to demolish the houses, to whomever they might belong, situated in the places where the sovereign (*Señor*) had ordered the road to be laid; so that the owners, seeing their houses being demolished, collected up their goods and everything they had and fled.

The expense of building the trade road was, apparently, laid on the townsfolk themselves. At all events, Clavijo states that ‘the people working here received payment from the town’.⁴⁹ As the fancy took him, Timur would force the townsfolk to take part in the triumphal celebrations he held.

Relations with west European rulers

Timur’s wars of conquest drew the attention of west European rulers, for they saw of the ‘Tartar conqueror’ a possible counterpoise to the growing military strength to the Ottoman Turks, who as early as 1389, after winning a victory on the plain of Kosovo in Serbia, seized that country along with Bulgaria and were threatening Hungary and Constantinople. The emperor of Byzantium, the Genoese ruler of Galata (the Frankish suburb of Constantinople) and the French king Charles VI Valois appealed to Timur for help against the Turks. For his part, Timur sent an embassy (its details are unknown) with gifts to Genoa and Venice. After his victory over Sultan Bāyazīd In 1402, he informed Charles VI in a letter of 1 August 1402 of the ‘deposition’ of the sultan and proposed that merchants from the realms of both rulers should visit each other’s countries, ‘for peace is strengthened by trade’.⁵⁰ A letter in like vein was addressed by Timur to the English king Henry IV. In reply, the king wrote that the news of the victory over Bāyazīd, ‘our enemy and yours’, ‘aroused in us a feeling of great solace and great joy’. However, this correspondence did not lead to the establishment of systematic diplomatic relations. One reason for this was the death of Timur and the incipient feudal quarrels among his successors, together, of course, with the great distances involved.

Timur’s warlike activity was attentively observed by Henry III, king of Castile, who as early as 1402 sent envoys to the East with orders to collect information ‘about the mores, customs, religion, laws and strength of these far-off nations’. This embassy was received

⁴⁸ Clavijo, 1881, pp. 201, 204–5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 278–9.

⁵⁰ Umnyakov, 1969, pp. 179 et seq.

by Timur during the festivities held by him to celebrate his victory over Bāyazīd In 1402. The amir lavished gifts on the envoys. ‘Mahomet al-Kazi’, as Clavijo calls Timur’s envoy, was sent back to Spain with them to deliver the letter from ‘Lord Tamurbeg’. A return embassy led by Clavijo left Spain by sea on 25 May 1403 for Constantinople and Trebizond, whence they travelled overland through Iran to Samarkand. On 8 September 1404 they were received by Timur. The envoys were shown marks of respect, but there quickly came an order for them to quit Timur’s court and return to their country. This unexpected turn of events was brought about by the start of preparations for a new invasion, this time of China, where Timur’s army arrived on 27 November, just a few days after the departure of the Spaniards from Samarkand.⁵¹

The great army raised by Timur set out, but the severe winter of 1404–5, proved fatal for the aging conqueror and, on arrival at Utrar in February 1405, he suddenly died.

The succession struggle⁵²

After Timur’s death, conflict broke out among the members of his house, the rulers of the state domains and the provincial governors. They refused to accept Pīr Muhammad, Timur’s grandson, who had named himself Timur’s successor. The empire, lacking a single economic base and resting on the sole authority of Timur as military leader and on his despotic power supported by methods of terror, quickly began to disintegrate. Shāh Rukh (1405–47) declared himself an independent ruler, governing a large domain that included Khurasan and the Herat region.

A serious rival to Shāh Rukh appeared in the person of Khalīl Sultān (Timur’s grandson and the son of Mīrānshāh), the former ruler of Tashkent. He had the support of several powerful amirs and grandees of Samarkand, who handed over to him the keys of the city, the fortress and Timur’s rich treasury. Mīrānshāh, with the intention of supporting Khalīl Sultān, marched on Samarkand from Iran at the head of his army. Khalīl Sultān’s position was made more complicated by raids by the Khans of the Golden Horde, who had taken Khwarazm and marched as far as Balkh. Nevertheless, in February 1406 he managed to defeat, in a battle fought near Karshi, the army of Pīr Muhammad and Ulugh Beg (son of Shāh Rukh), who had concluded an alliance against him. Several months later Pīr Muhammad died at the hand of an assassin.

Meanwhile, the position of Khalīl Sultān in Samarkand had appreciably worsened and he did not have enough troops to undertake further military conquests. The advancement

⁵¹ Umnyakov, 1969, pp. 190–5.

⁵² For the chronology of the Timurids, see Bosworth, 1996, pp. 270–2.

of new men under his rule annoyed Timur's amirs. One of them, Khudāydād, took Khalīl Sultān prisoner and occupied Samarkand. Shāh Rukh marched on Samarkand. Learning of his approach, Khudāydād left the city, taking Khalīl Sultān with him. On 13 May 1409 Shāh Rukh entered Samarkand and dealt severely with the amirs of the warring groups there. Leaving the city, he appointed Ulugh Beg ruler of Samarkand and another of his sons, Ibrahīm Sultān, as ruler of Balkh. Other Timurid princes also received fiefs in Transoxania from Shāh Rukh. In the spring of 1410, unwilling to recognize the authority of Ulugh Beg, they raised a rebellion and, to the west of Samarkand near Kizil Arvat, they defeated Ulugh Beg and his regent, Amir Malik Shāh. Returning to Transoxania, Shāh Rukh put down the rebellion. Ulugh Beg (1409–49) became in effect the sole ruler of Transoxania, although at the demand of Shāh Rukh he contributed troops to his campaigns, and on the coinage and in the *khutba* Shāh Rukh's name appeared along with that of Ulugh Beg.

In western Iran and Azerbaijan, governed in Timur's reign by his son Mīrānshāh (killed in battle in 1408), the Jalayirids established themselves in power with the help of the Kara Koyunlu (the 'Black Sheep' Turkmens). But it was only in 1410 that the Jalayirid Sultan Ahmad died in battle against his former allies. Power over Azerbaijan, Armenia and Arab Iraq then passed into the hands of the Kara Koyunlu dynasty. Shāh Rukh, whose effective power extended over Khurasan and Gurgan, Mazandaran, Sistan and the region of Herat, Kandahar and Kabul, waged several wars against the Kara Koyunlu. His next campaign in 1435 brought him victory and Jahānshāh Kara Koyunlu (1436–67) acknowledged himself to be Shāh Rukh's vassal.

A series of military operations by Shāh Rukh were directed against two nomadic states that had sprung up to the north and north-west of Timur's disintegrating empire. A considerable threat was posed by the Uzbek nomads, whose state arose out of the fragments of the Golden and White Hordes; the Uzbeks carried out predatory raids against Transoxania, Gurgan and Astarabad. The Chaghatayid Khans of Moghulistan, although occupied with internal disturbances, strove to take control of Ferghana and Turkistan. From time to time, the Afghan tribes rebelled; their subjection to Shāh Rukh was in many cases purely nominal.

Shāh Rukh's efforts were also directed against the rebellious scions of the house of Timur, his own grandsons, to whom he had granted fiefs in *soyurghal*. They were allowed to keep their own courts, but had to hand over part of their revenues to Shāh Rukh and fulfil certain other feudal obligations on pain of punishment. In 1414–15 Shāh Rukh's grandson Iskandar was deprived of his *soyurghal* that included Isfahan, Hamadan, Luristan and Fars; in 1414 Husayn Bayqara was evicted from Qum, Kashan and Rayy. In 1446 Shāh

Rukh mounted what was essentially a punitive expedition against his grandson, Sultan Muhammad (son of Baysunqur), to whom he had once awarded a large fief.

In his efforts to increase his power, Shāh Rukh relied for support mainly on the settled Tajik Persian landowning nobility, particularly the civil bureaucracy. He had close ties with the Muslim clergy, particularly the shaykhs of the Sufi order of the Naqshbandiyya. To this, he owed the reputation of being the ideal Muslim ruler. At the same time he was severe with his amirs. Some of them, including several of the most prominent, he put to death for a variety of offences against his authority. The customs and standards embodied in the Mongol *Yasa* and observed in Timur's time were, in Shāh Rukh's reign, relegated to oblivion and the law of the *shari'at* achieved unconditional supremacy.⁵³

During Shāh Rukh's reign, his capital Herat became a great centre of commerce, crafts and culture. Many outstanding poets and painters, scholars and historians lived and worked there. Their activities were encouraged by Shāh Rukh's son and effective co-ruler, Baysunqur (d. 1433), who officially occupied the post of chief *wazīr*. Through his efforts, the library was founded there. In it worked scholars and philologists, calligraphers, miniaturists and bookbinders. Herat was embellished by architectural monuments bearing the stamp of the influence of Samarkand at the end of Timur's reign. To Herat came not only merchants from many countries, but also foreign embassies, most notably from China. In return, in 1420 Shāh Rukh sent to China envoys of his own, among whom was the artist Ghiyāth al-Dīn. His diary of the journey to China was used by the historian Hāfiz-i Abrū. In 1441–2 ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī went to India on Shāh Rukh's orders. In his historical work he describes the route from Hurmuz to India and gives a vivid account of many cities in the south Indian state of Vijayanagar. Its ruler sent a return embassy to Herat, with a view to increasing trade between Transoxania, Khurasan and India.

Under the outward brilliance of the state, however, one can discern clear signs of weakness. Although Shāh Rukh's historians describe his reign as a time when the *ra'iyyats* (peasants) were 'freed from cares' and found 'tranquillity', this conflicts with the known facts, above all the growth of popular rebellion. As early as 1405 a Sarbadar uprising took place in Sabzavar and was suppressed by Shāh Rukh. In the following year, a similar uprising engulfed Mazandaran. The peasants and craftsmen failed to make common cause with the small local landowners, as had happened in the fourteenth century. The ideological underpinning of their action was provided by the doctrines of the 'extremist' Shi'ite sects, who preached, in particular, the common ownership of land and other property and a Utopia of social equality. On 21 February 1427, in the Friday mosque of Herat, an attempt was made on the life of Shāh Rukh, who was gravely wounded in the stomach. The attacker was

⁵³ Bartol'd, 1914, p. 32.

a pupil of Fadl Allāh Hurūfī, the founder of one of the extremist Shi^cite sects in Khurasan, the Hurūfiyya; Fadl Allāh Hurūfī had earlier been banished by Timur to Azerbaijan, where Timur's son Mīranshāh had put him to death with his own hands.

Towards the end of Shāh Rukh's reign, his state presented a picture of political fragmentation. In Khurasan alone, says ^cAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, were there 'several *pādishāhs*'; the *pādishāh* (king) of Azerbaijan and both Iraqs, Jahānshāh Kara Koyunlu, seized the region of Astarabad and Sabzavar.