CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

THE TIMURIDS AND THE MONGOL EMPIRE

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This chapter on the legacy of the Mongol Empire in the Timurid period in Iran and Central Asia (ca. 1370–1510) assumes that the Timurid Empire was not part of the Mongol Empire but was merely influenced by it, absorbing various elements of Mongol imperialism. This has not always been the universally accepted approach in scholarship on the Mongol and Timurid empires. For instance, René Grousset treated the Timurid dynasty as part of the “Jenghiz-Khanite Mongols” in his classic work titled The Empire of the Steppes.1 But David Morgan, the renowned historian of the Mongol Empire, who published a widely used introduction to the Mongol Empire in 1986, left the Timurid dynasty entirely out of his monograph The Mongols.2 There is in fact no inconsistency between these two positions. An empire is an administrative, political, and military organization, but above all, it is an idea, and imperial ideas often live longer than the empires themselves. While the Great Mongol Empire as imagined by Chinggis Khan ended when Qubilai Qa’an, the last universally recognized great khan, died in 1294, the idea of the Mongol Empire lasted for centuries.3 With this idea in mind, Marshall G. S. Hodgson formulated the concept of the “Age of the Mongol Prestige” to study the period between 1258 and 1503, that is, the era between the conquest of Baghdad by the armies of Hülegü in 1258 and the rise of the Safavid Empire in Iran. According to Hodgson, the Age of Mongol Prestige was a period when new standards of politics, law, and art emerged under the influence of the Mongols. The driving force of this innovative phase in the history of the Middle East was the challenge of the Mongols to Islamicate life. First the non-Muslim Mongols’ rule over majority Muslim regions from Mawarannahr to Syria and then the Mongols’ conversion to Islam paved the path for new and radical intellectual movements, which coexisted and often clashed with the Islamicate conservative spirit. This Hodgson identifies as one of the main features of pre-Modern societies.4

Effective Mongol rule in Iran and Central Asia may have ended with the death of Abu Sa’id Bahadur Khan in 1335, but the non-Chinggisid rulers, or qarachus, who came to power in Central Asia and Iran, including the Timurids, were very well aware of the fact that they were operating in a political and constitutional
framework whose main outlines were drawn by Chinggis Khan and his descendants. For instance, Shaykh Uways (d. 1374), the Jalayirid ruler of Azerbaijan and Iraq considered himself as the “resurrector of the traditions of the Changizkhanid state . . . unfurler of the banners of the Sacred Law of the Prophet, kindler of the flame of the Muhammadan faith, distinguished by the support of God, Lord of the worlds.”5 As I will discuss, Timur (d. 1405) ruled under the nominal sovereignty of Chinggisid rulers until the end of his reign, with the exception of the last two years of his life. These non-Chinggisid or qarachu “commoner” rulers were aware that effective Mongol rule and prestige never ceased to exist. They knew that the Jochids were still in power in the North, and those were the Chinggisids who initiated a Chinggisid revival after the fall of Timurid rule in Central Asia.6 It would be a mistake to think that Mongol prestige was effective only in the areas previously controlled by the Mongol Empire. Even the institutions of the Ottoman Empire were shaped by the influence and prestige of the Mongol Empire, causing constant embarrassment for an empire who claimed the leadership of the Islamic world in the early modern period.7 When the rebellious Ottoman Sufi scholar Niyazi-i Misri (d. 1694) shouted, “The Ottoman dynasty is like a rotten egg! The throne belongs to the Tatars!” he was most probably referring to the centuries-old prestige of a dynastic and political institution, not to a specific Chinggisid ruler, although it is true that there was indeed a Chinggisid ruler, the khan of Crimea, who could be a possible claimant to the Ottoman throne. Misri said: “What sultans really need is faith and justice. The Tatars have both.”8 This was not just the delirious utterance of a grumpy Ottoman Sufi master about his enemies. Whenever the Ottoman bureaucrats dared considering the possibility of ousting the Ottoman dynasty from power, the Chinggisid Crimean khans were the first in line to replace the dynasty in Istanbul.9

These examples suggest that the greatest legacy of the Mongol Empire was the Chinggisid dynasty. For centuries after the dissolution of the Great Mongol Empire at the end of the 13th century, the descendants of Chinggis Khan, or altan urugh (golden seed), were catalysts in the formation and articulation of political ideologies throughout Islamicate Eurasia from the Kazakh steppe in the east to Ottoman Constantinople in the west.10 However, this is just half of the matter that we need to understand. We cannot assume that the presence of and references to the Chinggisid dynasty in different contexts mean the same thing, and it is important to define what the Chinggisid dynasty, or the Mongol legacy for that matter, meant in each context. According to Robert McChesney, the Chinggisid legacy manifested itself in three distinct political, legal, and administrative principles: 1. the idea of universal peace created and maintained by an empire; 2. the principle of clan sovereignty, in which sovereignty belongs to the ruling lineage, not to the ruler himself or herself; and 3. the idea of yasa, customary law, which was believed to be issued by Chinggis Khan.11 The legacy of the Mongol Empire was in fact a constant fight over these three principles. The Mongol legacy was adapted, contested, and always imagined throughout history, and I will discuss these debates in the context of the Timurid Empire.

THE MONGOL LEGACY ADAPTED

The Timurid Empire emerged under the leadership of Timur out of the Ulus Chaghadai, the confederation of Turco-Mongol tribes that inhabited the domains of
Chaghadai, the second son of Chinggis Khan, in Central Asia in the second half of the 14th century. Timur became the leader of the Barlas tribe in 1360, and ten years later, in 1370, he controlled the entire Ulus Chaghadai. After establishing himself as the ruler of the ulus, Timur designed a constitutional fiction along the lines of dual kingship, according to which *de jure* or nominal sovereignty was invested in a member of the Chinggisid family and *de facto* sovereignty remained in the hands of Timur. Since Timur was not a Chinggisid himself, he could not exercise legitimate sovereignty according to the Chinggisid constitutional fiction, so he needed a Chinggisid in order to be able to legitimize his polity. In other words, as far as Timur’s constitutional fiction goes, Timur’s empire was yet another Chinggisid dispensation that emerged after the dissolution of the Great Mongol Empire. Throughout his career, Timur had two nominal Chinggisid khans: Soyurghatmish Khan b. Danishmandcha between 1370 and 1388, and Sultan Mahmud b. Soyurghatmish between 1388 and 1402. The names of these two nominal sovereigns appeared on the coins and edicts of Timur and his third son, Miranshah. On a unique Timurid coin minted in 1398 in Samarqand, a second son of Soyurghatmish, Sultan Ahmad, was cited as the nominal sovereign, but the rule of this Chinggisid khan is yet to be confirmed in other contemporary sources. These Chinggisid sovereigns played an important role in Timurid political rituals and ceremonies beyond being simple figureheads, as contemporary observers of Timurid politics recorded their existence in Timur’s entourage. John E. Woods made three observations regarding Timur’s relationship with these two or more sovereigns of the Timurid Empire. Soyurghatmish Khan died in 1388, and Timur did not appoint Sultan Mahmud immediately because Toqtamish, a Chinggisid ruler of the Golden Horde, had just attacked Mawarannahr, and Timur did not want to take the risk of having a Chinggisid sovereign, albeit a ceremonial one, while another Chinggisid was threatening his rule. Secondly, although Timur’s empire emerged out of the Ulus Chaghadai, Timur preferred his khans to come from the Ögödeid line of the Chinggisid family. According to Woods, this is not a random choice and reflects Timur’s multilayered approach to the legacy of the Mongol Empire. In Timur’s perspective, Chinggis Khan bequeathed Central Asia to his son Chaghadai, and Iran and Iraq became a Chinggisid appanage-state when Möngke’s brother Hülegü established his own dispensation there in 1256. When Möngke came to power after the so-called Toluid Revolution and Hülegü invaded Iran and Iraq, the Toluids usurped what rightfully belonged to the Ögödeids. Therefore, as far as Timur was concerned, the Timurid Empire was an Ögödeid-Chinggisid polity and an attempt to restore Chinggis Khan’s original will. In other words, Soyurghatmish and Sultan Mahmud were not mere “puppet khans,” as they are sometimes labeled in secondary literature, but they were pillars of the constitutional organization of Timur’s empire. Finally, Woods suggested that Sultan Mahmud Khan died in 1402, and Timur did not fill the vacancy that his death created. This means that he ruled for three years without a nominal Chinggisid sovereign, and perhaps more importantly, when he launched what turned out to be his final campaign to China, he was both the nominal and actual sovereign of his empire. Therefore, Woods argued, Timur may have intended to establish his independent dispensation after the death of Sultan Mahmud in 1402.
Timur’s program of dual kingship was underpinned by the Timurid dynastic genealogy. According to the Timurid genealogical fiction, Timur was not a descendant of Chinggis Khan, but his ancestry went back to Tumanay Khan, second great-grandfather of Chinggis Khan. Hence, Timur’s dual kingship arrangement was also “codified” through genealogical speculation. This genealogical fiction is found in a range of literary, genealogical, and epigraphic sources, meticulously discussed by John E. Woods. However, it is not easy to determine if this genealogical fiction began at the time of Timur or if it emerged in the political and ideological competition between various branches of the Timurid dynasty after the death of Timur. Woods surmised that Timur developed this genealogical fiction in the last decade of the 14th century, especially after Toqtamish Khan of the Golden Horde invaded and pillaged the power base of Timur in Mawarannahr in 1388.17

The prestige of the Chinggisid dynasty extended beyond the sphere of the two nominal sovereigns. Chinggisid princesses were the preferred wives of members of the Timurid dynasty. Timur himself married a Chaghadaid-Chinggisid princess, Saray Malik Khanum, and all his children, Jahangir, ʿUmar Shaykh, Miranshah, and Shahrukh, married Chinggisid princesses at some point in their lives.18 Marrying a Chinggisid princess allowed a Timurid prince to use the prestigious title giiregen (son-in-law), although not every Timurid prince who married a Chinggisid princess used it. For instance, we have firm evidence to suggest that both Timur and Miranshah used the title on their coins and edicts, but Shahrukh did not include it in his political vocabulary. After the second generation, various Timurid family members married Chinggisid princesses, but whether they emphasized their relationship with the Chinggisid dynasty is a topic that requires further research. Although many Timurid princes married Chinggisid princesses, only Miranshah, Pir Muhammad b. Jahangir, Ulugh Bek b. Shahrukh, and Sultan Abu Saʿid b. Sultan Muhammad highlighted their connections to the family of Chinggis Khan in their political language.19

The Chinggisid dynastic discourse, be it real or fictional, meant something more than just a legitimizing nomenclature that served to validate the rule of a qarachu dynasty in an area previously controlled by the Mongols. The Chinggisid discourse was a critical part of the scaffolding of Timurid sovereignty through which a range of economic, legal, and social policies and political practices were implemented.20

Arguably, the most important of these policies in the Timurid period was the concept of corporate sovereignty. The Chinggisid practice of collective sovereignty meant that authority was invested in the corporate persona of the dynastic family, not in the corporeal body of the dynast himself or herself. This constitutional arrangement had two significant consequences. The first was the territorial apportionment of governed territories among the members of the dynastic family. Timur initiated the process by allocating specific provinces and regions to his four sons, ʿUmar Shaykh (d. 1394), Jahangir (d. 1376), Miranshah (d. 1408), and Shahrukh (d. 1447), and the practice was continued by Shahrukh, who emerged victorious at the end of the first Timurid Civil War between 1405 and 1418. Shahrukh divided his domains among his children Ulugh Bek, Ibrahim Sultan, and Baysunghur, as well as his grandchildren. The appanage allocations to Timurid princes continued until the end of the dynasty in the first decade of the 16th century, but its exact extent and scope is yet to be properly studied.21
The appanage system in the Timurid Empire did not have a uniform structure. Certain appanage holders, such as Ulugh Bek in Samarqand between 1409 and 1449, acted semi-independently in their political and military affairs. Sultan Muhammad b. Baysunghur’s appointment to ‘Iraq-i Ajami in 1443 is often labeled as the formation of a new Timurid dispensation. Furthermore, the Timurid Empire from the death of Sultan Abu Sa’id in 1469 until the late 15th century can only be considered a diarchy, whereby the ‘Umar-Shaykhid Sultan-Husayn and his two sons, Badi’ al-Zaman and Muzaffar Husayn, ruled – as a condominium during the latter two’s reign – in Herat until 1507 and the Miranshahid Sultan Abu Sa’id and his descendants ruled in Samarqand until 1500. In other words, the Timurid Empire turned into being the Timurid diarchy between 1469 and 1500. Unfortunately, we know very little about Sultan Abu Sa’id’s children and their activities in Mawarannahr. Our view of Timurid history in the second half of the 15th century has been dominated by the sources written at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara.

The second significant consequence of corporate sovereignty in the Timurid period was the uncertainty of succession protocols after the death of a specific ruler. The idea of collective sovereignty prescribes that every male member of the dynastic family has a right to claim rule for himself, and this idea has often been blamed for the quick disintegration of nomadic polities in the medieval and early modern periods. This is indeed a highly romanticized view of Timurid dynastic politics, but it assists in understanding certain dynamics in specific periods. At no point in Timurid history was the succession to the ruler’s position an orderly affair. Imitating Chinggis Khan, Timur tried to regulate the succession processes after his death, but his wishes were even more quickly violated by his sons and grandsons than that of Chinggis Khan, whose favorite Ögödei and his son, Güyük, ruled the Mongol Empire for almost twenty years after his death. As soon as Timur died in 1405, the Timurid Empire plunged into a protracted civil war waged by sword as well as by pen. The First Timurid Civil War ended in earnest only in 1418, when Shahrukh replaced the appanage holders installed by Timur with his own children.

Succession to the throne after Shahrukh’s death was no less brutal. We have indirect evidence suggesting that Shahrukh favored his son Baysunghur, but his influential wife Gawharshad favored ‘Ala’ al-Dawla b. Baysunghur. Just like the First Timurid Civil War, the subsequent struggles among various pretenders to the throne, a period we can name the Second Timurid Civil War, produced an unexpected winner, Sultan Abu Sa’id, a grandson of Miranshah. The same scenario repeated itself, albeit with fewer pretenders, mainly because of the establishment of the Timurid diarchy described earlier, when Sultan Abu Sa’id was killed during his campaign against the Qaraqoyunlu and the Aqqoyunlu Turkmen in 1469. Timurid succession struggles, or civil wars, were not disorderly power struggles. Rather, they were moments of political crisis during which political alliances matured and new political and ideological formulations were tested. One of the important aspects of the Timurid civil wars was that the power struggle between the dynastic family members gives only a section of the entire story. The way economic and political resources were cultivated during civil wars tells more about the unique nature of political competition in a given moment. Hence, the Timurid civil wars were, on the surface, a true legacy of the Mongol Empire, but underneath the surface they were genuine Timurid or 15th-century political practices.
The Timurids inherited many of their economic and legal practices from the Mongols. Most of these practices were not entirely continuations of early Mongol conventions, but they were the amalgamation of Mongol processes with earlier and contemporaneous Islamic customs. For instance, the much-discussed practice of *soyurghal*, the grant of privileges and tax exemptions, had its roots both in the Chinggisid *soyurghamisih* and the medieval Islamic grants of *iqt*. While the Mongol concept of *soyurghamisih* in Mongol administrative language and practice simply meant “grant of favors” by the sovereign ruler to influential members of the administration, army, and society, the *iqt* meant land grants in return for specific services to the sovereign. Throughout the 14th century, and especially in the 15th century, these two conventions merged, and the practice of *soyurghal* emerged as a uniquely late medieval administrative tool. *Soyurghals* were hereditary grants that provided a range of privileges to the grantee. A *soyurghal* may have consisted of tax immunity, shares from taxes, or even grants of outright ownership (*tamlik*). In large *soyurghals*, the privileges granted to a specific person may have led to complete political autonomy. Other forms of land grants, tax immunities, and the recognition of autonomous enclaves also had their roots in the Mongol system. For instance, the hereditary *tarkhan* status was given to high-level aristocrats and religious figures, and the status came not only with tax immunities and land privileges that amounted to private property, it also entailed immunity against up to nine criminal prosecutions. Tarkhans were originally Mongol nobles, but by the 15th century, the status had been granted to non-Mongol and even non-Muslim dignitaries.

**THE MONGOL LEGACY CONTESTED**

The Timurids and other late medieval polities of Western Asia did not merely adapt the Mongol political, administrative, and cultural practices, they also contested them. No other theme, practice, or policy was discussed in our sources more than the Chinggisid *yasa*, *töre*, and *jarghu* as legal-cum-administrative practices and the *tamgha* as a practice of taxation. There is now a relatively advanced literature on these processes, on which we do not need to dwell here. As far as the late medieval commentators were concerned, *yasa* and *töre* meant a set of loosely defined political and legal practices that were believed to be issued and codified by Chinggis Khan. *Jarghu* was a court and an unspecified legal procedure, whereby *yasa* and *töre* were implemented. It is worth noting here that the information we have regarding the contents of the *yasa* and *töre* as well as the specifics of the *jarghu* is very insubstantial. *Tamgha*, on the other hand, was a more tangible practice. It was a form of tax levied upon commercial transactions and industrial production in cities. *Tamgha* was not the only form of tax the Mongols introduced to the Middle Eastern economy. Other forms of taxation, such as *qubchur* and *qalan*, were also introduced by the Mongols in the Middle East. The *qubchur* was initially a pasture tax on nomads, but it was eventually collected from livestock as well as pastures and arable land. In certain cases, the *qubchur* tax became a poll tax on both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In fact, the term “*yasa*” was often used as an umbrella term that referred to the legal application of these various forms of non-canonical taxes. In the Mongol and post-Mongol periods, these non-canonical taxes emerged as a parallel system...
of taxation to four canonical taxes, that is, kharaj (tax on land and agricultural products), 'ushr (tithe), zakat (alms tax), and jizya (poll tax on non-Muslims). The most important difference between the canonical and non-canonical taxes were that whereas the rates of the canonical taxes were fixed by the shari'a, the rates of the non-canonical taxes were set independently by rulers and other authorities who had the right to collect taxes, although there were semi-successful attempts to codify non-canonical taxes as well.31

Yasa, jarghu, tamgha, and other taxes were seen as anathema to the religious establishment of the late medieval period, and the ulama fiercely opposed these practices due to their non-canonical nature. This antagonism was highlighted especially during certain political crises in the Timurid period. During the First Timurid Civil War, for instance, the renowned muhtasib of Herat Jalal al-Din al-Qayini (d. 1434) praised Shahrkuh for abolishing jarghu courts and abrogating yasa and törä, “which had been observed by Turko-Mongolian rulers since ancient times.”32 Similarly, Sa’īn al-Din Turka (d. 1432), one of the foremost intellectuals of Timurid Iran, hailed him, certainly under duress due to the political pressure that he was under during Shahrkuh’s clash with the informal intellectual networks, for abolishing the tamgha and yarghu and restoring the shari’a in the Timurid Empire.33 When Ulugh Beg’s son ʿAbd al-Latif clashed with his father, one of the points of contention was Ulugh Beg’s adherence to the tamgha tax, which ʿAbd al-Latif was reported to have abolished after assassinating his father in 1449.34 In the second half of the 15th century, Sultan Abu Sa’īd abolished the tamgha in Bukhara and Samarqand on the request of the Naqshbandi shaykh Khwaja Ahrar (d. 1490), an act that contributed to an increase in the Naqshbandi shaykh’s wealth and authority while also impoverishing the Timurid ruling elite.35 These debates continued well into the 16th century and beyond in the political language of Central Asia and Iran.

However, there is now an increasing appreciation of the fact that the conflict between the shari’a and yasa as well as the debates on non-canonical taxes were non-debates or just clashes on the nature of politics in a given moment. İsenbike Togan argued that what was debated was actually whether the Timurid polity should have been a centralized or decentralized polity, and there were no fixed meanings attached to each position in the 15th century. Religious scholars as well as soyurghal-holding Turco-Mongol aristocrats defended a decentralized political system by favoring shari’a in order to maintain their local privileges in the first half of the 15th century, but the same groups defended a centralized government by evoking the same principles of the shari’a at the end of the century.36 Thomas Welsford suggested that evoking the yasa and törä was merely a way of referring to Chinggisid dynastic prestige, which was discussed at the beginning of this chapter.37 As for the non-canonical taxes, although their names were certainly Turkic or Mongolian, they were hardly novel, even under the Ilkhanids in the 13th century. Barthold warned us long ago that the tamgha tax was no different than the baj, a form of road and merchandise tax.38 The tamgha tax is also very similar to, one can even dare say the same as, maks (pl. mukus), a non-canonical tax widely used by medieval Islamic dynasties. Like tamgha, the maks was equally controversial among Muslim religious scholars, and the arguments against its application are well documented in medieval Islamic sources.39 The jarghu courts, which are often contrasted to the mahkamas, or qadi courts, and seen as the venues where the yasa was implemented, are very much akin
to mazalim or even to the judicial processes conducted in the diwan, or the courts at the governor or ruler’s court.⁴⁰

In other words, it would certainly be a mistake to consider the debates on yasa and shari’a in cultural, civilizational, or ethnic terms, such as Mongol politics vs. Islamic politics or Turco-Mongol forms of taxation vs. Islamic forms of taxation. It is more fruitful to study each concept in its specific context and consider these terms and concepts as part of a broader political language that developed in unique circumstances of the post-Mongol period. As our understanding of Islamic politics, law, and society has become more receptive to the diversity and plurality we observe in medieval societies, we are less inclined to see sharp clashes between certain Mongol and Islamic practices in these areas. In other words, a non-canonical practice does not mean non-Islamicate practice. However, the debates on these practices were real, and they are well attested in our sources. But as Robert McChesney warned us before, we know more about the views of those who opposed these practices, most importantly the ulama and Sufi shaykhs, as well as bureaucrats (ahl-i qalam), than those of the Turco-Mongol military elite. In fact, most of our knowledge about the yasa comes from those who actually opposed it and even tried to eradicate it.⁴¹

The conflict between the yasa and the shari’a was certainly a discursive one, but that does not mean the conflict was not a reflection of deeper and broader conflicts over politics and resources.⁴² Whether a practice’s genealogy was traced back to the Mongols or to a non-canonical Islamic practice, its practitioners had vested interests in its continuing existence, and in equal measure its detractors found its disappearance advantageous to their interests in a given historical moment. A case in point is Shahrukh’s well-publicized declarations regarding the abolition of the yasa and yarghu and the strengthening of the shari’a in his realm. We have no reason to doubt the veracity of this claim because he clearly announced that he would abolish the “yarghu wa qawa’id-i Chingiz Khani” in his 1412 letter to the Ming emperor Zhu Di (r. 1402–1424).⁴³ At around the same time, as mentioned, al-Qayini praised Shahrukh for his commitment to the shari’a. Later, Shahrukh made his commitment to the shari’a even more pronounced by adopting the title caliph (khalifa) for himself and he even minted coins carrying the title between 1416 and 1422.⁴⁴ However, we have very little evidence to suggest that Shahrukh maintained this discursive position throughout his reign. Ibn Arabshah (d. 1450), a keen observer of the Timurid political system, expresses his doubts on the abolition of the yasa during Shahrukh’s reign:

He [i.e., Timur] clung to the laws of Jenghizkhan, which are like branches of law from the faith of Islam, and he observed them in preference to the law of Islam. Thus it is also with all the Jaghatais, the people of Dasht, Cathay and Turkestan, all which infidels observe the laws of Jenghiz Khan, on whom be the curse of God! rather then [sic] the laws of Islam. . . . It is said however that Shahrukh repealed the law and customs of Jenghizkhan and ordained that they should make his rule flow along the streams of the law of Islam, but this I do not consider true, since it is considered among them as the purest religion and true faith and if it happened that he should summon his chief men and doctors to his palace and closing the doors look upon them from his throne and propose to them anything of this sort, truly they would flee like asses to the gates.⁴⁵
Ibn Arabshah’s testimony highlights the rhetorical nature of the abolition of the Chinggisid yasa. In fact, there are other instances in which Shahrukh referred to yasa in order to justify his own actions during the later years of his reign. For instance, in 1440, he removed his grandson Sultan Mas’ud b. Soyurghatmish from the governorship of Qandahar and Ghazna for his opposition to the Chinggisid customs and rules. Similarly, in 1444, he chastised the influential amir Firuzshah for his disregard of the töre, after the amir stormed out of a diwan meeting and did not return for a couple of days.46 One can also mention the fact that the Mu’izz al-ansab lists among the officers of Shahrukh’s administration both jarghuchi and yasa’ul, two individuals who were in charge of implementing the yasa and töre in the Timurid administrative apparatus.47

If Shahrukh continued to keep Chinggisid references as part of his political discourse, and if the Chinggisid practices continued to be cited throughout Shahrukh’s reign, then the question of why he made a big deal of abolishing them at the beginning of his reign begs an explanation. I believe the answer to this question must be sought in the specific circumstances in which Shahrukh found himself during the First Timurid Civil War. Shahrukh’s letter to the Ming emperor was in fact a response to the letter he received from the emperor Zhu Di in 1412. The Ming emperor’s letter, which exists in a longer Persian and shorter Chinese version, is a declaration of Ming universalism and an invitation to Shahrukh to submit to his rule unconditionally. Zhu Di says that he is the ruler of the entire world by divine endorsement and asks Shahrukh to stop his war with Khalil Sultan b. Miranshah (d. 1411) and continue sending his annual tribute regularly.48

Ming universalism was not the only rival political ideology that threatened Shahrukh’s administration in Herat. His nephew Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh (d. 1415), who ascended to the appanage-governorship of Fars in 1409, was an even more potent threat, coming as it did from another family member. Iskandar posed Shahrukh arguably the most significant challenge during the First Timurid Civil War. Iskandar cultivated the intellectual and political resources of southern Iran in order to launch his own political career. Like many other Timurid princes, Iskandar was a learned individual as well as being a patron of art and sciences. He used his knowledge of esoteric sciences to formulate a novel constitutional vision for the Timurid Empire. During his short reign, Iskandar experimented with various political ideas, and in the end, by relying on his knowledge of astronomy, he attempted to define a kind of absolutism according to which Iskandar himself would be the source of law and legitimacy. Shahrukh saw through Iskandar’s rhetoric and understood that it would be a real threat to his authority. He invaded Iran in 1414 and ended Iskandar’s political ambitions as well as his experimental eschatological absolutism.49 It is true that Shahrukh had a superior army, which was immensely helpful in suppressing Iskandar’s challenge, but he also knew that serious ideas had to be countered with serious ideas so they could be neutralized. Shahrukh’s so-called abolition of the Chinggisid yasa and törä was an attempt to counter the universalizing political ideologies that had started to gain a foothold in the Timurid Empire. It was also in this context that he adopted the caliphal titles, albeit relatively briefly. The Chinggisid legacy in the Timurid Empire was indeed challenged in the 15th century by competing universalist ideologies, such as eschatological ideas and messianic movements. Gradually, the Chinggisid rhetoric of the 14th and 15th centuries...
was absorbed into the broader Chinggisid neo-constitutional system in the 16th century.50

THE MONGOL LEGACY IMAGINED

The Timurids imagined themselves as firmly rooted in the Mongol imperial system founded by Chinggis Khan. As discussed, the dynasty was not part of the Chinggisid lineage, but the Chinggisid genealogical framework provided the main ideological paradigm in which the Timurid political and historical imagination took shape. It is not surprising that Miranshah was the only person other than Timur for whom a historical work was written before the death of the dynasty’s founder. The *Futuhat-i Miranshahi*, which is extant in fragments quoted in later chronicles, was most probably written between 1391 and 1399 by Mawlana Sa’d Allah Kirmani and narrates the exploits of Miranshah in the 1380s and 1390s.51 Miranshah married his Chinggisid *yingā* (brother’s wife) Khanzada Sevin Beg sometime after 1376 and started using the title *güregen* (son-in-law). He and his children appear to have been very comfortable with presenting themselves as upholders of Chinggisid traditions. Therefore, it is worth asking if the existence of a very early Miranshahid chronicle can be explained by the fact that Miranshah’s Chinggisid discourse made it easier for Kirmani to locate the prince’s activities in a broader historiographical framework.

The Timurid dynasty was the most successful one of all *qarachu* (commoner) dynasties that emerged in the 14th century in Iran and Central Asia. Their predecessors, such as the Injuids, Jalayirids, Qongrat Sufis of Khwarazm, Sarbadarids, Muzaffarids, and many other smaller polities, were absorbed into the Timurid system before they were able to develop a consistent and coherent historiographical framework that would facilitate a clear definition of what *qarachu* rule in the framework of Chinggisid political principles would and should look like. Therefore, the Timurid scholars had to experiment until they properly located the Timurid dynasty in a historiographical scheme. There appears to be a tension in Timurid historical imagination about how to interpret the enormously successful founder of the dynasty. The author of the earliest extant Timurid chronicle (*Zafarnama*), Nizam al-Din Shami (d. before 1411), appears to be a proponent of a form of proto-Machiavellianism. Timur’s persona was probably a convenient vehicle in which he read his views on absolutist politics into historical narrative.52 The same argument can be made for the other famous biographer of Timur, Sharaf al-Din ʿAli Yazdi (d. 1454). Yazdi initially played with the idea of locating Timur and the Timurids in a broader Chinggisid framework, but he appears to have abandoned this idea in favor of a structure that presented Timur as a sacral king in his chronicle, which was also known as the *Zafarnama*.53 Yazdi’s work on the Chinggisids, titled *Muqaddima*, was not published during his lifetime but much later, in 1480, when it was “rediscovered” and prefaced to his *Zafarnama*.54

The first historiographical text that thoroughly locates the Timurid dynasty in a Chinggisid framework appears to be Husayn b. ʿAli Shah’s untitled genealogical tree. Written most probably in Samarqand during Khalil Sultan b. Miranshah’s short reign between 1405 and 1409, the genealogical tree firmly associates the Timurid dynasty with the Chinggisid dynasty, making the former a cadet branch of the Mongol ruling dynasty descended from Alan Qo’a, the ancestress of the Chinggisid
The next historian who narrated Timurid history as part of Chinggisid historiography was Mu’in al-Din Natanzi, who was a keen observer of Mongol society and politics in the 15th century. Natanzi wrote three different historical works, two universal histories, one of which is untitled and the other one titled *Muntakhab al-tavarikh-i Mu’ini*, and one tabulated universal history. In all these works he presented the Timurid dynasty as a post-Mongol independent dynasty, although the connections between the Timurids and the Mongols were frequently highlighted in Natanzi’s text. It was actually Hafiz-i Abru who really put the Timurid dynasty in the Chinggisid framework. In a series of cascading chronicles, written between *ca.* 1412 and 1427, which emulated the Ilkhanid historian Rashid al-Din’s grand world history, *Jami‘ al-tavarikh*, he established the historiographical canon, which firmly confirmed the identity of the Timurid dynasty as a Mongol dynasty. Especially in his *Mu’izz al-ansab*, which was modeled after Rashid al-Din’s *Shu‘ab-i Panjgana*, Hafiz-i Abru places the Chinggisid and Timurid dynasties in a continuum, descending from the same ancestress, Alan Qoaa. His final work, titled *Majma‘ al-ansab*, was a universal chronicle that included a lengthy account of the Mongol Empire in its third part, and its fourth part, separately titled *Zubdat al-tavarikh-i Baysunghuri*, is a Timurid dynastic chronicle from Timur’s birth to 1427. Finally, the two genealogical inscriptions in the Gur-i Mir, the Timurid royal mausoleum, and the Shah-i Zinda necropolis in Samarqand, situated the Timurid dynasty alongside the Chinggisids. Therefore, by the 1430s, a political discourse firmly locating the Timurid dynasty in the context of the Mongol Empire had already taken root in the Timurid Empire. They posited the Timurid Empire as just a new phase in the history of the Mongol Empire. Hafiz-i Abru points at the fact that the death of the last effective Ilkhanid ruler, Abu Sa‘id, coincided with the birth of Timur in the Islamic lunar year of 736/1335–1336. Therefore, what happened in that auspicious year was a kind of *translatio imperii*: royal power passed from one branch of Alan Qoaa’s descendants to another branch of her descendants.

John Woods convincingly argued that the emergence of Chinggisid rhetoric beyond the practice of dual kingship was actually a conscious policy choice on the part of Timur. When Timur’s protégé and the Jochid khan Toqtamish invaded Mawaranahr in 1388, he reconsidered how he formulated his political authority. Obviously, he realized that the system of dual kingship he had established in 1370 by installing Soyurghatmish Khan as his nominal sovereign was no longer enough because Toqtamish, a Chinggisid ruler himself, did not need a nominal sovereign to rule as a member of the Chinggisid family. Facing Toqtamish’s challenge, Timur started devising further strategies that would put him firmly in the broader Chinggisid framework. He argued that the foundation of the Ilkhanate by a member of the Toluid house of the Chinggisid family contradicted Chinggis Khan’s original will because Chinggis Khan had made Iran and Central Asia an appanage of his son Chaghadai. Furthermore, the election of Möngke as the great khan was also illegal because Chinggis Khan had wished the great khanate to remain in the Ögödeid line. Hence, Timur was the defender and restorer of the rights of the Chaghadaid and Ögödeid houses, who were deprived of their legal rights due to the actions of the Toluids and Jochids. From this point onward, the Chinggisid discourse gradually moved to center stage of the Timurid historical consciousness, and by the time
Hafiz-i Abru composed his universal chronicle Majmaʿ al-tavarikh in 1427, the Mongol nature of the Timurid Empire was the strongest historiographical theme in the Timurid Empire, only challenged by Yazdi’s biography-oriented emphasis on sacral kingship. For later Timurid historians, the Timurid dynasty was firmly rooted in the history of the Mongol Empire.

The Mongols shaped the history of Eurasia in general, and Iran and Central Asia in particular, after the 13th century. No aspect of life prior to the modern period, whether social, economic, political, or cultural, can be understood without taking into account the Mongol impact. However, this impact was not a static or one-off event. The Mongol Empire and its various aspects were constantly rediscovered, reimagined, and reinvented well into the modern period, but it was never codified. The Timurids were no different. They imagined themselves as part of a wider Mongol commonwealth. Their relationship with the Mongols and the Chinggisid dynasty was not an organic or ahistorical one. Timur and his followers consciously chose to be part of that commonwealth. Surely, they had other options, and some members of the Timurid family did try to distance themselves from the idea of the Mongol Empire, but no other political alternative was strong or flexible enough to make politics, religion, and economy converge under the rule of the Timurid dynasty. The Timurids knew they were not Chinggisids, but one can also argue that they tried to save the Mongol Empire from the Chinggisids, albeit unsuccessfully. The Chinggisids returned to Mawarannahr with a vengeance in the first decade of the 16th century, under the command of Shaybani Khan, but they did not bring the Mongol Empire with them.

NOTES

1 Grousset 1970, 409–465. Grousset’s work was originally published in 1939 in French.
2 Morgan 1986. Also see the discussion between David Morgan and Beatrice Forbes Manz regarding the Timurids’ relationship with the Mongol Empire, Morgan 2000, 233–241; Manz 2016, 281–291.
3 Others date the dissolution of the empire to 1259; when Möngke died, civil wars erupted. Jackson 2009, 39–40.
5 Woods 1999, 7; Wing 2016, 129–134. Unless absolutely necessary, I will cite only the secondary literature in this article. For further references to primary sources, the reader is invited to check the books and references cited in this article.
8 Terziolu 1999, 350.
13 Erdoğan 2014, 37. The name of the nominal Chinggisid sovereign is cited as Sultan Ahmad b. Jalal al-Din Soyurghatmish on this coin, and Timur’s name is cited as Timur Mahmud. The coin is part of a hoard discovered in Sürekli (Diêm in Kurdish), a village in the southwest of Mardin, in 2009. According to Hafiz-i Abru, Soyurghatmish had two sons and one daughter: Sultan Bayazid, Sultan Mahmud, and Orun Sultan. See Hafiz-i Abru, Muʿizz al-ansāb, f. 44a.
The author of this short Syriac chronicle was later identified as Adday of Basibrina [d. 1502], a monk from Basibrina [Haberli] in Şırnak; Woods 1990a, 101.


Although Timur abandoned the dual kingship model at the end of his life, his grandson Khalil Sultan b. Miranshah, who briefly controlled Samarqand between 807/1405 and 811/1409, after the death of Timur, revived the idea. On his coins he presented Muhammad Jahangir b. Muhammad Sultan as his overlord. See Woods 1990a, 114.


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The practice of yingä, that is, marrying the widowed wife of a deceased relative, should be emphasized here. Timur’s Chinggisid wife was Saray Malik Khanum bt. Qazan Sultan Chaghatay. ‘Umar Shaykh’s Chinggisid wife was Malikat Agha b. Khizir Oghlan Chaghatay, who later became the yingä of Shahrukh. Jahangir married Khanzada Sevin Beg bt. Aq Sufi Qongrat, who later became the yingä of Miranshah. Miranshah also married Urun Sultan Khanika, the daughter of the aforementioned Soyurghatmish Khan. See Woods 1990b, 18, 20, 29, 33, 43.

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19 Miranshah did not mint coins, but he used the title küregen on his edicts. See, for instance, Matsui et al. 2015, 55. Both Ulugh Bek and Sultan Abu Sa’id used the title on their coins. See Komaroff, “The Epigraphy,” 220, 223. Sultan Abu Sa’id’s Türkic edict to Uzun Hasan Aqquyunlu in Uyghur script also includes the title küregen. See Kurat 1940, 120–121. Pir Muhammad b. Jahangir used the title on his coins minted in Balkh. See Islamic Coin Collection of the University of Tübingen (FINt) Inventory Nos. FINt 91–1–247 (minted in 807/1404–05); 2002–16–133 (minted in 808/1405–06).

20 For the allegory of the “scaffolding of sovereignty,” see the editors’ introduction in Benite et al. 2017, 3.


30 Togan 2019, II/758; Hinz 1949, 748; Özyetgin 2004, 75–83, 86–91, 121–125. As Özyetgin’s work demonstrates, the origins of these taxes may go back to the pre-Mongol period.

31 Fragner 1986, 533–534.


33 Binbaş 2013, 24–25.

34 Barthold 1963, 128, 155–156.


36 Togan 1994, 10–11.

37 Welsford 2013, 84–85.

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41 McChesney 1996, 128. See also Woods 1999, 144, for the historian Fazlullah Khunji-Isfahani’s remarks.
42 Woods 1990a, 100–101; McChesney 2000, 63–64.
44 Binbaş 2016, 260; Banister 2021, 147–148.
46 Togan 1949, 527; Yüksel 2009, 57–58.
47 Ando 1992, 120. For further references to yasa, yarghu, törä, yarghuchi and yasa’ul in late medieval sources, see Doerfer 1963–75, I, 264–267 (for törö/törä), II, 554–568 (for tamgha and tamghachi), IV, 58–66 (for yarghu and yarghuchi), 71–82 (for yasa(q) and yasaqchi).
48 Kauz 2005, 95–97. Khalil Sultan was the nephew of Shahrukh, the ruler of Samarqand, and one of the pretenders to Timur’s throne. He was already dead by this time, but the news of his passing had probably not reached the Ming capital when the letter was composed.
49 Binbaş 2014, 290–293.
50 McChesney 2009, 283–286.
51 Woods 1987, 83; Binbaş 2016, 168, 179–180. Futuhat-i Miranshahi is most probably the earliest Timurid historiographical source.
52 Binbaş 2016, 173.
53 Binbaş 2016, 251. Also see Jean Aubin, who argued that Yazdi saw in Timur’s political persona a theocratic sovereign. Although the terminology he chose to describe Yazdi’s discourse was inaccurate, Aubin’s argument highlights a very significant aspect of the Timurid political discourse. Aubin 1956, 145.
59 Woods 1990a, 105.
60 Woods 1990a, 105–108.

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