



# COURTS AND COURTIER V. UNDER THE TIMURID AND TURKMAN DYNASTIES

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One of the causes of Timur's break, in 771/1370, with the Chaghatayid prince Amir Ḥosayn (see [chaghatayid dynasty](#)), who ruled northern Afghanistan and had been his ally in his early campaigns against the eastern Chaghatayid Tuġluq (Tūġlūq) Tīmūr, may have been Ḥosayn's intention to build a fortified capital city for himself at [Balk](#) (Šāmī, I, pp. 51-52; cf. Gronke, p. 18). In that respect he was challenging a tenet of Mongol tradition that had until then been immutable. A nomadic existence was the established pattern among Mongol rulers, and a fortified capital was not permitted. Nevertheless, once Tīmūr had consolidated his own power, he no longer rejected the idea of such a capital for himself. He gave up his original plan to establish it in the vicinity of his birthplace at Keš (Šahr-e Sabz), in favor of Samarqand, which, after a period of flowering under the Samanids (204-395/819-1005), had gradually declined under the Qarakhanids (433-607/1041-1211) and, owing to subsequent plundering by [Čengīz Khan](#), had finally sunk to an insignificant locality (Brandenburg, 1972, pp. 17-18). Tīmūr intended Samarqand to outdo in pomp and splendor all other capitals in the world known to him. For that purpose,



from 781/1379, when he entered Organj, in every city that he conquered he selected architects, artists, craftsmen, teachers, and poets and transported them to Samarqand, where he founded new settlements, frequently named for other major Islamic cities: Cairo (Meşr), Damascus, Baghdad, Solţānīya, Shiraz (cf. Roemer, 1989, p. 107; Barthold, 1938, p. 11). By the time of Tīmūr's death in 807/1405 Samarqand had become one of the foremost capitals of the Islamic world, ornamented by a number of splendid architectural monuments, many of which are still preserved today (see Golombek and Wilber).

Subsequent Timurid and Turkman rulers and princes established their seats in other cities and built them into important political and especially religious and cultural centers. During the short reign of Tīmūr's grandson Oloğ Beg (850-53/1447-49) Samarqand remained a significant center of cultural patronage. But already during the lifetime of his father, Šāhroḡ (807--50/1405-47), Herat had become a significant court center, and under Sultan [Ḥosayn Bāyqarā](#) (875-912/1470-1506) it was developed into the most splendid capital of the period, usurping the position of Samarqand. Tabrīz under the Qara Qoyunlū (782-873/1380-1468) and [Āq Qoyunlū](#) rulers (780-914/1378-1508) and Shiraz under the Timurid princes Eskandar b. 'Omar Šayḡ (812-17/1409-14) and Ebrāhīm b. Šāhroḡ (d. 837/1434) were also noteworthy urban centers. Despite the foundation of capital cities and court establishments, the Mongol nomadic tradition was not entirely given up by Timurid and Turkman rulers. It remained alive in the royal encampments (*ordū-ye homāyūn*) in which the princes customarily resided with their followers as they traveled about the countryside, far from the royal household established in the capital (see iv, above). Even the Safavids continued this practice until the time of 'Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629; see vi, below).

*The princely entourage.* Although the internal structure of the various Timurid and Turkman courts has not so far been the focus of extensive research, certain fundamental elements must have been similar in all of them. For example, neither Tīmūr nor his successors ever assumed the official title "khan," though contemporary chroniclers frequently referred to them as such in their works. Tīmūr preferred to call himself "amir" and, underscoring his familial relation to the Chengizids, also adopted the Mongol title *kürgān* (lit. "son-in-law"; Šāmī, I, pp. 9, 15; Ḥāfez-e Abrū, pp. 430, 439, 457). Until 805/1402 he professed loyalty to successive princes of the lineage of Čengīz Khan, Soyūrgātmīš (771-86/1370-84) and Solţān-Maḡmūd (786-805/1384-1402), who as nominal rulers of the realm bore the title "khan," though actually they func-



tioned only as legitimizing figures and puppets in the hands of the conqueror (Roemer, 1989, p. 60; Barthold, 1935, pp. 108-09). His son Šāhroḡ did not adopt the title *kürḡān* and maintained no shadow khan at Herat, but his other son, Mīrānšāh, who ruled in western

Persia, did use the title (Ḥāfeḡ-e Abrū, p. 8; Dawlatšāh, ed. Browne, pp. 324, 329). Furthermore, both Mīrānšāh's son Ḳalīl, who was Tīmūr's immediate successor in Transoxania (807-12/1405-09), and Šāhroḡ's own son Oloḡ Beg (Ḥāfeḡ-e Abrū, p. 444; Barthold, 1935, p. 109), in addition to calling themselves *kürḡān*, also ruled with shadow khans, though Ḳalīl's choice was a descendant of Tīmūr himself, rather than of Čengīz Khan; Oloḡ Beg's shadow khan was a Chengizid, who lived entirely secluded at the so-called "khan's court" (*ḡeyāt-e ḡān*), a walled precinct in the eastern part of Samarḡand (Mīrzā Ḥaydar, pp. 71-72; Barthold, 1935, p. 109).

The influential class of nobles with the title *tarḡāns* constituted a special group at court. Various privileges accompanied membership in this group: free access to the ruler; immunity from punishment for nine infractions, both for the title holders and their descendants; release from the obligation of providing horses for the cavalry (*olāḡ*); and exemption from taxes and levies, including those on booty from hunting and military conquest (Šāmī, I, p. 123; Hinz, 1952, pp. 216-17, 220). Amirs from a Turkish tribal group called Tarḡān, which seems to have taken its name from a bearer of this title, played a leading role in Herat under Šāhroḡ (Ando, pp. 118, 138-45).

Understanding the organization of the court and administration in the 15th century poses severe difficulties for the researcher, for several reasons. There was obviously no uniformity between the practices of the Timurid and Turkman dynasties, which were also subject to internal variations at different periods. Furthermore, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions because the distinction between court and state officials is not always clearly recognizable. In every instance these difficulties reflect the absence of scholarly investigation. No comprehensive survey of the period, which would have to be drawn from many different sources, has yet been written, to say nothing of a more systematic description.

As for those offices that were part of the court establishment, in most of the sources official posts that were already known earlier at the Mongol court are mentioned. Particularly prominent among them were the *ḡūrčīs* (quiver bearers), who were members of the ruler's bodyguard; the *yūrčīs* (stewards),



who were responsible for provisions and arrangements for the entire royal encampment on campaigns, hunting expeditions, and journeys; and the *aktāčīs* (stable masters; Rašid-al-Dīn, *Jāme' al-tawārik*, Baku, p. 164; Naḳjavānī, II, pp. 62-67; Šāmī, I, p. 199, II, pp. 16, 114; Samarqandī, p. 355; cf. Doerfer, *Elemente* I, pp. 117-18, 429-32, IV, pp. 216-17). The Mongol legacy was also apparent in the presence at court of *yār/yarḡūčīs* (judges), whose duty it was to provide interpretations of the laws (*yāsā*) of Čengiz Khan and Mongol customary law. Supervising court ceremonial, organizing the reception of visitors, and similar official arrangements were the responsibility of the *yasāvols* (masters of ceremonies), who during audiences led forward those attending to hear the commands of the ruler and, in time of war, were supposed to take charge of mustering the troops for battle (Naḳjavānī, II, pp. 34, 57-62; Samarqandī, pp. 38, 226; Mīrzā Ḥaydar, p. 54; cf. Doerfer, *Elemente* IV, pp. 64-66, 166-72). The *būkāvols* appear to have been military quartermasters or staff officers, subordinate to the commanders; they were charged with administering the different divisions of the army, the provisioning of troops, the payment of wages, and the equitable distribution of the booty from war (Naḳjavānī, II, pp. 53-67; 'Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, fols. 31b-32a, tr. pp. 61-63, comm. pp. 155-57; Hinz, 1952, p. 215; cf. Doerfer, *Elemente* II, pp. 301-07). The decrees of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā at the end of the 15th century show that the *būkāvols* still also fulfilled their original function as tasters and cooks ('Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, comm. p. 156); in this connection official *sūčīs* (cupbearers; Šāmī, II, p. 138; Ḥāfez-e Abrū, pp. 447, 463; Doerfer, *Elemente* III, pp. 285-86) were also part of the court establishment. The *tūḡčīs* (standard bearers, banner carriers) carried the standards adorned with horse tails (Doerfer, *Elemente* II, p. 624), which, along with kettledrums, were the insignia of rank for nobles and higher officials (Doerfer, *Elemente* II, p. 620. For this reason, the ruler's own military band, including tympanists (*naqqāračīān*), flutists (*šurnājīān*), trumpeters (*nafrjīān*), and cymbal players (*senjīān*), was also carefully regulated. The band was responsible not only for martial music but also for the *nawba*, a musical piece heard several times daily at fixed times. The leader of both the band and the court drum corps bore the title *ostād* (master) and also had jurisdiction over the circle of people who performed regularly at public festivities, as well as others who belonged to the socially scorned professions and minorities, like public entertainers (*qawwālān*) who performed in the markets, spinners (*fartmālān*), gypsies (*lūliān*), sieve makers (*ḡerbālbāfān*), and especially foreigners (*ḡarīb-zādagān*), the proprietors of wine taverns (*bāda-bānān*), bathhouse keepers (*ḥammāmīān*), bath scrapers (*dallākān*), barbers



(*sartarāšān*), cuppers (*hajjāmān*), peddlers (*ṭawwāfān*), and corpse washers (*ḡassālān*; ‘Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, fols. 20b-22a, tr. pp. 88-91, comm. pp. 174-76). For soft music, which was very popular at court, there were also court musicians. The musicians and singers in Samarqand during Oloḡ Beg’s reign enjoyed an especially high reputation for their artistry; under Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā they bore the title *ostād* (‘Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, fols. 44b, tr. pp. 91, comm. p. 176). For the royal hunting expeditions there were *bārs/pārsčīs* (keepers of the hunting cheetahs) and *qūščīs* (falconers; Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Jāme‘ al-tawārīk*, Baku, pp. 372, 479, 486; Hinz, 1952, p. 214). The post of *qūščī* was an important military office, and the incumbents were amirs, numbered among the highest-ranking group of officers (‘Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, fols. 19a-20b, tr. pp. 87-88, comm. p. 173). For his library at Herat Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā created the post of court librarian, with the official title *dārūḡa-ye ketāb-kāna-ye homāyūn* (*Ḥabīb al-sīar*, Tehran, IV, pp. 155, 188, 189; Barthold, 1938, p. 56). In keeping with Turkish tradition princes were educated by atabegs, who were responsible for teaching their young charges everything they, as future rulers and princes, were required to know (Šāmī, II, p. 58; Mīrzā Ḥaydar, pp. 140, 375). The treasurers (*kezānačī*), seal bearers (*mohrdār*), and secretaries (*parvānačī*), who were entrusted with writing the decrees of the ruler, were also included among the officials of the court. There is some confusion about the position of the *bahādors* (lit. “heroes,” perhaps field marshals), a designation that seems to have been only an honorary title conferred for bravery in battle and probably did not refer to a precise official function (for a discussion of this term, see Doerfer, *Elemente* II, pp. 366-77). Finally, there were also state chanceries (see *dīvān*) at the Timurid and Turkman courts; the details of the chancery system in the different realms are frequently unclear, but they belong outside the framework of official functions that were specifically part of the court, in the equally little understood arena of state administration (see cities ii).

*Ceremonials and entertainments.* The court life of Timurid and Turkman princes, with its entertainments and ceremonies, is depicted in the miniature paintings of the 15th century, which at present have been too little studied from this point of view. The parallel Islamic and Mongol-Turkish traditions of the period exerted varying degrees of influence on the court establishments of individual princes. For example, Šāhroḡ governed Herat as a pious Islamic ruler, strongly enforcing the provisions of the *šarī‘a* (Islamic canon law). Every Friday he attended the mosque in the role of a simple Muslim, without distinguishing himself in the slightest from the rest of the faithful. On



Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays Qurʾān readings were presented at his court audiences. Šāhroḡ also strictly observed the fast of the month of Ramaẓān (Barthold, 1935, p. 142). In contrast, his son Oloḡ Beg continued many Mongol customs in his court at Samarqand. Like his grandfather Timūr he loved banquets with music, singing, and copious wine drinking, and he paid only the slightest heed to the *šarīʿa* (Barthold, 1935, pp. 141-43). It is known that Uzun Ḥasan Āq Qoyunlū (857-82/1453-78), after morning prayer in the presence of the princes and amirs, took the opportunity to hear appeals personally. Poor and needy subjects brought petitions, which were presented by officials acting on their behalf, and the ruler handed down decisions and, through his secretaries, gave instructions for action (Woods, p. 122).

Receptions and banquets for ambassadors played an important part in court life. According to Mongol-Turkish tradition, the wives of the rulers and other women of their households participated in these festivities. A detailed report on the ceremonies observed at a reception of ambassadors was given by [Ruy González de Clavijo](#), who left an eyewitness account of life at Timūr's court in Samarqand. The seating order was arranged according to rank. Timūr himself sat in splendid dress on a seat of silk cushions arrayed on a platform. Hundreds of filled wine jugs stood ready, and there were music and processions of elephants. During the entire presentation ceremony the ambassadors were held under the armpits by servants, who loosened their grasp only when the ambassadors had returned to their places. The ceremonial wine drinking was also precisely regulated: Each guest stepped forward in turn, bent his right knee, stood up again in order to step forward somewhat farther, then knelt on both knees and received the filled beaker. Then he stood up, stepped back a little, knelt again, and drank the wine in a single draft. Finally, he stood and, as an indication of respect, placed his left hand on his forehead (Clavijo, tr. Markham, pp. 154-56). Frequently the royal audience concluded with a banquet. On such occasions and at other court festivities it was customary to distribute robes of honor and titles. Oloḡ Beg elevated several individuals to the status of *tarkān* on the occasion of the circumcision ceremonies for one of his sons (*Ḥabīb al-sīar*, Tehran, IV, p. 35). In general not only the princes themselves but also their wives and high officials attended such revels, at which entertainment was provided by musicians, singers, and poets (Ebn ʿArabšāh, p. 163).

Most Timurid princes took a special delight in hunting expeditions in the open air. Oloḡ Beg, who was particularly enthusiastic about the sport, drew up for



himself a list of the wild beasts that he had personally killed (Dawlatšāh, ed. Browne, p. 362) and was accustomed to undertaking winter journeys to the neighborhood of Bukhara in order to hunt birds. Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā particularly enjoyed hunting for pigeons (Barthold, 1938, p. 55).

Splendid receptions, banquets, and hunting parties were no less typical of the court of the Āq Qoyunlū at Tabrīz under Uzun Ḥasan and his son Ya‘qūb (883-96/1478-90; Alderly, 1873b, pp. 52-63).

*Patronage and cultural life.* Every Timurid and Turkman prince strove to enhance his prestige not only by displaying the trappings of power but also by turning his court into a center of cultural life. The courts thus swiftly developed into centers of learning and the arts. The princes and their courtiers were important patrons of literature and poetry, miniature painting, [calligraphy](#), and the art of [bookbinding](#); they assembled large numbers of scholars at their courts and adorned their capital cities with splendid architectural monuments. To name only the most important examples, Samarqand under Tīmūr and Oloḡ Beg; Herat under Šāhroḡ, his son [Bāysonqor](#), and Ḥosayn Bāyqarā and his vizier, ‘Alī-Šīr Navā’ī; Tabrīz under Uzun Ḥasan Āq Qoyunlū and his son; and the smaller court cities like Shiraz under Eskandar b. ‘Omar Šayḡ and Šāhroḡ’s son Ebrāhīm developed in similar ways into cities of refined aspect and artistic accomplishment, as well as centers of pleasant living, where the most outstanding contemporary scholars congregated.

The Timurid and Turkman are particularly noted for the rich historical and poetic literature fostered at their courts. Although the best historians, like Ḥāfez-e Abrū, ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Samarqandī, and Mīrḡvānd, did not perhaps achieve the magisterial level that characterized Mongol historical writing, nevertheless they left works of considerable scope. Princely patronage also engendered new vitality in the art of court poetry (see ix, below). Although the number of poets thus increased greatly, their works do not rank intellectually or aesthetically with the output of the great period of Persian literature in the preceding centuries. Poetic conventions and a strong emphasis on formal elements came more and more to replace originality and richness of thought. The 15th century produced only one truly great Persian poet: ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī, who lived in Herat in the time of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. When he died Sultan Ḥosayn himself and his entire court attended the funeral services (*Ḥabīb al-sīar*, Tehran, IV, p. 338). In addition, patrons also interested themselves in scientific works, especially in astronomy and mathematics. The



court of Oloğ Beg in Samarqand was especially renowned as a center of such studies; the observatory constructed there was known to contemporaries far and wide (Barthold, 1935, pp. 165-66). The culmination of this work was the set of astronomical tables known as *Zij-e Oloğ Beg* or *Zij-e jadīd-e solṭānī*, in the formulation of which the ruler himself participated. His son ‘Abd-al-Laṭīf, following in his father’s footsteps, also showed an inclination toward study of the exact sciences, as Eskandar b. ‘Omar Ṣayḡ had done earlier in Fārs (Aubin, pp. 82-83).

Literary works were extremely popular as gifts between princes and leading figures, but these men did not limit their cultural activities to patronage. Many of them participated directly in the flourishing literary activity of the age. Two examples may be cited to demonstrate the regard for the literary life among the ruling families: an edition of Ḥāfeẓ sponsored by Farīdūn Ḥosayn Mīrzā, a son of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, and an anthology of classical Persian poetry compiled by Eskandar b. ‘Omar Ṣayḡ in Fārs (‘Abd-Allāh Morvārīd, fols. 97a-100a, tr. pp. 134-39, comm. pp. 200-01; Aubin, p. 77). Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā, Eskandar b. ‘Omar Ṣayḡ, Jahānšāh Qara Qoyunlū (841-72/1438-68), and Ya‘qūb Āq Qoyunlū composed poetry in Persian and Turkish. Oloğ Beg, who was very well acquainted with Persian literature, corresponded on literary subjects with his brother Bāysonḡor in Herat (Dawlatšāh, ed. Browne, p. 351). Ya‘qūb Āq Qoyunlū exchanged letters with Jāmī (Woods, p. 150). In addition to the historic, scientific, and poetic literature in the Persian language, in the 15th century Chaghatay, an eastern Turkic language, was also elevated to a literary language, under the tutelage of ‘Alī-Šīr Navā‘ī in particular, though the inclusion of Persian literary material is noteworthy (see [chaghatay language and literature](#)). Princes of the blood were also to be found among the numerous composers of the period (Bouvat, pp. 267-68).

Owing to the intense interest of Timurid and Turkman princes, painting also developed rapidly into a major art form; although no murals or pictorial textiles are known today, a great many book illustrations survive. In Shiraz a lively school of miniature painting flourished successively under Eskandar b. ‘Omar Ṣayḡ and Ebrāhīm b. Šāhroḡ; it soon found a strong competitor in the Herat school, which developed under the patronage of Šāhroḡ and his son Bāysonḡor and eventually of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. Toward the end of the 15th century the calligrapher Solṭān-‘Alī Mašhadī lived and worked in Herat, as did [Kamāl-al-Dīn Behzād](#), perhaps the greatest painter ever produced in the Islamic world. Painting and calligraphy also flourished at the court of the



Turkman dynasties at Tabrīz, especially under Uzun Ḥasan and Ya'qūb Āq Qoyunlū (883-96/1478-90). It reached a high level of originality there, and comparison with the much more renowned painting of the Timurids is not inappropriate.

Following the example of Tīmūr, who had been active as a patron of architecture in Keš and especially in Samarqand, the princes of the 15th century embellished their residential cities with numerous religious and public buildings: mosques, schools, baths, hospitals, and the like (Golombek and Wilber). In addition to the rulers themselves, court officials also enhanced their reputations by sponsoring buildings; the most famous example is 'Alī-Šīr Navā'ī. The architecture of the period was distinguished by an unprecedented use of color in surface decorations, particularly tile revetments (Roemer, 1989, pp. 170-71), as well as a general preference for ostentation, which expressed itself in costly ornamentation and a multiplication of domes and minarets. Tīmūr ordered a palace, the Kōk Sarāy (Blue palace) to be built for him in the center of Samarqand, but he preferred to spend most of his time in a series of pleasure palaces that he had constructed in the midst of extensive gardens, for example, Āq Sarāy near Keš and Taqt-e Qarāča south of Samarqand (Yazdī, fols. 163a, 295b); the ruins of the former, the most significant surviving example of Timurid palace architecture, have been preserved. Tīmūr's garden pavilions were faced with tiles and on the interior with wall paintings in, which his military victories were depicted (Ebn 'Arabšāh, pp. 227-28). His successors also preferred to withdraw from the urban centers to the suburbs or to establish their courts entirely outside the cities, developing new centers of intellectual and cultural life around their princely residences. Large garden installations with palaces and pavilions, providing a glittering backdrop for royal receptions and festivities, were equally characteristic of both Timurid and Turkman courts (Gaube, pp. 231-32). On the occasion of banquets or entertainments lavish canopies and expensively furnished tents were erected for guests. The most glittering parallels for Tīmūr's garden palaces were to be found in the Herat of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā. Already Šāhroḡ had moved his court from the center of the city to the outskirts, to the Bāḡ-e Zāḡān, which had been founded in the Kartid period (see [āl-e kart](#); Allen, p. 22). Then under Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā a new court center, the Bāḡ-e Jahānārā, was established north of the city on formerly uninhabited terrain; it included palaces, mosques, and other buildings located in the midst of large gardens. The plan of this entire complex was most probably based on that of Tīmūr's Āq Sarāy at Keš (Allen, pp. 51-54).



The Āq Qoyunlū court at Tabrīz also lay outside the city, near the settlement of Şāhebābād, from which it was separated by a stream. From a central square, on which Uzun Ḥasan had built a mosque decorated with ceramic tiles, a door led into the palace proper, which was surrounded by extensive gardens. Construction of this splendid palace, the Hašt Behešt, had probably already been started by Uzun Ḥasan and was completed by Ya‘qūb; it consisted of a glittering domed building, the interior rooms of which were ornamented with faience and gilding. The ceiling of the great hall was covered with painted battle scenes, embassies, and hunting parties of the Āq Qoyunlū rulers. The harem, which was separate from the palace, had space for a thousand people (Alderly, 1873a, pp. 173-77).

In the courts, as well as the courtly life, of the Turkman and Timurid princes traditions of very different kinds seem to have been intertwined, though the separate components have not yet been investigated. A number of elements surviving from the Sasanian period may have been incorporated (see ii, above); the characteristic practices of the ‘Abbasid caliphal courts and especially of earlier Turkish courts like those of the Saljuqs, were probably even more influential. Some aspects were probably taken over from the Il-khanids as well, and Byzantine elements, perhaps transmitted through the marital connection between the Āq Qoyunlū and the imperial house of Trabzon, must also be considered.

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