



ECONOMY VI. IN THE TIMURID PERIOD

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The Timurid invasions against the Kartid rulers of Khorasan, which began in 783/1381, caused socioeconomic dislocation and unprecedented wholesale destruction and pillaging of towns, as well as brutal massacres of their populations (or, in more fortunate cases, the extraction of ransom money, large-scale confiscations, and the deportation of classes of people possessing specialized skills). Once he was established, Tīmūr's (d. 807/1405) main concern, in the tradition of the Chingizid (see [ČENGĪZ](#)) models he sought to emulate, was to secure trade routes and to reestablish the exchange economy, with a view to enriching the Transoxanian base of his empire. However, the flight or enslavement of peasants and the banishment or murder of leading families disrupted social relations, and Persia's economy remained disorganized (Aubin, pp. 90 ff.; Roemer, pp. 52 ff.).

The reign of Tīmūr's son and successor, Šāhroḡ (811-50/1409-47), represented a dramatic departure from the irregular taxation practices and lack of concern for the agrarian economy, which had characterized the previous period. Šāhroḡ's vizier, Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn Moḥammad K̲v̲afī instituted regular fiscal and administrative procedures (ʿOqaylī, p. 342). The irrigation system, which in the



Marv oasis, for example, had been ruined during the Mongol invasions, was repaired, and the first steps were taken to restore agricultural production (Ḥāfeẓ-e Abrū, I, p. 60, II, p. 9; *Ḥabīb al-sīar* IV, Tehran, p. 650). Sultan Abū Saʿīd (r. 855-73/1451-69) continued the development of the agrarian economy by increasing the acreage under cultivation—his vizier, Qoṭb-al-Dīn Ṭāwūs Semnānī, was responsible for constructing the Jūy-e solṭānī irrigation canal northeast of Herat and was credited with the highest yields ever produced in Khorasan (Kvāndamīr, pp. 385-86, 389; Esfezārī, I, p. 85)—and by confirming traditional patterns of water use (Abūnaṣrī Heravī, p. 15).

The Timurid ruler regarded by contemporaries as having raised agriculture to new heights in the Herat region, where the Timurid capital was located, was Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā (873-911/1469-506). He took a personal interest in agriculture and even gardening (Subtelny, 1993, pp. 184-89). Esfezārī's historico-geographical work, *Rawẓāt al-jannāt* (comp. 897/1491-92), and Abūnaṣrī Heravī's agricultural manual, *Eršād al-zerā'a* (compl. 921/1515), relate specifically to the period of Bāyqarā's rule. Along with the earlier geographical history of Ḥāfeẓ-e Abrū (compl. 823/1420), they present a detailed tableau of the agriculture of greater Khorasan during the 15th century, including the types of cereals, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and flowers cultivated (for a summary of the contents of Esfezārī's work, see Semenov, pp. 69-82; for a partial translation, see Barbier de Meynard, pp. 461-520). Bāyqarā appears to have played a direct role in the organization of agricultural production, on both state lands and lands belonging to the *awqāf* of the many shrine complexes, such as those at Gāzorgāh, Balk, Jām, and Mašhad. The Timurids systematically developed these complexes, transforming them into vehicles for managing the lucrative, intensively irrigated agriculture of Khorasan (Subtelny, 1993, pp. 189 ff.).

Although agriculture remained the chief source of tax revenues, trade and commerce were also important in this period. Local craft production in Persia was initially weakened as a result of Tīmūr's deportation of large numbers of skilled craftsmen and artisans to his Central Asian capital, Samarkand. After Šāhroḡ's son, Ulūḡ Beg, allowed these groups to return to their homes, local industries, on which the *tamḡā* tax continued to be imposed despite religious objections, resumed production. A balance appears to have existed between the sedentary and pastoral nomadic sectors, with the towns continuing to serve as the sites of exchange between them. The long-distance caravan trade, particularly in luxury goods such as porcelains and silk (with Estarābād as a



chief manufacturing center), continued between eastern Persian and Central Asian cities under Timurid control, such as Herat and Samarqand, and India and China. But the Timurids, unlike their Mongol predecessors, were unable to promote the traditional Persian east-west trade along the so-called Silk routes. The reasons for this failure were the decentralized nature of their empire and political pressure from the Turkmen dynasties in the west (Fragner, pp. 524 ff.; Rossabi, pp. 352 ff.).

The political stability which had existed under the Timurids throughout the 15th century and which had enabled agriculture and commerce to flourish was brought to an abrupt end in the first decade of the 16th century by the nomadic Uzbek invasions, which toppled the Timurid dynasty. The fall of the Timurids for some time set back the economic prosperity which had taken a century to achieve. There are indications, however, that the increasing fiscal decentralization of the Timurid state, which had resulted from the growth of such fiscal immunities as *soyūrġāl* land grants and the accumulation of a huge fund of *awqāf*, had already by that time put considerable economic pressure on the Timurid center. The situation necessitated the debasement of coinage and placed in jeopardy central political control (Subtelny, 1988, pp. 123-51; Fragner, pp. 559-61).

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