

The Timurid View of the Mongols: An Examination of the Mongol Identity of the Timurids

Joo-Yup Lee

Intermittent Lecturer, University of Toronto

Introduction

The Timurids rose to prominence in the post-Mongol world thanks to their forefather Temür (r. 1370–1405), who created a vast empire encompassing the western half of the former Mongol Empire. The Timurids ruled in much of western Central Asia throughout the fifteenth century and in much of South Asia from the mid-sixteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries. By lineage, Temür and the Timurids belonged to the Barlas, one of the Mongol tribes that had coalesced around Chinggis Khan in the early thirteenth century.¹ It is well known

¹The account of the Mongol origin of the Barlas tribe is given in Rashid al-Din Fazlullah Hamadani, *Jami' al-tavarikh*, ed. Bahman Karimi (Tehran: Intisharat-i Iqbal, 1367/1988), 139, 152; Rashiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami'u'l-tavarikh (Compendium of Chronicles): A History of the Mongols*, 3 pts., trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1998–99), 1:98, 106; and Igor de Rachewiltz, trans., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols., Brill's Inner Asian Library 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1:9.

Joo-Yup Lee has a PhD (2012) in Turko–Persian Studies from the University of Toronto. Currently an intermittent lecturer at the university, he has taught Central Eurasian history courses. He has published a number of books and scholarly articles, including *Qazaqliq, or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs* (Brill, 2016), which won the 2017 CESS (Central Eurasian Studies Society) Book Award, and “Turkic Identity in Mongol and Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Qipchaq Steppe” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (2019).

that Temür looked to the Mongol Empire for political legitimation.² However, unlike the early Mongols, Temür and his descendants spoke Turkic instead of Mongolic, professed Islam, and were receptive to Persian culture. In terms of statehood, the Timurids had notable success in transitioning from a nomadic empire to a sedentary polity based on the Perso–Islamic model.³ Here, one may ask the following questions: What did Temür and his descendants, being Turkic-speaking Muslims who were well acquainted with Persian culture, think about their Mongol roots? Did they view the Mongols as aliens and foreign ancestors or as their own *ulus* (people)?⁴

As a matter of fact, historians are aware that Temür and his descendants stressed their Mongol lineage in a variety of ways.⁵ However, historians in general interpret the Timurids' emphasis on their Mongol roots as a desire to promote their own legitimacy rather than a genuine expression of self-identity. Many historians also view the Mongol identity of the Timurids as a political identity, not an ethnic one.⁶ To clarify the nature of Temür and the Timurids' Mongol identity, this paper examines the Timurid view of the Mongols.⁷ In doing so, the paper differentiates between political legitimation and ethnic identity, and is concerned with

²This fact has been noted and discussed in Beatrice F. Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1–12; and Beatrice F. Manz, “Historical Background,” in *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, ed. Beatrice F. Manz (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 4–24, reference on pp. 5–7.

³For a study of this transition, see Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran*, Brill's Inner Asian Library 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁴The Mongolian word *ulus* means “people (subject to a certain ruler)” or “state.”

⁵For instance, see Anna Caiozzo, “Propagande dynastique et célébrations princières : Mythes et images à la cour timouride,” *Bulletin d'études orientales* 60 (2011): 177–201.

⁶If one does not dismiss the Roman identity of the Byzantines as a political identity, one should also consider the Timurids's Mongol identity a serious ethnic identity.

⁷The Mongols in this paper should not be equated with the modern Mongols—that is, the Mongolic-speaking peoples of present-day Mongolia, China, and Russia. The Mongols of the Mongol and post-Mongol periods were a more complex people: the nomads united by Chinggis Khan, who participated in the Mongol enterprise and later came to constitute the nomadic population of various Chinggisid *uluses* (peoples). The *Jami' al-tavarikh*, a universal history compiled for the Mongol rulers in Iran by Rashid al-Din Fazlullah Hamadani (d. 1318), classifies them into two new and one original Mongol groups. See Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-tavarikh*, 47–161; and Fazlullah, *Jami' u'l-tawarikh*, 1:37–112. Importantly, I follow Rashid al-Din's classification and definition of the Mongols.

the latter.⁸ Based on a broad range of sources that attest to the Mongol identity of the Timurids, this paper will provide new insights for understanding the Timurid identity.⁹

Temür's Mongol Identity

Modern historians identify Temür as a Turk, Turkicized Mongol, or Mongol.¹⁰ What about Temür himself? Did he identify himself as a Turk or a Mongol? Perhaps, Temür's self-identity is best manifested in the conversation between him and his commander Amir Jalal that is recorded in Nizam al-Din Shami's *Zafar-nāma*, a history commissioned by Temür himself. When Amir Jalal and his companions experienced a water shortage during their campaign in Iraq, Amir Jalal was asked to yield his share of water by another commander of Temür's from the Jochid Ulus. Amir Jalal did as asked, saying that "the generosity and goodness of the Chaghatay (*karam va mujamalat-i Chaghatay*)" should be remembered. Later, upon hearing this story, Temür praised Amir Jalal, saying, "Since you gave your share of water to the Uzbek, who is from the Qiyat lineage, the memory of this noble deed will remain in the Chaghatay ulus (*chun hissa-yi ab-i khud bi-Uzbek dadi ki az nasl-i Qiyat ast, dar ulus-i Chaghatay zikr-i in makrumat baqi manad*)." To this, Amir Jalal replied: "Yes, [it was] with the good omen of that unity and the likes of those acts of lenity that the Mongol people conquered the world, and [it was] with justice and generosity that they took the world (*Ari, tayifa-yi Mughul bi-yumn-i an ittifaq va amsal-i an musamihat-ha 'alam ra musakhkhar kardand va bi-dad u dahish jahan ra giriftand*)." ¹¹ By Mongol, Amir Jalal refers to the Timurid

⁸I am not concerned with modern theories of ethnicity. I approach the identity of the Timurids from their own perspective and that of their contemporaries.

⁹I do not aim to critique the historical sources that have been used in this paper. I am mainly concerned with demonstrating what virtually all the extant sources that provide information on the identity of Temür and the Timurids unanimously share.

¹⁰For instance, Beatrice F. Manz defines Temür as "at once Muslim, Turk and Mongol." Beatrice F. Manz, "Temür and the Early Timurids to c. 1450," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank, and Peter B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 182–198, quote on p. 182.

¹¹Nizam al-Din Shami, *Histoire des conquêtes de Tamerlan intitulée Zafarnāma, par Nizāmuddīn Šānī*, vol. 1, *Texte persan du Zafarnāma*, ed. F. Tauer (Prague: Oriental Institute, 1937), 140. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

people (*Chaghatay* in this passage) and the Jochid people (*Uzbek* in this passage), among others.¹² It is thus natural that Temür did not regard the Chinggisids as alien rulers. According to the Timurid historian Natanzi, who wrote a general history from Creation to 1413–14 for Shahrukh (r. 1405–47), son of Temür, Temür once remarked that obedience to the Chinggisid monarchs is compulsory and necessary: “According to the heavenly decree and the law of Chinggis Khan, obedience and acquiescence [to the Chinggisid rulers] are compulsory and necessary (*Bi-hukm-i yarligh-i asmani va tura-yi Chingiz Khani ita ‘at va mutaba ‘at vajib va lazim ast*).”¹³

As a matter of fact, virtually all Temür’s contemporaries identified him as Mongol, including the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun, who personally met with Temür in Damascus in 1401, the Arab historian Ibn ‘Arabshah, who was taken prisoner as a child when Temür conquered Syria in 1401 and who lived in Samarkand for many years, and the Castilian envoy Ruy González de Clavijo, who met with Temür in 1404.¹⁴ Ibn Khaldun refers to Temür as “the sultan of the Mongols (*Mughul*) and Tatars (*Ṭaṭar*)” and Temür’s court language as “the Mongol language (*al-lisān al Mughulī*)” in his work describing their meeting.¹⁵ He also uses the name Chaghatay (*Jaqatay*), along with Mongol (*Mughul*), to refer to Temür and his commanders.¹⁶ Similarly, in his travelogue Clavijo uses the term Mongolia (*Mugalia*) to denote Temür’s state.¹⁷ Clavijo also says that the Timurid nomads identified

¹²For the origin and meaning of the name Uzbek, see Joo-Yup Lee, *Qazaqlıq, or Ambitious Brigandage, and the Formation of the Qazaqs: State and Identity in Post-Mongol Central Eurasia*, Studies in Persian Cultural History 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 121–24.

¹³Mu‘in al-Din Natanzi, *Muntakhab al-tavārikh-i Mu‘īnī*, ed. Jean Aubin (Tehran: Khayyam, 1957), 206.

¹⁴One should assume that their primary informants included the members of the Timurid *ulus*.

¹⁵Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Ta‘rif bi Ibn Khaldun wa rihlatuhu Gharban wa Sharqan* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1979), 406, 416; and Walter Joseph Fischel, trans., *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane: Their Historic Meeting in Damascus, 1401 A.D. (803 A.H.); A Study Based on Arabic Manuscripts of Ibn Khaldūn’s “Autobiography”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 29, 38.

¹⁶Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Ta‘rif*, 409, 421, 427; and Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*, 31, 41, 46.

¹⁷Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo to the Court of Timour, at Samarcand, A.D. 1403-6 Translated for the First Time, with Notes, a Preface, and an Introductory Life of Timour Beg*, by Clements R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society,

themselves as Chaghatays (*Chacatay*) after the death of Chaghatay Khan (r. 1227–42) and that they were descended from Chinggis Khan’s Mongols (*Tartaros*).¹⁸ Ibn ‘Arabshah calls Temür’s army “Tatars (*Tatār*)”¹⁹ and quoting Temür’s own words, depicts him and the Qara Tatars, a remnant group of the Ilkhanid Mongols residing in Anatolia, as one and the same people.²⁰ He also refers to Temür as “a Chaghatay robber (*Jaghatāi ḥarāmī*).”²¹

Temür was also regarded as a Mongol or Tatar in the Ottoman Empire, the Mamluk sultanate, India, and Muscovy. For instance, the Ottoman historian Mustafa ‘Ali writes that Temür belonged to “the Tatar tribe named Barlas *ulus* (*ulus-i Barlas nam Tatar kabilesi*).”²² He also writes that Temür held a banquet according to “the Mongol custom (*Mogul ayini*)” after defeating the Ottomans in 1402.²³ The Ottoman historian Ibn Kemal (Kemalpasazade) also refers to Temür’s army as Tatars in his history of the Ottomans.²⁴ So did the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi (d. ca. 1684) in his famous travelogue *Seyahatnâme*.²⁵ Likewise, the fifteenth-century Mamluk historian Ibn Taghribirdi refers to Temür’s army, including a captured Timurid commander, as Tatars in

1859), 119; and Ruy González de Clavijo, *Historia del gran Tamorlan e itinerario y enarracion del viage, y relacion de la embajada que Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo le hizo por mandado del muy poderoso señor rey Don Henrique el Tercero de Castilla: Y un breve discurso* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1782), 138.

¹⁸Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo*, 125, 128–29; and Clavijo, *Historia del gran Tamorlan*, 144–47.

¹⁹Ahmad b. Muhammad Ibn ‘Arabshah, *‘Ajā’ib al-maḥdūr fi nawā’ib Tīmūr*, ed. Ahmad Fa’iz al-Himsi (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risalah, 1986), 123, 306; and J. H. Sanders, trans., *Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Amir: From the Arabic Life by Ahmed Ibn Arabshah* (London: Luzac, 1936), 64, 169.

²⁰Ibn ‘Arabshah, *‘Ajā’ib al-maḥdūr*, 320; and Sanders, *Tamerlane*, 178.

²¹Ibn ‘Arabshah, *‘Ajā’ib al-maḥdūr*, 50; and Sanders, *Tamerlane*, 6.

²²Gelibolulu Mustafa ‘Ali, *Füsül-i hall ü akd ve usûl-i harc ü nakd: İslam devletleri tarihi; 622-1599*, ed. Mustafa Demir (Istanbul: Değişim Yayınları, 2006), 105.

²³Gelibolulu Mustafa ‘Ali, *Künhü’l-ahbâr*, 5 vols. (Istanbul: Takvimhane-i Amire, 1860–68), 5:99.

²⁴Ibn-i Kemal, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, vol. 3, ed. Şerafettin Turan (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1970), 369.

²⁵Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. 7, ed. Yücel Dağlı, Seyit Ali Kahraman, and Robert Dankoff (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2000), 251.

his *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira*.²⁶ Ibn al-Furat, another Mamluk historian, calls Temür “the administrator of the Tatar kingdom (*mudabbir mamlakat at-Tatār*)” in his work.²⁷ The sixteenth-century (Persian-born) Indian historian Firishta identifies Temür and his descendant Babur, along with Chinggis Khan, as Mongol.²⁸ The eighteenth-century Mughal historian Khafi Khan states in his work that Temür and his descendants (i.e., the Mughal emperors) were, along with Chinggis Khan and Chaghatay Khan, true Mongols.²⁹ Finally, the sixteenth-century *Nikon Chronicle* describes Temür as “a Tatar from the Samarqand territories.”³⁰

In short, as attested to in his court historian Shami’s *Zafar-nāma*, Temür, who was a member of the Mongol Barlas tribe, identified himself as a Chaghatay Mongol.³¹ Moreover, virtually all his contemporaries including his adversaries regarded him as a Mongol. One should therefore understand that Temür’s Mongol identity was a logical product of his Mongol descent, which was not contingent upon his pro-Chinggisid orientation or policies.

The Mongol Identity of Temür’s Sons and Grandsons

Shahrukh

Temür’s son Shahrukh (r. 1405–47), who established control over his father’s dominions in 1409, is well known for restoring the shari‘a and

²⁶Koby Yosef, “Cross-Boundary Hatred: (Changing) Attitudes towards Mongol and ‘Christian’ Mamlūks in the Mamluk Sultanate,” in *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History: Economic, Social and Cultural Development in an Era of Increasing International Interaction and Competition*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019), 73–74.

²⁷Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane*, 50.

²⁸Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India, till the Year AD 1612*, 4 vols., trans. John Briggs (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), 1:489, 598, 2:67.

²⁹Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul lubab*, pt. 1, ed. Maulvi Kabir al-Din Ahmad (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1869), 4.

³⁰*Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey*, vol. 11, *Letopisnyy sbornik, imenyemyy Patriarshey ili Nikonovskoy letopis’yu (Prodolzheniye)* 1897. (Moscow: Yazyki russkoy kul’tury, 2000), 158. For an English translation, see *The Nikonian Chronicle*, vol. 4, 1382–1425, ed. Serge A. Zenkovsky, trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty Jean Zenkovsky (Princeton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1984), 94–95.

³¹Shami’s *Zafar-nāma* was presumably read aloud to Temür and approved by him.

abrogating the *yasa* (Mongolian *jasag*), the laws of Chinggis Khan. Additionally, styling himself *padishah-i islam*, Shahrukh did not rule through a Chinggisid puppet khan. At the same time, Shahrukh considered Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304), the Ilkhanid Mongol ruler who converted to Islam, his political role model, and also commissioned Hafiz-i Abru in 1417–18 to continue Rashid al-Din’s *Jami’ al-tavarikh*.³² In short, Shahrukh’s pro-Islamic orientation was a political-religious stance, not an expression of an anti-Mongol or non-Mongol identity.

Shahrukh, like his father, retained a Mongol identity. In his letter to the Ming Emperor Yongle (r. 1402–24), Shahrukh describes Temür as the successor of the Muslim Jochid and Ilkhanid Mongol rulers.³³ Notably, the *Mu’izz al-ansāb fī shajarat al-ansāb*, a genealogy of the Timurid and Chinggisid houses that Shahrukh commissioned, refers to the Timurid lineage as follows: “The genealogical tree of the Mongol rulers, among which, or rather, the fruits of which, are the ancestors of His Majesty the sultan [Shahrukh] (*shajara-yi ansāb-i salāṭīn-i Mughul ki ābā’ u ajdād-i ḥaẓrat-i salṭanat dākhil-i ān shajara, bal samara-yi ān shajara-and*).”³⁴ The *Mu’izz al-ansāb* also relates that “all the Mongol tribes,” to which Temür belongs, “descend from two persons who had gone to Ergüne Qun (*tamāmat-i aqvām-i Mughūl az nasl-i dau shakhṣand ki dar Arkana Qutūqūn rafta būdand*).”³⁵

Natanzi’s *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh-i Mu’īnī* also identifies Temür as Mongol. For instance, describing Temür’s military campaign against

³²On Shahrukh’s simultaneous Islamification and Mongol orientation, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, “Mongol History Rewritten and Relived,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 89–90 (2000): 129–49.

³³Abdurazzok Samarkandiy, *Matlai sa’dayn va majma’i bakhrayn*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 1405–1429, trans. A. Urinboev (Tashkent: 2008), 228. I was unable to obtain the original Persian text of Samarqandi’s work during this time of pandemic and thus have relied on the Uzbek translation.

³⁴*Mu’izz al-ansāb fī shajarat al-ansāb*, trans. and ed. M. K. Abuseitova et al., *Istoriya Kazakhstana v persidskikh istochnikakh* 3 (Almaty: Dayk, 2006), fol. 2a.

³⁵*Mu’izz al-ansāb fī shajarat al-ansāb*, fol. 3a. According to the Ilkhanid Mongol history *Jami’ al-tavarikh*, the Mongols are descended from Qiyan (Qiyān) and Nüküz (Nuküz), who, fleeing from their enemies, took refuge in a grassy plain (*shahrā-i pur ‘alaf*) called Ergüne Qun (*Arkana-qūn*), meaning a valley of wall (*kamar-i sadd*). Rashid al-Din, *Jami’ al-tavarikh*, 113–14; and Fazlullah, *Jami’u’l-tavarikh*, 80.

the Jochid Ulus, it says that Temür “threw [. . .?] according to the Mongol custom and returned (*bar qa ‘ida-i sunnat-i mughul sara an biy-andakht va baz gardid*).”³⁶ The *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh* also refers to the Timurid people as Chaghatay (*Jaghatay*), a name reflecting a Chinggisid identity. For instance, depicting the conquest of the Jochid Ulus by Temür, it states: “The entire capital of the Uzbeks was destroyed by the Chaghatay (*majmu ‘-i paytakht-i Uzbek dar zir-i dast va pay-i Jaghatay ‘aliyaha safilaha shud*).”³⁷

Ibrahim Sultan

Shahrukh’s son Ibrahim Sultan (d. 1435), who served as governor of the province of Fars, possessed a Mongol identity like his father. His view of the Mongols is reflected in the Persian history of Temür, the *Ẓafar-nāma* by Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi (d. 1454), whose work Ibrahim Sultan commissioned and patronized. According to John E. Woods, Yazdi “[purged] the Chingīzid components of Timur’s biography” and “laid greater stress on the Islamic elements” in place of the concept of Chinggisid legitimacy in this work.³⁸ However, when it comes to ethnic identity, Yazdi identified Temür and the Timurids as Mongol. His Introduction (*muqaddima*) to the *Ẓafar-nāma*, which offers a brief outline of Mongol history and the genealogy of the Chinggisid and Timurid houses, presents the Mongols as descendants of a khan named Mongol (Mughul Khan), among whom are Temür’s ancestors.³⁹ Accordingly, the *Ẓafar-nāma* identifies Temür’s ancestor Qarachar Noyan, a contemporary of Chinggis Khan, as Mongol. For instance, it relates Chinggis Khan’s distribution of the conquered territories among his family members as follows: “And when [Chinggis Khan] conquered the eastern kingdoms from Khitai to Almaligh, he divided them all, along with all their Mongol clans and tribes, among [his] sons, brothers, and Qarachar Noyan—who was a cousin—and other relatives (*chun*

³⁶Natanzi, *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh*, 425.

³⁷Natanzi, *Muntakhab al-tavārīkh*, 349.

³⁸John E. Woods, “The Rise of Timurid Historiography,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46 (1987): 81–108, reference on p. 105.

³⁹Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi, *Ẓafar-nāma*, ed. Sayyid Sa‘id Mir Muhammad Sadiq (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis, 1387/2008–9), 87–101.

mamalik-i sharqi az Khitai ta Almaligh dar taht-i tasarruf award, tamami-i an ra ba jami' -i qabayil va aqvam-i Mughul bar farzandan va baradaran va Qarajar Nuyan ki az abna' -i a 'mam bud va sayir-i khvishan qismat kard)."⁴⁰

The *Zafar-nāma* also depicts Temür's great-great-grandfather Ijil Noyan, son of Qarachar Noyan, in the following manner: "Ijil Noyan was the most mature and perfect [son] among them and it was him who became the father's successor. Verse: As it has always been the younger son who becomes the father's successor according to the Mongol custom (*Arshad va akmal-i ishan Ijal Nuyan bud va ham u qa'im-maqam-i pidar shud. Nazm: Ki payvasta buda-ast kihtar pizar Bi-rasm-i Mughul janishin-i pidar).*"⁴¹

Naturally, Yazdi also identifies Temür as Mongol. Concerning Temür's birth, the *Zafar-nāma* states that he was born in "the Year of the Rat, which marks the distant origin of the Mongol calendar (*Sichqana yil ki mabda' -i dur-i salha-yi Mughul ast).*" Yazdi also refers to Temür's army that pillaged Isfahan as Mongols: "The Mongol troops swarmed the city (*fitadand dar shahr khail-i Mughul).* The foundation of humans was uprooted altogether (*Bar-uftad bunyad-i mardum bi-kull).*"⁴²

In another passage, the *Zafar-nāma* relates that the Timurid soldiers celebrated their victory according to the Mongol custom: "According to the Mongol custom and manner, they sang, kneeled, and offered cups [of wine] (*bi-qa'ida va 'adat-i Mughul surud miguftand va zanu zada kasa midashtand).*"⁴³ When explaining the name of a kind of deer (*ahu*) that the Timurid troops encountered during Temür's campaign against the Jochid Ulus in 1391, Yazdi writes that the Mongols (*Mughul*)—that is, the Timurid *ulus*—call it *qandaghay* whereas the steppe people (*dashtiyan*)—that is, the nomads of the Jochid Ulus—call it *bukan* [?].⁴⁴

⁴⁰Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 117.

⁴¹Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 197.

⁴²Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 419.

⁴³Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 503.

⁴⁴Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 454.

In post-Mongol Central Asia, Mughul (*Moğul* in Turkic) had two different meanings. It denoted the Mongols and the eastern Chaghatays, better known as Moghuls. Importantly, Mughul (or *Moğul*) was never used in the modern sense of a Mongolic speaker. Therefore, in the *Zafar-nāma*, the Mongols residing in Mongolia at the turn of the fifteenth century are referred to as Qalmaq, not Mughul.⁴⁵ To differentiate between “Chinggis Khan’s Mongols” and the eastern Chaghatays, Timurid histories often call the latter Jata.⁴⁶ For instance, Yazdi refers to Tughlugh-Temür (r. 1351–63), the khan of Moghulistan who invaded Transoxiana in 1361, as “the Jata king (*padshah-i Jata*).”⁴⁷

The Timurids were also referred to as Turks in Timurid sources including the *Zafar-nāma*. However, one should not see this as an indication of a non-Mongol or pre-Mongol Turkic identity. Turk in Mongol and post-Mongol Central Asia had a broad meaning that can be rendered as “Inner Asian nomad.” It was a term relational to Tajik, a name denoting the Iranian-speaking sedentary population, not relational to Mongol.⁴⁸ Naturally, the *Zafar-nāma* also applies the name Turk to the Mongols. For instance, referring to the Mongol conquests, it states: “The Turks have conquered the world on account of the good omen of unity and agreement (*Turk bi-yumn-i ittifaq va yik-jahati ‘alam musakhkhar gardanida-and*).”⁴⁹ It also describes the Qara Tatars, a remnant group of the Ilkhanid Mongols in Anatolia, as “a Turkic tribe (*qaumi az Atrak*).”⁵⁰

⁴⁵Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 607. For the term Qalmaq, see Joo-Yup Lee, “Were the Historical Oirats ‘Western Mongols’?: An Examination of Their Uniqueness in Relation to the Mongols,” *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 47 (2016): 1–24, reference on p. 9.

⁴⁶For the term Jata/Jete, see Peter B. Golden, “Migration, Ethnogenesis,” in Di Cosmo, Frank, and Golden, *Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, 109–19, reference on p. 117.

⁴⁷Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 222.

⁴⁸On this point, see Joo-Yup Lee, “Turkic Identity in Mongol and Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Qipchaq Steppe,” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, ed. David Ludden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–39, reference on pp. 8–11, doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.443. One may see the name Turk being used in juxtaposition with the name Mongol in various histories. For instance, see *Shajarat al-Atrāk*, MS, Ethé 172, p. 115, India Office, British Library, London; *Shajarat Ul Atrak: Or Genealogical Tree of the Turks and Tatars*, trans. William Miles (London: W. H. Allen, 1838), 78; and Muhammad ibn Khavandshah Mir Khvand, *Tārīkh-i Rauzat al-ṣafā*, 6 vols., ed. Riza Quli Khan (Tehran: Piruz, 1960), 6:4. However, on examining the context, one may learn that Turk and Mongol in juxtaposition are used in the sense of the Mongol Turks and other Turks.

⁴⁹Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 514.

⁵⁰Yazdi, *Zafar-nāma*, 808.

Like other Timurid histories, Yazdi's *Ẓafar-nāma* also refers to the Timurids as Chaghatays. For instance, it relates that Temür gathered "the whole Chaghatay *ulus* (people) (*tamami-i ulus-i Jaghatay*)" to invade the Jochid Uluṣ.⁵¹ One should note that the Timurids' Chaghatay identity was clearly linked to Chaghatay Khan (d. 1241), son of Chinggis Khan, as remarked by Yazdi as follows: "The tree of [Temür's] reign/dynasty has grown by the stream of Chaghatay Khan's kingdom/reign (*Shajara-yi daulat-i u bar juybar-i saltanat-i Chaghatay Khan nashv va nama yafta*)."⁵²

Ulugh Beg

The Mongol identity of Ulugh Beg (r. 1447–49), who succeeded his father, Shahrukh, in 1447, is reflected in his *Tārīkh-i arba' ulūs*, a history of the Mongol Empire. In the anonymous *Shajarat al-Atrāk*, which is considered an abridgment of the *Tārīkh-i arba' ulūs*, the Mongols are presented as descendants of Mongol Khan (Mughul Khan), among whom are Temür's ancestors.⁵³ Like Yazdi, Ulugh Beg sometimes uses the name Turk as a self-appellation. However, this was not a display of a non-Mongol Turkic identity. Like Yazdi, Ulugh Beg also uses Turk to refer to the Mongols. For instance, he calls a Mongol army "the Turkic swordsman of the sky (*Turk-i tigh-zan-i falak*)," as a metaphor for the morning sun.⁵⁴ He also praises the martial valor of the Mongols, referring to them as Turks.⁵⁵

⁵¹Yazdi, *Ẓafar-nāma*, 342.

⁵²Yazdi, *Ẓafar-nāma*, 166.

⁵³See *Shajarat al-Atrāk*, 32–83. For an abridged English translation, see Miles, *Shajarat Ul Atrak*, 24–58. For Ulugh Beg's authorship of this Mongol history, see its last page, which mentions his name. Ulugh Beg also added inscriptions to the marble slab covering the tomb of Temür, which mention Alan Qo'a, the founding ancestress of the Mongols, as the ancestress of the Timurids. See A. A. Semenov, "Nadpisi na nagrobiiakh Tīmūra i ego potomkov v Gur-i Emire," *Epigrafika Vostoka* 2 (1948): 52–62; for an English translation of the inscriptions, see Denise Aigle, *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 122–23.

⁵⁴*Shajarat al-Atrāk*, 204.

⁵⁵*Shajarat al-Atrāk*, 138–140; and Miles, *Shajarat Ul Atrak*, 93–95.

Importantly, Ulugh Beg, like other Timurid historians, does not equate language with ethnicity in his work—that is, he does not define Turk as a Turkic speaker or Mongol (*Mughul*) as a Mongolic speaker. Therefore, while Ulugh Beg identifies Chinggis Khan as Mongol, he also presents the latter as a Turkic speaker. For instance, Ulugh Beg relates that Chinggis Khan and one of his amirs conversed in Turkic about his son Jochi's death. When the news of Jochi's death reached Chinggis Khan's camp, a Mongol amir reported this to Chinggis Khan in Turkic, and the latter also lamented in Turkic.⁵⁶

Khalil Sultan

Khalil Sultan (d. 1411) was another grandson of Temür who possessed a Mongol identity. The genealogy that he commissioned also depicts the Timurids as belonging to the Mongols and sharing the same ancestors as the Chinggisids. This Timurid genealogical tree is made up of roundels, which have drawings of Mongol ancestors, among whom are Alan Qo'a, the mythical ancestress of the Mongols, and her descendant Tumina Khan, whose sons Qabul Khan and Qachuli became the ancestors of the Chinggisids and the Timurids, respectively.⁵⁷ Since the Barlas tribe had already been depicted as descending from Alan Qo'a in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, a thirteenth-century Mongol history of Chinggis Khan and his ancestors, as well as in the *Jami' al-tavarikh* by Rashid al-Din, this claim was not a pure fabrication.⁵⁸ Claiming descent from Alan Qo'a was a prerogative of the Timurids and an expression of pride in their noble Mongol lineage, not outright propaganda.

In sum, there is ample evidence that not only Temür but also his sons and grandsons viewed themselves as belonging to the Mongol *ulus* (people) or the Chaghatay branch of the Mongols.

⁵⁶*Shajarat al-Atrak*, 297–98.

⁵⁷For a study of this Timurid genealogy included in the album (H2152) kept in Istanbul's Topkapı Palace Museum, see Osman Fikri Sertkaya, "Timürlü Şeceresi (*Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Hazine 2152*, v. 32-43)," *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı* 9–10 (1981): 241–59.

⁵⁸Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-tavarikh*, 27–28, 139, 152; Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-tavarikh*, 1:26, 98, 106; and Rachewiltz, *Secret History of the Mongols*, 1:3–9.

The Mongol Identity of the Later Timurids

Sultan-Abu Sa'id

The Mongol identity of Sultan-Abu Sa'id Mirza (r. 1451–69), the last Timurid ruler to hold sway over both Transoxiana and Khurasan, may be reflected in Kamal al-Din 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi's *Maṭla'-'i sa'dain va majma'-'i bahrain*, a Timurid history covering the years from 1304 to 1470.⁵⁹ In this history, Samarqandi presents the Timurids and the Ilkhanids as belonging to one and the same people as he tries to depict the Timurids as the successors of the Ilkhanid Mongols. The title of his work, *Maṭla'-'i sa'dain va majma'-'i bahrain*, meaning “the rise of the two auspicious constellations and the junction of the two seas,” refers to two homonymous rulers, Sultan-Abu Sa'id Mirza and the Ilkhanid Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan (r. 1316–35).⁶⁰

In his history, Samarqandi often uses the name Mughul to refer to the eastern Chaghatays (i.e., Moghuls) but also applies it to the Timurids. For instance, when the news of Temür's death reached the then-Timurid governor of Shiraz, Pir Muhammad—the eldest son of 'Umar-Shaikh, son of Temür—he gathered his amirs and asked for advice from them. According to Samarqandi, some said, “Like Amir Muhammad Muzaffar, who obtained the country's edict (*yarligh*) from the Abbasid caliphs of Egypt, we will change the Mongol *yasa*,” while others said, “We will submit to Mirza 'Umar” or “We will call Mirza Miranshah king.”⁶¹ Here, the Timurid rulership is equated with Mongol political tradition.

⁵⁹Sultan-Abu Sa'id Mirza is referred to as “Chaghatay pādshāh” in an Ottoman chronicle. See Necdet Öztürk, *Anonim Osmanlı kroniği, 1299-1512, Istanbul* (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000), 128.

⁶⁰It is believed that Timurid historians chose the Hijri year 736 (1335–36 AD) as Temür's birth year to present Temür as the inheritor of the legacy of the last effective Ilkhan, Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan, who died in the same Islamic year. See Maria Eva Subtelny, “Tamerlane and His Descendants: From Paladins to Patrons,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Eastern Islamic World, Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171; and Manz, “Temür and the Early Timurids,” 185. Temür was actually born in the 1320s. Takao Ito, “Al-Maqrīzī's Biography of Temür,” *Arabica* 62 (2015): 308–27, reference on p. 323.

⁶¹Samarkandiy, *Matlai sa'dayn va majma'i bakhrayn*, 61.

Sultan-Husain Bayqara

Sultan-Husain Bayqara (r. 1469–70 and 1470–1506), great-grandson of Temür’s son ‘Umar-Shaikh, became the ruler of Khurasan after the death of Sultan-Abu Sa‘id. One can recognize his Mongol identity from the works of the Timurid poet and statesman ‘Alishir Nava’i, whom he patronized, and the later Timurid historians Mir Khvand and Khavandamir, whom Nava’i patronized.⁶² Nava’i, who in his *Muhakamat al-lughatain* argues that the Turkic language is a proper literary language superior to Persian, describes Hülegü (r. 1259–65), the founder of the Ilkhanate, as the first Turkic khan in the Islamic world. He writes as follows: “The fortune (*ruzgar*) was transferred from the Arab kings (*malik-i ‘Arab*) and the Iranian rulers (*Sart salatani*) to Turkic khans (*Türk khanlar*). From the time of Hülegü Khan and from the time of Temür (*sultan-i sahibqiran Temür kürägän*) to the end of the reign of his son and successor, Shahrukh, verses in Turkic were composed [. . .]”⁶³ At the same time, Nava’i refers to the Seljuq ruler Tughril Beg as “an Iranian ruler (*Sart sultan*).”⁶⁴ Here, Nava’i uses the name Turk in a non-modern sense, as an antonym of Sart, and sees the Mongols as the ancestors of the Timurid people.⁶⁵ Similarly, Mir Khvand depicts the Timurids as sharing the same Mongol ancestors as the Chinggisids in his *Rauzat al-şafā*, which is a universal history of prophets, caliphs, and kings of Iran up to 1523 and dedicated to his patron Nava’i.⁶⁶ Mir Khvand’s grandson Khavandamir reiterates his

⁶²One may also see that Sultan-Husain Bayqara’s view of the Mongols was not different from that of the early Timurids, judging from the fact that he was the patron of the illustrated *Zafar-nāma* manuscript known as the Garrett or Baltimore *Zafar-nāma*. For a study of this *Zafar-nāma* manuscript, see Mika Natif, “The Zafarnama [Book of Conquest] of Sultan Husayn Mirza,” in *Insights and Interpretations: Studies in Celebration of the Eighty-Fifth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 211–28.

⁶³*Chrestomathie en Turk Oriental contant plusieurs ouvrages: De L’emir Ali-Schir* (Paris: École royale et spéciale des langues orientales vivantes; Firmin Didot frères, 1841), 33.

⁶⁴*Chrestomathie en Turk Oriental*, 33; and Robert Devereux, “Judgment of Two Languages: Muhakamat al-Lughatain by Mir ‘Ali Shir Nawa’i,” *Muslim World* 55 (1965): 28–45, reference on p. 40.

⁶⁵For the term Sart, see Maria Eva Subtelny, “The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik,” in Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, 45–61, reference on p. 49.

⁶⁶Mir Khvand, *Tārīkh-i Rauzat al-şafā*, 6:4.

grandfather's words in his *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, which is also a universal history from the earliest times to 1524.⁶⁷ Khavandamir also identifies Temür as a Mongol amir when he remarks that “the Mongol commanders have always preserved the genealogy of forefathers [. . .] (*umara'-i Mughul payvasta silsila-i nasab-i aba u ajdad ra mahfuz dashta*).”⁶⁸ Elsewhere in his work, Khavandamir refers to Temür's army that attacked the Kartids (1245–1381) in Herat as Mongols.⁶⁹

In sum, like Temür and his sons and grandsons, the later Timurids viewed themselves as belonging to or descending from the Mongol *ulus*.

Conclusion

In sum, according to virtually all the extant sources that provide information on their identity, Temür and the Timurids saw themselves as belonging to the Mongol *ulus* (people) and were viewed as such by their contemporaries. More specifically, they identified themselves as Chaghatay Mongols and were recognized as such by others.⁷⁰ The Timurids' Mongol identity was not contingent upon their political orientation. In other words, their expression of Mongol identity itself was not motivated by a desire to strengthen political legitimacy by stressing the Timurid connections with Chinggis Khan. This is well manifested in Shahrukh's restoration of the shari'a and abrogation of the laws (*yasa*) of Chinggis Khan and his (court historians') simultaneous identification of the Timurids as Mongol. The same holds true for Yazdi's laying greater stress on the Islamic elements in place of

⁶⁷Ghiyas al-Din b. Humam al-Din al-Husaini Khvandamir, *Tārīkh-i Ḥabīb al-siyar fī akhbār-i afrād-i bashar*, 4 vols., ed. Jalal al-Din Huma'i. 1333/1954–55. (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Khayyam, 1362/1984), 3:392–93; and Ghiyas al-Din b. Humam al-Din al-Husaini Khvandamir, *Habibu's-siyar: Tome Three*, 2 pts., trans. W. M. Thackston, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 24 (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1994), 1:227.

⁶⁸Khvandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 3:392.

⁶⁹Khvandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 3:430, 434; and Khvandamir, *Habibu's-siyar*, 1:246–47. Khvandamir also refers to Temür's army that assaulted Baghdad as Chaghatays. Khvandamir, *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, 3:456; and Khvandamir, *Habibu's-siyar*, 1:258.

⁷⁰Before questioning this thesis statement, one should be able to find a non-Mongol identity attributed to Temür and the Timurids in relevant primary sources.

the Chinggisid legitimizing principles and his simultaneous identification of the Timurids as Mongol in his *Zafar-nāma*. Furthermore, the fact that the Timurids were acknowledged as Mongol by their adversaries including the Mamluks and the Ottomans also demonstrates that the Timurids' Mongol identity was not contingent upon politics. Hence, the Timurids' Mongol identity should be understood as a logical product of their Mongol descent.

Equally, the Timurid expression of Mongol identity should not be understood as an act of ethnic impersonation. One should understand that Mongol identity was the only ethnic identity that the Timurids could assume. For instance, being Barlas Mongols, the Timurids had no good reason to adopt a Seljuk Turkmen or a Qarakhanid Turkic identity as a self-identity. The Timurids had no reason to identify themselves with the Seljuks or Qarakhanids or other pre-Mongol Turkic groups that had been subdued by their own ancestors.⁷¹

One may then ask, What about their Turkic identity? It is true that the Timurids identified themselves as Turks too. However, this Turkic identity was essentially a non-Tajik, Inner Asian nomadic identity, not a non-Mongol or pre-Mongol Turkic identity. In Mongol and post-Mongol Central Asia, Turk was a term relational to Tajik, meaning sedentary Iranian speakers, and importantly, encompassed Mongol.⁷² One should also understand that, contrary to popular perception, the use of Turkic instead of Mongolic by the Timurids (i.e., linguistic Turkicization) did not affect their Mongol identity. In the steppe world, linguistic affiliation did not necessarily define ethnic identity, and accordingly, Turkic identity in the modern sense was nonexistent.⁷³ Consequently,

⁷¹In the Perso-Islamic world, the Qarakhanid Turks were regarded as descendants of Afrasiyab, the Turanian hero of the *Shahnamah*. However, the Mongol descendants in Central Asia and Iran including the Timurids did not regard Afrasiyab as their progenitor. On this point and the Qarakhanid Turkic identity, see Lee, "Turkic Identity," 3, 18, 24, 28n59; and Joo-Yup Lee, "Some Remarks on the Turkicization of the Mongols in Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Qipchak Steppe," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 71 (2018): 121–44, reference on pp. 129–31, 137–38.

⁷²Lee, "Turkic Identity," 8–11.

⁷³On this topic, see Joo-Yup Lee, "The Historical Meaning of the Term Turk and the Nature of the Turkic Identity of the Chinggisid and Timurid Elites in Post-Mongol Central Asia," *Central Asiatic Journal* 59 (2016): 101–32. To understand why the Turkic-speaking nomads of

this paper argues that to understand the Mongol identity of the Timurids, one ought to view it from the standpoint of the Timurids themselves and their contemporaries.⁷⁴

the Mongol successor states in Central Asia and the Qipchaq Steppe held on to a predominantly Mongol orientation rather than reverting to pre-Mongol identities, see Lee, “Some Remarks on the Turkicization of the Mongols.”

⁷⁴The Ilkhanid history *Jami' al-tavarikh* refers to the original Mongols, who included the Chiggisids and the Barlas tribe as “Mongol Turks (*Atrāk-i Mughūl*).” See Rashid al-Din, *Jami' al-tavarikh*, 112; and Fazlullah, *Jami' u'l-tavarikh*, 1:79. In modern English, *Atrāk-i Mughūl* should be rendered simply as Mongols.

IRAN A Quarterly of
Iranian Studies
NAMAG

Volume 5, Number 4, Winter 2021

Special Issue Dedicated to Dr. Ahmad Ashraf
for His Lifetime Service to Iranian Studies

