

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work. Miranda Lenihan

Proposal: Historical Opinions of Tamerlane

When one thinks of the notorious Turko-Mongol conqueror Timur, or Tamerlane, a pyramid of skulls and destroyed cities is likely the most prominent image that comes to mind. Timur is known to many as a bloodthirsty ruler who aimed to recreate the Mongol empire. However, many scholars today and during his time know him as an endorser of learning and scholarship. His court at Samarqand was one of the largest centers of knowledge in the Islamic world. Several famous Islamic historians, poets, and theologians such as Ibn Khaldun and al-Jarazi were members of Timur's court at Samarqand. As a result of his grand court, a great deal of writing came from his empire during the early 1400s. Much of it has been translated and studied in multiple different languages to figure out what Timur himself was like; however, the historical documents are each varied in methodology and tone.

The proposed project will analyze a select few fifteenth century writings on Timur to prove that different backgrounds influenced how individuals wrote about him and viewed him as a ruler. It will use fifteenth century documents from four different people who met Timur to compare the differences between their tones. The original writings come from three famous historians from the 15th century: Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Arabshah, and Ibn al-Yazdi; as well as the diary of Spanish ambassador Ruy González de Clavijo during his visit to Samarqand from 1400 to 1403. The different sources, while coming from four people who were alive and well-educated during the height of Timur's rule, are drastically different in how they approach Timur and his legacy. Ibn Arabshah's biography of Timur degrades and curses the conqueror at every possible moment, whereas Ibn al-Yazdi's, Ibn Khaldun's and Ruy de Clavijo's accounts are, conversely,

approving of him. The proposed project will argue that the difference in tones in the different fifteenth century documents is caused by the authors' different backgrounds, which affected how they viewed Timur. The four had different positions in the Empire: Clavijo was a Spanish ambassador; Ibn Khaldun and al-Yazdi were decorated historians; and Ibn Arabshah was an imperial subject. These different backgrounds provide different contexts and reasons for writing about Timur that will be analyzed in the proposed research. Because of the broad scope of this topic, the proposed paper will only focus on the broad, overarching tones of each historical document rather than an in-depth analysis of each one.

These four historical authors were chosen primarily due to the fact that their writings have been translated and thoroughly analyzed into English, resulting in them being highly accessible to research. The accuracy of these translations may be called into question, but a variety of modern scholars who have read the historical documents in their original language will give more insight into the accuracy. Historians such as Il'nur Mirgaleev, Evrim Binbaş, Beatrice Manz, and Walter J. Fischel will be used in the proposed research in order to understand the backgrounds of each of the writers and their connections to each other. Beatrice Manz uses the primary sources of the proposed research in her novel analyzing Timur and his empire as a whole. Her work connects the sources to each other through what they say about Timur and the continuities between them. Justin Marozzi similarly analyzed Timur's life through the works of Ibn Arabshah and al-Yazdi, who both wrote full biographies. A majority of the listed modern historians have written monographs on the fifteenth century writers that will be analyzed. Evrim Binbaş, who wrote primarily on al-Yazdi, analyzed the circulation of al-Yazdi's biography of Timur and his previous historical writings. Walter J. Fischel wrote almost entirely on Ibn Khaldun and translated Khaldun's famous meeting with Timur into English. His analysis of both

the meeting itself and Khaldun's life as a whole will support how Khaldun's background as a well-known historian in Timur's court influenced how he described his meeting with the conqueror. Il'nur Mirgaleev wrote an article on Ibn Arabshah's biography and compares it to other works of theologians at the time about Timur, similarly to the proposed research, but through the lens of theological differences rather than differences in societal positions and backgrounds. Mirgaleev's work has an important approach to how different writings describe Timur, but the proposed paper will provide a different context for Timur's different "personalities" in different sources. The proposed paper will also use fifteenth century writings from non-theologians, such as Clavijo and al-Yazdi, in order to get a more diverse perspective than just a religious one. The proposed research will compare disjointed literature and historical sources in order to create a new conversation— one that does not revolve around theology.

The proposed research paper would be important in analyzing connections and differences between historical resources from the early 1400s Timurid empire, which has only been done before by Il'nur Mirgaleev. The project will find connections between Timur's behaviors and campaigns and how his legacy has been recorded by notable historians of different backgrounds. The critical secondary and primary sources will not only provide those connections but also the context for them. The proposed research will determine the influence of background on a historian's work and how different backgrounds result in different tones.

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