



Timur Talks About Exchanges between His Empire and Europe



Elisabetta Ragagnin



The name Timur (1336-1405), the founder of the Timurid dynasty - in full Timur (Temür) ibn Taraghai Barlas - is known worldwide and immediately recalls, on the one hand, legendary conquests, extraordinary exploits, fierceness, and, on the other, exquisite art and sublime architecture.

His name originates from the Turkic term temür 'iron'. The form "Tamerlane", in use in various European languages, is derived from Timur-i leng 'Timur the lame', a Persianized form. It consists of a genitive construction combining the name Timur with the Persian adjective lang 'lame'.

Timur was an extremely skilled com-

mander and surely one of the greatest military strategists and leaders in world history. He defeated the Golden Horde khans, the Mamluks, as well as the Ottomans at beginning of their expansion. Besides, he was also a patron of arts, architecture and culture in the broadest sense, as we can still admire today in Central Asia. It is not by accident that we speak of “Timurid renaissance”.

SILKROADIA: Amir Timur, you are a hero in all Central Asia. Every year, hordes of tourists from all over the world pay you homage at your burial in Samarkand. There is also a beautiful statue of you in the centre of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, and millions of children have been named Timur in so many countries throughout time.

Your name is recollected in Western culture as well. I am just thinking of Edgar Allan Poe’s Tamerlane and Other Poems or Giacomo Puccini’s opera Turandot. I am so excited to be interviewing you today!

Timur: Thank you for your praising

words, Interviewer-Khonom. It is a great honour for me to be interviewed by *SILKROADIA*, right after Alexander the Great. Yes, the Turandot, nice opera piece, indeed. Giacomo gave me its libretto some decades ago. I enjoyed it a lot. I actually had already known several parts of the plot for quite some time. Back then in the fourteenth century, during our military campaigns, in the evenings, around the fire-place, this was one of our favourite stories.

We had a phantastic story-teller with us, Ya'qob, a nice Nestorian guy from Samarkand. Every evening he was able to tell us a slightly different variant of that story with a new intriguing riddle, grasping from his endless Central Asian cultural magic box. What a talented story-teller! Imagine that some evenings, he was also surprising us with gastronomic magics, preparing special thematically themed plov-dishes.

But, let me come back to the Turandot opera.... Giacomo listened very carefully to all my comments to his Turandot. He is now ultimating a brand new version of it;

he named it Turandot reLoaded, just for “us”. The première will be performed next spring exclusively for the “RulersSupreme” group (see *SILKROADIA* 4/1). If it will be in hybrid-format, I will check if we can send you a zoom invitation, even if you are in the “other” world.

SILKROADIA: Thank you so much, I am honoured. Amir Timur, do you actually like traveling?

Timur: Oh, I love traveling. When I was on Earth, conquering the world took almost all my time and energies. Unfortunately, I had no time for real travels. I managed to see quite a lot of Asia, however, always in a kind of rush. I am sure you know what I mean.

I would have liked to visit Venice, Paris, Madrid, Budapest, but I was – as you know from history books – too busy with other matters. However, I had an active epistular correspondence with several European kings, for instance with Charles VI, king of France, the Venetians, the Genoese, the Greeks from Trapezunt, just to mention a



few.

They sent me emissaries with precious information, as well as special gifts. I, too, sent several of my good guys to Europe who, when back, gave me very detailed reports on the places they had visited. At my court there was always someone coming from the West or from the East: my door was always open, the table was always laid and there was always plenty of fodder for the horses.

I remember the nice days passed together with the Castilian guy, Ruy González de Clavijo, who came to me on behalf of King Henri III. We had lovely evenings and en-

joyed good food and very pleasant conversations. He used to note down everything. Later, I saw that he published his travel account under the title “Embajada a Tamor Lán (Embassy to Tamerlane)” offering thus to European people a vivid account of my great capital and court. Some time ago, I had a short trip to Madrid and read the original in the Biblioteca Nacional. I actually don’t care if in Europe I am known as “Temerlane” and not as “Timur”, “Amir Timur” or “Timur Gurkānī”. “Temerlane” sounds pretty cool.

SILKROADIA: Do you like reading travelogues?

Timur: Yes, a lot. With great pleasure I read Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and Evliya Chelebi as well as the accounts of the monks William of Rubruck, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, Rabban Sauma and Xuanzang, just to mention the “classics”. It is really fascinating to read these travelogues and grasp so much knowledge from so many different perspectives.

SILKROADIA: Amir Timur, besides short

trips, as the one to Madrid you just mentioned, are you planning longer journeys now that you have more free time?

Timur: Yes, sure! I have just got as a birthday present from the “RulersSupreme” group a phantastic train ticket for the “Silk-Road-Experience”. I will be travelling with my inseparable Bibi. She is very excited to visit as a tourist her own mosque in Samarkand. We will be traveling in disguise, however, using our real names. With so many Timur, nobody will ever imagine that I am actually the very first one.

SILKROADIA: Wonderful, aq yol (Have a nice trip)!

Timur: Thank you Interviewer-Khanom. I have a little question. May I ask?

SILKROADIA: Sure, Amir Timur. I am happy to answer, or, at least, try to answer.

Timur: Whom will you interview next?

SILKROADIA: We haven’t decided yet. Do you have any advice?

Timur: If I may advise you....well, don’t miss my great-great-great-great-great-

grandson.

SILKROADIA: Which one do you mean Your Excellency? I am not very good with numbers and chronology.

Timur: I mean Bābur of course! The founder of the Great Moghul empire. He did pretty well with regard to conquests, yes, good boy. I am very proud of him. Chinggis is also always praising him a lot. You will surely enjoy speaking directly with him. He has a great sense of humor and, moreover, his knowledge is simply unlimited. He is a great knower and lover of nature, art, music, poetry etc.

During his campaigns, our Bābur had time to write down his diary and turn it later into what the world knows as Bāburnāma, absolutely the best oeuvre of Central Asia. Unfortunately, I did not have time to write a Timurnāma myself, but, at least several historians did a great job, both in the past and in present times, so that you have good information about my deeds.

SILKROADIA: I will surely inform SILKROADIA asap. I know Bāburnāma very well. In the section dedicated to Ferghana, Babur describes a superb melon which is called “Mīr Timurī” in your honour. I tried it and I can just totally agree with Babur’s description: it is really delicious, the best melon I have ever tasted!

....bip..bip...bip.....

Timur: I beg your pardon, Interviewer-Khonom, I have to leave you now. I have just received a zoom-reminder. In 5 minutes, our “RulersSupreme” zoom meeting will start. Alex and Chinggis, the organizers, hate latecomers. We surely don’t want to make them angry.

SILKROADIA: Sure, Amir Timur, I am extremely grateful for the time you granted me! You are such a magnetic person! Tomorrow I will go to Samarkand. Do have any recommendation?

Timur: Dear Interviewer-Khonom, have a nice stay in the Timurid territories and enjoy my beautiful Samarkand. Go to the res-

taurant just behind my Gur (Gūr-i Amīr) and be my guest. The relatives of Ya‘qob should still be running that superb restaurant. Try the Timurī-plov, of course, and remember that I used to feed my armies with that dish!

SILKROADIA: Thank you very much, Amir Timur, raxmat, motashakkeram!

Elisabetta Ragagnin (ragagnin@unive.it) is Associate Professor of Turkic and Mongolic studies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Her research fields include linguistics, philology, cultural studies and literature of Turkic and Mongolic languages and peoples, as well as Silk Road Studies.