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DISCOURSES OF AN IMAGINARY ARTS COUNCIL IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY IRAN

In any given period one form of art — whether it is architecture, painting, music, poetry, or, as today, film and advertising — will predominate over the others. Anyone familiar with art in the West knows that certain epochs were celebrated for sculpture, others for painting, and so it goes. The “success” of a medium has three dimensions: its popularity, measured in terms of output, or quantity; its quality, as represented in the materials used; and the degree of creativity it exhibits. The first two dimensions can be objectively measured. The third, creativity, must be judged on the basis of a subjective understanding of the evolution of a style.

The relative importance of the various media at a single moment of time started to concern me as I was working on Timurid architecture. I began to wonder why there were so many remarkable buildings surviving from the first half of the fifteenth century, but so few from the second half. This situation seemed to contrast with the history of Timurid painting. In the first half of the century, while painting showed technical perfection, the high point of creativity was reached in the second half, or so it seemed. If this turned out to be a valid observation, how was the apparent “imbalance” of the arts to be explained? Would these observations have a bearing on Timurid social, economic, or cultural history, or perhaps even on the history of art in general?

An evaluation of the proposed hypothesis requires an outline of the development of the arts over the century of Timurid/Turkmen rule in terms of their relative popularity, quality, and degree of creativity. For the arts of architecture, painting, and metalwork, this task has been greatly simplified by the work of colleagues over the past two decades and particularly within the last few years, during which time most of the major collections of Timurid art have been studied, analyzed, and published. The other media are less well known. Since very few fragments of textiles and carpets survive, studies have had to rely primarily on illustrations in Timurid manuscripts. The study of Timurid ceramics is still in its infancy for the opposite reason. Much material is on hand that could be dated on stylistic grounds to this period, but because the usual forms of documentation (archaeology, epigraphy, stylistic analysis) are lacking or of little use, the Timurid material cannot be distinguished from post-Timurid production. This departure from the norm in the history of Islamic ceramics is in itself, as the discussion will show, symptomatic of the problem.

Many recent studies have demonstrated that in the Timurid realms, as elsewhere in the medieval Islamic world, the peculiarities of works of art and architecture are to be explained by looking at the tastes and aspirations of the patron, as shaped by the needs of the times and tailored to the patron’s resources, both fiscal and human. There is, consequently, a dialogue between patron, society, and resources. It is helpful to imagine that each of these voices is represented on a consultative body, such as an arts council, familiar to us today. Although we know of no formal Timurid body devoted exclusively to the arts, informal discussions did take place at private gatherings. Within the prince’s divan decisions were made about financial allocations, which must have included architectural programs and perhaps also the funding of book production. The evidence which will be presented indicates that the principles guiding our own art councils were not unlike those dictating decisions affecting the Timurid arts. A medium was favored because it was the most suitable vehicle of expression for that time. To use the modern term, it was “cost effective.” Once the medium was selected to fulfill a particular need, it attracted the lion’s share of the funding and the finest talent.

As a scenario, one might imagine a debate about the budget among the members of Timur’s divan. The official representing Timur makes a convincing case for channeling all of the funds into architecture because it yields the “highest return” for the money. Studies have shown that Timur sought to legitimize his reign through the formulation of an ideology which identified him as heir to both Genghis Khan and the Baghdad caliphate. Inscriptions placed in strategic places, such as portals and minarets, carried subliminal propagan-
da, referring to Timur’s Mongol lineage or his guardianship of religion. Architecture, with its impressive scale, its lavish use of shimmering tile, the forcefulness of its pure geometric forms, proved to be the most effective vehicle for conveying this ideology (fig. 1).

The unlimited access to high-quality resources, both material and human, testifies to the favor which architecture enjoyed. Timur’s buildings shared three characteristics: a new aesthetic, new technologies to realize this aesthetic, and a profusion of expensive materials, especially for decoration. The new aesthetics appear in the treatment of the exterior. Buildings had to make a
single, powerful, and lasting impression. In addition to colossal scale, buildings had to have clear lines, unlike the rambling architecture of Timur’s predecessors. Regular geometric volumes — cubes, rectangular solids, cylinders, octagons — were the most effective forms for exteriors, such as the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi in Turkestan (figs. 2–4). This building is a beehive of heterogeneous cells and spaces, meeting the complex needs of a popular pilgrimage site. Here were halls for gathering, eating, cooking, sleeping, offices, a mosque, and the mausoleum of the Sufi shaykh at the rear, all neatly compacted on two levels within the confines of a rectangular solid. With this novel solution the architect resolved the functional as well as the aesthetic problem.

The dome figured prominently in these aesthetics. Timur’s domes project upwards toward the heavens, vying for ascendency with the stars (to use the language of the chronicles), as Timur himself sought domination over the earth. These soaring domes, which became a hallmark of Timurid style, were made possible through

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Fig. 2. Turkestan. Shrine of Shaykh Ahmad Yasavi erected by Timur, 1397–99. Plan.

Fig. 3. Turkestan. Shrine of Shaykh Ahmad Yasavi erected by Timur, 1397–99. Longitudinal cross-section. The mausoleum of the shaykh is shown on the left, covered by a double dome. The large domed hall in the center was used for Sufi gatherings.
Fig. 4. Turkestan. Shrine of Shaykh Ahmad Yasavi, 1397-99. Roofing system for a rectangular hall using transverse arches and groin vaults. (Drawing: Līa Man’kovšaia).
innovative technology. They required the building of two domes, one at a normal height that was seen from below, and a second dome set upon a tall cylindrical or octagonal drum (fig. 3). This outer dome, usually covered in turquoise tiles, had a thin brick wall for lightness, supported inside by vertical ribs resting on the lower dome. The technology had been developed in Iran in the fourteenth century and would have been practiced by the masons brought home from Iran by Timur.

The interior also underwent aesthetic changes, made possible through innovative engineering. The shrine at Turkestan has been described as a "museum of vaulting." Indeed, there are to be found endless variations on the arch and the vault in this most experimental building. Long rectangular halls could not be covered by simple domes (which require a square base). Formerly, the choice lay between highly inflammable wooden rafters or cumbersome brick barrel vaults. Many architects had simply avoided rectangular halls, but in fourteenth-century Iran builders had begun to tackle the problem. Methods for building elegant and airy rectangular vaulting systems had been developed. The hall was divided into square units by arches crossing it transversely (fig. 4). Short arches were used to bridge the transverse arches, and small domical vaults could be erected on top of the resulting base. The walls of the room could then be pierced with windows to let in light, and mezzanines could be built into the alcoves between the transverse arches. From a technical point of view, experiments with this kind of vault led to the next stage, occurring after Timur’s death, in which arches become independent structural members, and walls are no longer necessary (fig. 5).

Timur’s buildings, with their novel geometric look and their “high-tech” vaulting, also sported magnificent and lavish surface decoration. Glazed tile was used inside and outside, to cover large areas or to high-

Fig. 5. Khargird. Madrasa, 1442–46. System of intersecting arches. Built by the court architect Qavam al-Din Shirazi for the vizier of Shahrukh, Pir Ahmad Khvāfī.
light architectural details. Few buildings before his time, except for tomb towers, were decorated all around. All of Timur’s buildings, regardless of scale, were sheathed in patterns of glazed brick-ends, from the little Tuman Aqa complex at the Shah-i Zinda, to the great Bibi Khanom mosque in Samarkand. The most expensive technique was mosaic faience, which required the cutting up of thousands of colored glazed tiles to fit a jigsaw-like pattern. Such compositions decorated arch spandrels and were even manipulated around awkward surfaces, like the cable molding of the arch of Timur’s palace at Shahrizabz (fig. 6). Varied sizes of polychrome painted tiles, under- and overglaze, and cuerda seca were used for continuous bands and large compositions. Dadoes skirting the lower portion of the walls incorporated large slabs of limestone in geometric designs with glazed tile, or semiprecious onyx was cut to form hexagonal tiles. Few wall paintings have survived, but texts mention murals with gold and lapis pigments.

Timur’s architectural achievements are outstanding for several reasons: their high quality of construction and decoration, their degree of creativity, and their aesthetic value. The high quality of materials would have been due to Timur’s great wealth and access to natural resources, such as onyx or marble. The quality of workmanship and creativity depended on Timur’s access to human resources. We know that everywhere he went, he siphoned off the best talent for work at Samarkand. The evolving of a new aesthetic would come partly from Timur’s own needs and tastes and partly from the cross-fertilization among architects stemming from different building traditions. Timur’s craftsmen hailed from Damascus, Tabriz, Baghdad, Shiraz, Isfahan, Khwarazm, and Delhi.

Arguments used to support architecture under Timur did not apply to the production of luxury books. Their usefulness as propaganda would be very limited. Only members of the court or important visitors would enjoy the privilege of viewing them. Timur’s base of support, the semi-nomadic Turkic military, did not have the cultural background that would have made them sensitive to this form of propaganda, as would later become the case. One exception, however, may exist. This is the anthology of epics, dated 1397–98, now divided between the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (MS. 114) and the British Library (Or. 2780). The illustrations make much the same statement as Timur’s buildings. Unlike the more common Shahnama, with its confusing roster of kings, this anthology focuses on two individuals who could be seen as “prefigurations” of Timur. The Garshasp-nama features Garshasp, ancestor of the greatest Persian hero of all, Rustam. Like Timur, whose lineage denied him title to the rule of Transoxiana, Rustam was always a king-maker, never a king. Timur retained the title of amir and set up Chaghatay puppet khans, while he himself called the shots. Also included in this anthology of epics is the Mongol chronicler Shahanshah-nama by Ahmad Tabrizi. Like Timur’s works of architecture this choice flows from his need to identify with his Genghisid ancestors. One of the scenes in this manuscript even shows Genghis Khan chastising the people of Bukhara from the minbar of the ‘idgah at the time of conquest, saying that God has sent him to punish and subdue them, for he is a “terrible scourge of God (fig. 7).” These terms, which occur in the Mongol
history of Rashid al-Din, are the very terms that Timur used to justify his merciless destruction of whole populations.

Other than this manuscript, which Lowry and Lentz have already attributed to Timur on the basis of its high quality (an attribution now reinforced by its psychological profile), there are no surviving illustrated manuscripts known to have been commissioned by him. The allegation that Timur was not literate is insufficient to justify this lack of support for luxury books. We know that Timur was an avid history buff and loved being read to. Perhaps this distance from the page or Timur’s lack of cultural training molded his preferences. It was not that Timur disdained luxury books, but that architecture, with its high visibility, proved to be a more effective medium.

As for the other arts, metalwork and ceramics, there is no evidence for a prolific and creative industry apart from the half-dozen objects made for the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi. The great basin, now in the Hermitage, while an engineering feat tantamount to the construction of the shrine itself, continues the tradition of the great basin (1374-75) from the Friday Mosque of Herat. No luxury tablewares datable to this time in gold or silver, or even base metals inlaid with these, have survived, although they were, no doubt, being
produced. Brasses or bronzes which may have been made at that time were certainly not intended for the court. As Clavijo, the Spanish envoy, tells us, Timur’s tables were set with gold, silver, and Chinese porcelains.\(^\text{19}\)

As for ceramics, one would have expected local industry to have been spurred on by such competition. In Egypt and Syria potters deftly imitated the blue-and-white Yuan porcelains arriving in Red Sea ports during the fourteenth century.\(^\text{20}\) From the eastern realms of the Islamic world, however, there are neither firmly dated pieces nor excavated specimens testifying to a prolific production of Chinese imitations.\(^\text{21}\) Most local products probably reflected traditional Iranian taste, like the one bearing the unusual inscription (dated 1377): “As long as the soup is good, if the bowl is not so well made, let it be!”\(^\text{22}\) These wares may borrow a few motifs from Chinese imports, but show little interest in further emulating them.

How should this apparent absence of local imitations be explained? Early Timurid ceramicists did not lack for technology, if one judges by the high level of tile production. Perhaps the evidence for ceramic production in Timur’s Samarqand remains underground, but it is difficult to explain why, as we shall see, so much material from the second half of the century survives. Other explanations may be offered. Perhaps orders for architectural projects took precedence over the production of luxury domestic wares. Another explanation may be that the supply of Chinese porcelain imports was sufficient to meet Timur’s requirements. He had no more need to finance local production of ceramics than to promote the making of objects in base metals, as his tables were graced with gold and silver, long lost to us.\(^\text{23}\)

After Timur’s death in 1405, the center of power — and culture along with it — shifted to Herat, where his most capable son Shahrukh was governor of the eastern provinces of Iran. Under Shahrukh the arts entered a new phase, fueled by a steady flow of tribute from the provinces but also from the agricultural hinterland of Herat. Old infrastructures were restored.\(^\text{24}\) Herat itself gained a new marketplace of baked brick, thus a more secure place for valuable goods. As the population grew, a new Friday Mosque was required for the western suburbs. This project was undertaken by Shahrukh’s wife, Gawhar Shad, who, as the daughter of a Chaghatayid noble, had her own resources.\(^\text{25}\) She also gave the shrine of the Imam Riza at Mashhad an enormous mosque, thus promoting traffic to the burgeoning pilgrimage site, traffic which benefited not only the new city of Mashhad but also the towns through which the pilgrims passed. Gawhar Shad lent a certain class to the efficacy of the rule of Shahrukh, himself but the son of a concubine.

We rarely hear of “court architects” in the Islamic world before the Ottomans, but in Herat at this time biographical notices and signatures on architectural works point to an individual who can hardly have been anything else. Qavam al-Din Shirazi, according to Dawlatshah (1487), excelled in engineering, drawing, and construction, and was also capable of astronomical calculations.\(^\text{26}\) He worked for the royal family and for one of the powerful viziers from at least 1410 until his death in 1438. He built all of Gawhar Shad’s projects, including the domed mausoleum, which is all that remains of her madrasa at Herat. Qavam al-Din’s style carries forward the technology and the aesthetics of the imperial monuments of Timur. Vaulting techniques reach perfection, as domes now sit directly on four arches, thus eliminating a need for supporting walls (fig. 5). Space could be further opened up. Domes appear to float. Gravity is denied. Intersecting arches themselves become an architectural motif, suggesting tensile properties where there may be none. Qavam al-Din himself was not above artifice for aesthetics’ sake, for he also faked these arches in plaster in the same buildings that contain structural intersecting arches. This “arch-net” or “squinch-net” became ubiquitous in Persian architecture, displacing the muqarnas by the end of the century. Gawhar Shad’s buildings were also richly clad in glazed tile, an art in which Qavam al-Din’s team of decorators excelled.

Architecture served Shahrukh’s aims as it had done Timur’s, although the aims were quite different. Timur’s buildings projected the image of world conqueror or founder of a new order, while those of Shahrukh’s court — the new mosques, madrasas, and refurbished shrines — cast Shahrukh as upholder of the Islamic law, as well as the Persian tradition of kingship. Along with this shift in ideals came a change in the cultural climate, which resulted in the reemergence of the arts of the book. Timur’s sons and grandsons had received a traditional Persian education and were themselves skilled in the art of calligraphy. Shahrukh assured himself a place in history, not by raising monuments of brick but by rewriting history itself. He commissioned Hafiz-i Abru to compile a new world history, updating Rashid al-Din’s work which he may have salvaged from Tabriz. None of the surviving manuscripts bears a dedication to Shahrukh, but two contain
his seals, and scholars generally agree on attributing these manuscripts to him.\cite{29} If, in fact, they should be viewed as examples of Shahrukh’s patronage of the book, we must conclude that he took less interest in the quality of illustration than in the quantity. The Paris manuscript is profusely illustrated in diverse styles according to a limited number of formulas.\cite{30} Shahrukh’s taste and access to resources must have changed, however, when his son Baysunghur struck out on his own to found a production center for books (kitābkhāna) in the 1420’s.

Works of the Baysunghur atelier, in particular, show an extraordinary consistency in the high quality of all materials used, for binding, paper, ink, and pigments. Images glow. Gold and lapis headings proliferate. They accomplish Shahrukh’s political aims not only through conspicuous display of wealth, but also, as Lentz has shown, through choice of scenes and style of representation: it is “staged, learned, and impenetrable, it resembles the panegyric histories of the dynasty...”\cite{31}

Thus, Baysunghur’s workshop attracted the talent and resources because its products — fine illuminated and illustrated manuscripts — were appropriate “ideological tools,” serving the dynasty as architecture had done for Timur and continued to do for Shahrukh. The audience was no longer restricted to the society of the steppes, but now included the cultured Persian elite.

If one looks at Baysunghur painting from the point of view of innovation, however, it cannot be said to match the degree of creativity shown by the architecture of this time. The lack of inspiration discernible in this class of painting may be a function of the very role it was intended to play. Allusions to the past in both literature and the accompanying illustrations were generally applauded, and this esteem for earlier models could have discouraged painters from blazing new trails.\cite{32} However majestic, early Timurid painting was a backward-looking medium. Such unity of style imposed upon a multitude of talented hands tended to stifle individual expression. Only in the inspired drawings of the atelier, accidentally preserved in the Istanbul and other “albums” and probably never intended for our eyes, do we discover the unsuppressed personal expression of the artist and his potential for creativity and, even, humor.\cite{33}

Thus, the vehicles patronized by Shahrukh come with a caveat. While architects continued to innovate, painters were held at bay. As for the industrial arts, little has survived. Only the preparatory drawings referred to above suggest the high level of inspiration operating behind the artifacts. These drawings of animals, both real and fantastic, and less frequently people, in vegetation and arabesque foliage, were designed for transfer to textiles, leather bookbindings, metalwork, tiles, and other objects and furnishings. Most of these artifacts, like the fabled gold tablewares and Chinese blue-and-white porcelains, are now known only through book illustrations.\cite{34} No metalwork dated to the reign of Shahrukh has survived, although a few pieces have been attributed to his time.\cite{35} The masses of bronze inlaid works, bearing no dates but in the style of the late fourteenth century, may, in fact, represent output extending into the early fifteenth century, reflecting the conservative taste of the bourgeoisie rather than that of the court.\cite{36} The court itself would have continued to demand vessels of precious metal and stone, and these would eventually have been melted down or destroyed.

Around the midpoint of the century local potteries provide evidence for a flicker of interest in imitating Chinese porcelains. A fragmentary green-and-white bottle, inscribed at Mashhad in 1444, may be the first (failed) attempt of a local pottery to produce blue-and-white wares.\cite{37} It was, perhaps, the curtailment of porcelain shipments by the Dowager Empress of China in 1435 that triggered this local production.\cite{38} If this is so, it would be the scarcity of the desired product, rather than competition with it, that prompted imitation by local Khurasani potters. Notwithstanding the future discovery of dated ceramics and metalwork from the workshops of Shahrukh, we must conclude that the court did not invest in local ceramic production until perhaps the last decade because it could still rely on porcelain imports, nor did it produce objects in base metals for its own use: rather it produced them in silver and gold and semiprecious stones.\cite{39}

For the interregnum period following the death of Shahrukh in 1447, it is difficult to assess the arts. So little is dated to this time that one asks the question, were the objects and buildings destroyed or simply not produced? The only outstanding monument in Khurasan, the Masjid-i Shah at Mashhad (dated 1451), was built by a minor amir from Sistan.\cite{40} In Transoxiana, while technical virtuosity still appears, expenses were kept low by limiting tilework to the portal or mihrab and substituting for it the less expensive technique of wall painting, as in the Ishrati Khana (ca. 1464).\cite{41} Few luxury books date from this period. In the 1460’s, however, the arts of metalwork and ceramics rise to the level of luxury goods. The earliest inlaid bronze mug of this type is dated 1456–57.\cite{42} Of the fourteen mugs published
by Komaroff, two were certainly made for members of the Timurid court, which until then had perhaps disdained the use of base metal.\textsuperscript{41} Production of a series of high-quality black-and-turquoise stone-paste wares, inspired by Chinese Cizhou pottery, began around 1468, as attested to by several dated pieces, probably in Khurasan.\textsuperscript{42}

In 1470 Sultan Husayn Bayqara restored stability to the remnants of the Timurid empire, which now extended little beyond Khurasan. The rest of the empire to the west had fallen to the Qaraqoyunlu and later, the Aqqoyunlu. Despite the dwindling fortunes of the Timurid court at Herat, the city continued to view itself as the cultural capital of the East, the “Paris” of its day. The level of building activity was high, and manuscript production continued to feature such celebrities as the calligrapher Sultan ʿAli Mashhadi, the illuminator Yari, and painters of the likes of Mirak and Bihzad.\textsuperscript{43} If we examine these works more closely, however, the preeminence of Herat must be qualified.

For example, the scale of the large mosque of Sultan Husayn at Ziyaratgah, dating to 1482-83, strikes us as impressive (about 200’ × 240’), but only the twentieth-century eye would find its bare brick masonry attractive.\textsuperscript{44} Glazed tile is confined to the entrance portal. Had funds allowed, this mosque would certainly have been glazed, like its predecessors in Herat. Other buildings of this period, many sponsored by amirs and bureaucrats, like Mir ʿAli Shir Navaʾi, skimp on the tile revetments, omitting them or reserving them for the portal and mihrab.\textsuperscript{45} In the area of technology these buildings show no advances and, in fact, tend to cut corners. Instead of constructing intersecting arches, masons now consistently faked them, using corbeled masonry in the squinch areas, concealed behind elaborate plaster stellate vaults, resulting in a far less stable structure (fig. 8).\textsuperscript{46}

Considering the quantity of building activity reported in the texts, it is surprising so little has survived. Builders must have skimped not only on the decoration...
Fig. 9. Sultan Husayn Bayqara hosting an entertainment at which several guests are inebriated. Detail. Frontispiece to a manuscript of Sa‘di’s 
and technology but also on the building materials, using unfired brick instead of the more expensive, but also more permanent, fired brick. Many of the building efforts also represented repairs rather than new construction. 'Ali Shir seems to have spread his wealth thinly, and many of the smaller repairs may have been in response to local petitions from people occupying his lands.45

For whatever reasons, architecture in the late Timurid period is far less innovative, ambitious, and lavish than the buildings of the Shahrukh era. Many were sponsored by persons outside the royal family, but even the royal buildings show tendencies toward restraint. We are led to hypothesize that patrons in Khurasan did not have the funds or the human resources to expend on architecture.

By contrast, the arts of the book engaged the foremost practitioners of the age in all aspects of production—calligraphy, illumination, painting, and binding. The high level of skill was matched by innovation, as Bihzad and his colleagues introduced what is generally considered to be a sense of realism into Persian painting (fig. 9). The artist focuses on the transitory moment, the snapshot of the world around, including many extraneous details that fall within the camera’s eye but which are not mentioned in the text and never would have been permitted on a Baysunghuri canvas. People are smaller, clustered in isolated groups, more independent but more interactive. The range of colors has also changed. In Baysunghuri painting, artists used only pure, clear, brilliant colors. Now colors appear in many tones, sometimes triple the number of colors used earlier in any one image. Even the subject matter has changed. Kings and their courtiers are shown in most unbecoming postures. The beggar or the peasant is the new hero, the focus of the painter, corresponding to the Sufi ideal. Painting has become a vehicle for Sufi expression rather than imperial ideology,46 and this has occurred with the blessings of the ruling class!

While Herat painting progressed in new directions,

Fig. 10. Tabriz. Blue Mosque (Masjid-i Muzaffariya). Built for the Qaraqoyunlu ruler Jahan Shah, 1465. Corner of main hall with remains of mosaic faience and tile dado.
some of the talent was probably lured away to the wealthy Turkmen courts in western Iran and at Baghdad.\textsuperscript{59} The debt of Safavid painting to Timurid schools has been acknowledged and is well documented by art historians.\textsuperscript{50} That this movement from east to west started much earlier, however, is suggested by a number of fine Herat manuscripts, begun in the Timurid capital but completed in the west under Turkmen patronage and to which Aqqoyunlu artists added new paintings.\textsuperscript{51} The gravitation of artists toward Turkmen courts was certainly prompted by the promise of greater reward but also of more liberal access to high-grade materials. If we compare the quality of materials in Herat with Turkmen manuscripts, the differences are striking. Illumination in Herat manuscripts, while of high quality, is sparse and limited to one or two double-page spreads. Turkmen illuminators spaced their designs throughout. The sheer volume of expensive pigments, gold and lapis, is far greater in the Turkmen. Pages literally drip with gold. Gold is also the most common color for sky. Where lapis occurs, it is generously applied. In Herat manuscripts the blue pigment used for skies is either a diluted lapis or a less expensive pigment.\textsuperscript{52} Other pigments may also have been inferior, as suggested by the flaking found throughout the two famous British library Khamsos, some of the paintings of which were certainly done by Herati masters such as Mirak, Bihzad, and Qasim \textsuperscript{6}Ali (Or. 6810 and Add. 25900).\textsuperscript{53} There are few illuminations. It is ironic that such highly esteemed painters should have been given such a low budget. Considering the times, however, and what is suggested by the level of architectural patronage, this is understandable. What is more difficult to explain is why someone like Bihzad would have stayed behind in Herat and resisted the Turkmen “brain drain.” There is a curious contrast between the quality of human resources employed (which was very high) and the quality of the materials used (which was relatively low).

That architectural talent was also siphoned off to Tabriz is suggested by the high caliber of talent and skill exhibited in the Blue Mosque, built in 1465, the only surviving monument of this period in Tabriz (fig. 10).\textsuperscript{54} The disappearance of the other royal foundations is compensated for by rich descriptions of them by Venetian travelers.\textsuperscript{55} The many monuments built in the provinces, in Isfahan, Kashan, and Yazd, give some idea of the wealth accruing to Turkmen courts.\textsuperscript{56} While not always brilliant, these buildings do display extensive use of glazed tile.

In Khurasan the redistribution of wealth had the opposite effect on the industrial arts. A wider segment of the wealthy classes could now afford Chinese imported wares, and during the second half of the fifteenth century, the porcelain trade resumed at a heightened pace. At the same time this increase in the quantity of porcelains entering Khurasan made what had formerly been a restricted item more visible to lower levels of society. Local industry which normally supplied the needs of these classes was compelled to “retool” and meet the new demand for cheap porcelain-like wares. Thus, local ceramic production received a boost.

The large number of local imitations of blue-and-white, coming from many different centers (as indicated by fabric analysis), and the wide range of quality in drawing and fabric, meant that something was being produced for every size of pocketbook.\textsuperscript{57} One such plate is actually inscribed with its place of manufacture, Mashhad, and the date 878 (1473) (fig. 11).\textsuperscript{58} It is decorated with three carnation-like flowers, connected by an encircling stem or vine, with a variety of leaves. Around its rim is a debased version of the Ming wave-and-rock border. The drawing of both the tondo and the

![Fig. 11. Underglaze-painted plate, with decoration in cobalt blue. Mashhad, dated 878 (1473). Leningrad, State Hermitage Museum, VG-2650.](attachment:image)
rim are simplified renderings of an early Ming peony plate. More faithful to the Chinese original, but undated, is a group of high-quality plates made in the nearby town of Nishapur (fig. 12). So close to the Chinese model (fig. 13) are they that they must have been acceptable to the aristocracy as substitutes for the real thing. The Mashhad plate should, therefore, be seen as an imitation of an imitation, perhaps intended for the middle class. Inferior still were the stone-paste and clay-bodied wares produced in provincial centers which would have satisfied the craving for “things Chinese” by those who could not afford even the high-quality imitations.

By the end of the fifteenth century, deliberations in Sultan Husayn’s Arts Council might have gone something like this. Only one major architectural work could be afforded — that was to be the Sultan’s madrasa. Other building projects would have come in “under budget,” meaning little expense beyond what was absolutely necessary. Book production was popular and comparatively cheap. It should be encouraged, enough to keep the artists from starving or leaving. As for metalworkers, supplies would be straightlined, but potters should be encouraged to imitate porcelain locally, thus reducing the foreign deficit and increasing tax revenues.

This is how an explanation in economic terms would go. But more important was the suitability of the choices for the desired aims. Architecture was not only expensive. It did not serve anyone’s political purposes to sink large sums into lasting memorials. Book illustration was less expensive, but it also spoke to the times. Poetry was as popular a form of entertainment as popular music is today. As Dawlatshah said, “Wherever you listen, you hear the murmur of a poet, and wherever you look, you see a Latifi or a Zarifi, or a Naziri [names of Timurid poets].” Subtely has demonstrated the importance of poetry as a cultural vehicle: “Poetry was a cultural staple that no self-respecting court could afford to do without and it was the determining factor in the assessment of its ultimate worth.”

Whether the role of poetry evolved in this direction as a result of changes from the first to the second half of the fifteenth century is not known to me, but there was a discernible shift in the function of painting. The adoption of realism by the Bihzad school was more than a whimsical change in style (fig. 9). It was a major restructuring of the art of painting, brought about by social and economic changes. Between the demise of the family of Shahrukh, whose capital Herat had been the center of an empire, and the renewal of the Timurid line under Sultan Husayn Bayqara, Herat revived, not as a vital center, but as a “cultural oasis.” Under the direction of Shahrukh’s son Baysunghur, painters strove to transform mundane events into royal occasions. With the Bihzad school, the process was reversed: royal occa-
sions revolve around the concerns of the commoner, personified by the dervish. The painter has moved from universal time, the unchanging world of the prince, to fleeting time, where nothing remains forever but is constantly in flux. The most suitable vehicle to convey this notion is verisimilitude. This mode of expression, more common in Western art, is the very same that fostered autobiographical literature in the late Timurid world, as exemplified by the memoirs of Babur or the lively accounts of Vasif. The new focus on the individual, the move away from the courtly ideal, argues for comparison with the contemporary society of Renaissance Italy, and the plausibility of a common Zeitgeist that has somehow found its way into Iran.

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NOTES

1. On this theme, see the study of Svetlana Alpers, in which the author demonstrates that painting in seventeenth-century Holland performed the same function as theater had done in Elizabethan England, i.e., to represent the respective society to itself, whereas the same medium, painting, in Renaissance Italy commented on the intellectual side of human experience (The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century [Chicago, 1957]).

2. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting my research on "inter-art relations" since 1985 and the study of Timurid ceramics which grew out from this inquiry (1889-91). This paper is essentially a "working hypothesis" for the larger study.

3. It would be impractical to mention here all of these works; the most convenient bibliographies will be found in Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century (Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, Calif., 1989).


5. The most significant attempt to draw together the scattered information on the decorative arts in general, and ceramics in particular, is Ernst Grube, "Notes on the Decorative Arts of the Timurid Period," in Cururajamanjarika: Studi in onore di Giuseppe Tuuci (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1974), vol. I, pp. 233-79; not to be overlooked is the important, but rare, study of the excavated material from Samarqand by G.A. Pugachenko-va, "Samarkandskaia keramika XV veka," Trudy SAGU (Central Asian State University, Tashkent, Uzbek S.S.R.) 11 (1950): 91-120.

6. For example, Michael Brand and Glenn D. Lowry, Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1985); also various works by Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair.

7. Vasifi, as cited by Maria Subtelny, "The Poetic Circle at the Court of the Timurid Sultan Husain Ba'iqa and Its Political Significance," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1979, p. 208.

8. One rare document preserved in an album in the Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul (H. 2153, fol. 98a) is the "petition" (arzadash), or progress report, probably of the Baysunghur atelier in Herat. It includes comments not only on crafts related to the book but also buildings, gardens, and tents (trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art [Cambridge, Mass., 1909], pp. 323-27).


11. On the Tuman Aqa complex, see Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, cat. no. 21A and B; on the "Bibi Khanom" mosque (Masjid-i Jam' of Timur), see ibid., cat. no. 28.

12. Ibid., cat. no. 39.

13. Ibid., p. 42.

14. Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, pp. 56, 331 (cat. no. 16).

15. The exact text in the manuscript was not available, but the story is told in most histories of the Mongols, e.g., Abu'l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan, trans. Petr I. Desmasions, L'histoire des Mongols et des Tatars par Abou-Ghazi Behadour Khan (St. Petersburg, 1871-74; reprt., Amsterdam, 1970), p. 110; illustrated in I. Stchoukine, Les Peintures des manuscrits timourides (Paris, 1954), pl. 13.


19. See below, n. 23.

20. On Syrian imitations before 1401 (Timur's destruction of Hamah), see excavations of the Danish expedition (P. J. Riis and Vagn Poulsen, Hamah: les verrières et poteries médiévales [Copenhagen, 1957]).

21. A small group of sherds excavated in the citadel area of Samarkand suggest a short-lived attempt to replicate porcelain (currently under study at the Royal Ontario Museum); see Pugachenkova, "Samarkandskaia Keramika XV veka."


23. Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406, trans. Guy le Strange (London, 1928), often speaks of gold, silver, and porcelain serving dishes and goblets at the court of Timur (for example, pp. 224-25, 228).


25. For Gawhar Shad's works, see Bernard O'Kane, Timurid Architecture in Khurasan (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1987), pp. 83-84.

26. On Qavam al-Din, see Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, pp. 189-93.


28. BN suppl. persan, 1113 (Stchoukine, Peintures, no. 29, on pp. 48-51); Richard Ethinghausen, "An Illuminated Manuscript of
Hafiz-i Abru in Istanbul, Part I,” Kunst des Orients 2 (1955): 30–44. There are a few extraordinary paintings in this manuscript, such as the depiction of the birth of Ghazan Khan (fol. 210a) or his tomb complex at Tabriz (fol. 256b–57a).


30. The inclusion of new paintings based on older models may even have been institutionalized; see in this volume, A. Adamova, “Repetition of Illustrations in Manuscripts: The Khamsa of Nizami in Leningrad.”

31. Much has been written about the “Istanbul albums” and their importance for the study of Timurid painting and decorative arts; see, in particular, the papers of a symposium on these problems, in Islamic Art I (1981), and Grube, “Notes on the Decorative Arts”; Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, chap. 3.


34. E.g., Melikian-Chirvani, Islamic Metalwork, no. 108.


37. See, particularly, the jade objects made for Ulugh Beg, Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, pp. 142–45.

38. Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, cat. no. 93, pp. 334–36.


41. Ibid., the aforementioned jug (no. 3) and no. 14, dated 1498, and made for Sultan Husayn Bayqara (pp. 446–48).

42. For example, Arthur Lane, Later Islamic Pottery (London, 1957), pl. 20. Imitations of this ware have been excavated at sites in Iranian and Afghan Sistan, and sherds have been found in Khurasan. These finds will be discussed in a forthcoming monograph on the Royal Ontario Museum’s project on Timurid ceramics. I am grateful to William Trousdale, Umberto Scerrato, and Ernst Grube, who have made excavation and sherd collections available to us for study. Special thanks to A. Adamova, Anatoly Ivanov, and Boris Marshak for facilitating our study of materials in the State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.

43. See Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, for bibliography, chap 4.

44. O’Kane, Khurasan, pp. 259–63; Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, cat. no. 123, pp. 351–52.

45. For example, the shrine at Azadan near Herat (dating before 1497–98; ibid., pp. 318–20); the Chihil Sutun mosque in Gyaratgah (ca. 1485, ibid., pp. 350–51).

46. Perhaps the one feature that shows some creativity in the architecture of the late fifteenth century is the extraordinary variety of stellate vaults created in plaster to hang from simple brick vaults (cf. ibid., pp. 169 ff).


50. See M. Dickson and S.C. Welch, The Houghton Shahnameh (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 2 vols. The Uzbek conquest of Herat in 1507 had the effect of scattering artists east and west, some by force, others voluntarily. The ill-fated Timurid prince Badi` al-Zaman who fled to Tabriz, is believed to have taken with him precious objects and manuscripts. An Ottoman account implies that he also had brought artists to Tabriz. The text speaks of the prince’s transfer to Istanbul along with the artists and artisans who had come to Tabriz from Khurasan.

51. For example, the Khamsa of Nizami in the Topkapi Palace Library, H. 762 (see Basil Robinson, “The Turkman School to 1503,” in Arts of the Book in Central Asia: 4th–16th Centuries, ed. Basil Gray [Boulder, Colo, 1979], pp. 215–47). Robinson views the inclusion of miniatures of different styles in manuscripts produced for the Qaraqoyunlu as evidence for the collecting of artists from various parts of the declining Timurid empire.

52. For the use of substitutes for lapsis blue in European medieval illumination, see Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy (Oxford, 1972), pp. 14–17.

53. Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, nos. 140 and 145.


56. Such as: (Golombek/Wilber cat. no.)

Abrandabad masjid-i jamii
(Yazd) mid-15th c. 128 Afushteh shrine 1465 133 Bidakhvaid shrine
(Yazd) add of 1445–88 153 Bonderabad shrine complex
(Yazd) 1473–14 156B, C Isfahan, Darb-i Imam shrine 1453 170 Kashan, Masjid-i Maydan-i Sang 1462–64 175 Maybud, masjid-i jamii
(Yazd) 1462–63 189 Taft, Masjid-i Shah Vali 1468–84 217


59. See, for example, Grube, “Notes on the Decorative Arts,” figs.
23–24; provenance has been established by Robert Mason through petrographic analysis (to be published as part of the Royal Ontario Museum project on Timurid ceramics).

60. O’Kane, Khurasan, pp. 339–43.


63. Ibid., p. 129.


65. Ibid.