

**The Jade Dragon Sword:
Representations of Power and Legitimacy
in the Timurid Empire**

by

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**The Jade Dragon Sword: Representations of Power and Legitimacy
in the Timurid Empire**

Koç University

Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities

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ABSTRACT

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During the fifteenth century, the Timurid Empire would establish a distinct artistic idiom—disseminated beyond the empire's realm through the movement of objects, artists and ideas—that would solidify the empire's place as one not only of military and political dominance, but also of cultural superiority. A group of jade dragon swords and sword-parts believed to be created from the royal workshop of Ulugh Beg (r. 1447–49) reveal various elements of the political, cultural and artistic developments that occurred during this period that would help shape what would become the Timurid aesthetic. Through an investigation centered on this group of objects, this study particularly aims to shed light on how the Timurids were able to utilize their imperial artistic production in communicating sovereignty and legitimacy. The research will address the nature of Islamic arms and armor, the history of jade and the dragon motif in Islamic artistic production, and the manifestations of the Timurid legacy as seen on and through these objects. Along with addressing the later adoption of particular artistic elements, this study further aims to understand the empire's legacy through an examination of the afterlife of Timurid objects as they eventually moved into the treasuries of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires.

Keywords: Timurid art, Islamic arms and armor, jade, dragon, Iran, Central Asia, China, Ulugh Beg, cross-cultural interaction, sovereignty, legitimacy

ÖZET

Yeşim Ejderha Kılıcı:

Timur İmparatorluğu'nda Güç ve Meşruiyet Temsilleri

Christine Ji-Eun Kim

Arkeoloji ve Sanat Tarihi Bölümü, Yüksek Lisans

7 Ağustos 2019

Timur İmparatorluğu, 15. yüzyıl boyunca sadece askeri ve politik konumunu değil, kültürel üstünlüğünü de somutlaştıran özgün bir sanat dili oluşturmuştur -ki bu sanatsal üslup nesnelerin, sanatkârların ve fikirlerin dolaşımı itibarıyla imparatorluk sınırlarını da aşan bir mahiyettedir. Uluğ Bey dönemi (s. 1447–9) saray atölyelerinde üretildiği varsayılan bir grup yeşim taşı ve ejderha işlemeli kılıç ve kılıç parçaları, dönemin siyasi, kültürel ve sanatsal gelişmelerini ortaya çıkarırken, Timurlu estetiğinin saiklerini de şekillendiren parçalardan biri olmuştur. Söz konusu nesneler üzerinde yoğunlaşan bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Timurluların egemenlik ve meşruiyet söylemleri için sanatsal üretiminden nasıl istifade ettiklerine ışık tutmaktır. Timurlu mirasının göstergeleri, İslam sanatında yeşim taşı ve ejderha motifinin tarihi, ve İslami kültür coğrafyasında silah ve zırhların tabiatı araştırmanın işaret edeceği noktalar olacaktır. Süreç içinde benimsenen belirli sanatsal unsurların gözden geçirilmesinin yanı sıra, Timurlu mirasının anlaşılabilmesi adına, bu mirası oluşturan nesnelerin Safevi, Osmanlı ve Babür hazinelerine dâhil olduktan sonraki algılanma biçimleri de mercek altına alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Timurlu sanatı, İslam sanatında silah, yeşim, ejderha, İran, Orta Asya, Çin, Uluğ Bey, kültürler arası etkileşim, egemenlik, meşruiyet

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INTRODUCTION

The Lord said to the Angels, I will send a Sword among them, which shall cut in pieces every perverse or unrighteous person it encounters, as I have heard that the Sword there meant is (the power of) Princes...

—Amir Timur (r. 1370–1405), *Malfuzat-i Timuri*¹

Representing military strength and legitimacy of rule, the sword has often been associated with some of the most prominent figures within the Islamic world as an emblem of their place as the sovereign or leader. Timur, also known as Timur the Lame or Tamerlane in the West, was one such figure who utilized the latent symbolism of the sword in portraying his power and authority.² By referring to himself as a personification of the weapon, Timur emphasized not only the strength of his military career, becoming one of the most well-known conquerors on the Asiatic continent, but he further legitimized his place as an Islamic ruler sent by God, justifying his aims in unrelentingly vanquishing his opponents. The image of Timur as the Sword further fuels the significance that the weapon had within the Islamic world—specifically the Timurid Empire (1370–1506)—as both an object of military importance and as a symbol for strength, sovereignty and legitimacy.

The usage of the sword as a symbol for power is one that is commonplace throughout history and extends beyond the realms of the Islamic world. Prophet

¹ Timur, *The Mulfuzāt Timūry, or Autobiographical Memoirs of the Moghul Emperor Timūr*, trans. A. Hussyny and C. Stewart (London: J. Murray; Parbury, Allen and Co.; Howell and Stewart, 1830), 4.

² For a general overview of Timur and his rule, see Manz, Beatrice F., “Timūr Lang,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1223.

Muhammad was noted to have said: “Know that Paradise is under the shade of swords.”³ However, the sword as an image of power for Islamic rulers is particularly evidenced by the usage of the weapon in various ceremonies and acts of succession. In these examples, the sword represents a power and authority that is passed down, attributing the object itself with a notion of continual strength. The usage of the sword in this manner can be seen from the early Islamic period, particularly with one of the most well-known Islamic swords—the *dhu’l-faqar*, or the sword of Ali. The sword is believed to have originally belonged to a Meccan leader who was defeated during the Battle of Badr in 624 A.D, ended up in the hands of the Prophet and later “passed into [Ali’s] possession when the Prophet died in 632 A.D.”⁴ The passing down of the sword symbolized the legitimacy of the true successor to the caliphate after the death of Muhammad, especially since the sword was considered to be one of the sacred relics of the Prophet, and the image of the *dhu’l-faqar* would become particularly significant for the Shi’ite Muslims.⁵

Later examples of the usage of the sword within acts of accession can be seen with the sword of Timur, which was gifted to Shah Safi (r. 1629–1642) in 1633 and considered to be a sign of great fortune, assuring the success of the ruler in his world conquests.⁶ The sword-girding ceremony of the Ottoman Empire, codified under the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446, 1452–1481) after conquering Constantinople, further exemplifies this. During this ritual, the rising sultan is given the sword of Osman—named after the founder of the Ottoman dynasty—two weeks before his

³ Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, book 52, hadith 73.

⁴ David G. Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar* (PhD diss., NYU, 1984), 15-6.

⁵ Idem, “Dhu’l-faqār and the Legacy of the Prophet, Mirath Rasul Allah,” in *Gladius* XIX (1999): 158.

⁶ Iskandar Beg Munshi and Muhammad Yusuf, *Zayl-i tarikh-i ‘alam-ara-yi ‘Abbasi*, ed. S. Khwansari (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Islamiyah, 1938), 129–30 as cited in Sholeh A. Quinn, “Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles,” *Iranian Studies* 31/2 (Spring 1998): 149–58.

accession, emphasizing the notion of the sword representing the continual power of a ruler and serving as a kind of proxy for the figure and his associated legacy.⁷ The symbolism of the object is additionally magnified when considering that swords were often taken as spoils of war—removing not only the wealth of an empire but the tools that allow for a successful military ruler and army. It is clear that by the Islamic period, the sword encapsulated certain notions of authority, both as military strength and political legitimacy, with a movement or shift of power clearly understood through the symbolic act of the sword changing hands between rulers.⁸

The nature of the sword within the Islamic context thus raises numerous questions regarding a small group of Timurid objects believed to be from the fifteenth century, which sit at the heart of the present study. All three objects are either complete or parts of a *shamshir*, a single-edge curved saber that appeared in the Middle East by the ninth century.⁹ The first object is a saber, now located in the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul (fig. 1). It features a gold-inlayed hilt made completely of white nephrite jade, complete with a guard and a gold pommel, along with a curved watered-steel blade and a scabbard. The entire hilt appears to be made of two separate pieces of the same type of nephrite—one comprising the grip and one as the guard (see fig. 1.1). The quillons of the sword are carved in the shape of two upward-curving confronting dragon heads, nearly symmetrical, that extend outwards and curve back towards the

⁷ For more on the symbolism of the sword in the Ottoman accession ceremony, see Douglas S. Brookes, “Of Swords and Tombs: Symbolism in the Ottoman Accession Ritual,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 17/ 2 (1993):1–22.

⁸ The sword was also a common object that was given as a diplomatic gift between empires. For more on the nature of gift-giving, particularly between the Ottomans and the Safavids, see Sinem Arcak, *Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501–1618* (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012).

⁹ Scholars have not reached a consensus as to exactly when the *shamshir* first appeared in the Middle East. While Kobylinski suggests that the sword-type was first seen as early as the seventh century, others argue that it was not until the eighth or ninth century that the *shamshir* first was used. Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* (Tübingen: Legat, 2006), 71.

blade. The dragons are intricately and finely carved, with each individual tooth distinguished from the next, and one of the open mouths show a nearly detached tongue—the other which was likely damaged and broken off. The second object of this group is a detached hilt of the same sword-type, now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (fig. 2). It is nearly identical to the hilt on the first sword except for the color of the nephrite jade being of the dark green variety. The dragon heads both have the carved tongues with teeth that appear to be of slightly lesser quality than the first saber. The third object of this group is another full saber, known and catalogued in Topkapı Palace Museum's collection but without any published photographs, and is described to be nearly identical to the other full saber but with a dark green jade hilt of lesser quality.¹⁰ No other known jade dragon swords from the Timurid period exist, but the existence of several objects of this form indicates that it was not an anomaly but developed as a specific type, and the similarities in the quality of craftsmanship suggest that these objects originated from the same royal workshop.

The similarities of these weapons to other objects from the fifteenth-century Timurid Empire provide further evidence of the establishment of a unified artistic identity during this period, along with the importance of the royal workshop, or *kitabkhana*, in playing a role in the consistency of production and the eventual dissemination of objects and images throughout the Timurid lands and beyond.¹¹ The use of jade and the incorporation of the dragon motif within the Islamic context also provide clues to the incorporation of Chinese elements, as well as complicating such notions of cultural exchange throughout the longer history of said elements within the Islamic lands. However, the lack of any in-depth study on this group of objects indicates

¹⁰ A photograph of questionable quality is available in Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, cat. no. 33.

¹¹ Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 166–168.

a gap in the scholarship of Timurid artistic production, particularly in synthesizing the research done on various stylistic elements of the period along with the significance of the Islamic sword. Within the existing literature, certain elements of Timurid artistic production have been extensively studied, yet material categorized under the “minor arts” have not received a similar amount of attention.¹² While Timurid architecture and manuscripts are relatively abundant and have captured the interest of scholars due to their importance within the empire’s artistic patronage and their influence on later periods, other mediums, while addressed in the scholarship, have been generally overlooked.

Because of the significance of the developments in artistic production during the Timurid period, along with the symbolism of the Islamic sword and the relative lack of study on weaponry, this group of Timurid *shamshirs* raise particular questions regarding the role of arms and armor, metalwork and stonework within the empire’s development of their distinct artistic legacy. An investigation into these swords could thus lead to a more comprehensive understanding of why certain artistic features were utilized the way they were and how they would have contributed to the greater symbolic significance of these particular object. This study aims to fill a small gap within the study of Timurid material culture, especially considering that this group of Timurid jade dragon swords and sword parts have simply been mentioned in broader studies relating to one or two aspects of their material significance—e.g. Timurid jade production—yet fail to investigate the significance that these elements hold for the object itself.¹³ The broader significances of the objects in communicating elements of

¹² The nature of the Islamic “minor arts” within art historical scholarship is discussed further in Chapter II.

¹³ This is evident in the brief mention of the Timurid dragon-headed jade handles and its usage on weaponry in Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 143.

sovereignty and legitimacy provide a broader framework in situating these objects within the greater study of Timurid art.

By utilizing a small group of objects as a starting point and then delving into the artistic, stylistic, sociocultural and political elements that surround their creation, I attempt to provide greater contextualization to better understand the place of these objects historically and further insight into how these elements may have contributed to the symbolic nature of these pieces of weaponry. I have approached these objects with careful consideration of the various issues surrounding them, taking into account many unavoidable limitations which will be addressed in the following chapter, and have thus utilized a methodology in which the material can be best studied. Because of the paucity of similar weapons from the Timurid period, the present study utilizes a thematic approach in order to bring light to the various elements that may have contributed to the creation of these objects. This method also allows for a discussion on a larger range of artifacts, not limiting the objects to arms and armor but situating them within a more comprehensive view of Timurid artistic production.

The small number of Timurid sabers necessitates that the themes of the present study are not necessarily limited to Islamic arms and armor per se. The thematic approach of my research allows for discussion that may lead to conclusions that do not necessarily come back to the objects themselves—instead making conclusions within broader topics relating to Timurid artistic production. Thus, while each chapter begins with the Timurid sabers as a starting point, the research extends much further beyond these few objects in an effort to create a more comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective.

The first chapter addresses the issues that complicate the place of arms and armor in Islamic art historical scholarship and the way in which the objects at the heart of this study have and continued to be understood. Through an analysis of the existing literature and the development of the scholarship, the chapter aims to essentially provide an understanding of the difficulties in studying these objects that are inherent to the field of art history, particularly as they relate to arms and armor. By providing an overview of the way in which the scholarship was shaped by the history of collections and the interests of the various types of institutions involved, the chapter highlights various issues regarding the inherent biases present in the available material. More general problems of Islamic art historical scholarship are also addressed, particularly concerning the nature of the “minor arts” and issues of categorization by medium and by field. Such issues thus necessitate certain precautions and limitations regarding how these objects can and should be studied and the chapter provides the reader with some of the implications of these effects and how they are addressed within the current study.

The second chapter presents the historical context of the period within which these objects were produced, with a focus on the rich artistic atmosphere that arose during the early fifteenth century. While the current art historical literature focuses on the Timurid Empire as a time of great artistic innovations, I attempt to shed more light on the nuances of the changes that occurred throughout the reign of the Timurids. The shifts in ideology that can be seen between the first rulers of the empire—Timur, Shahrukh and Ulugh Beg—call for a closer investigation of the general cultural, social and political climate of the early fifteenth century. The chapter focuses on the various ways in which these three rulers differed in how they established their legitimacy and how this became manifested during their respective reigns. Because of certain elements of the jade dragon sabers, I focus primarily on Ulugh Beg and his specific contributions

to the artistic production of the empire—particularly his own personal interest in the arts, his ties to the empire’s eponymous founder and his strengthened relations with Ming China.

The third chapter focuses specifically on the usage of nephrite jade in the Timurid Empire and the incorporation of the material into weaponry. By investigating the historical significance of jade in Central Asia, the research problematizes the usage of jade as a Chinese import and provides additional nuance to the importance that the material may have held for the Timurids. I then provide an analysis of how this material was used historically within the Islamic lands, particularly on objects of weaponry, and the symbolic nature of the material that may have developed before the rise of the Timurids. Within this discussion, an in-depth analysis of a passage on jade from the “Book on Minerology” (*al-Jamahir fi-Ma’rifat al-Jawahir*) by the eleventh-century Persian scholar al-Biruni (d. 1050) is provided for it reveals how the material may have been received during the late medieval period. Because Islamic jade production is commonly attributed to Ulugh Beg, I then go into an investigation of various Timurid jades—particularly a jug-type that would become associated with the Timurid Empire and utilized as a princely object—in an attempt to better understand why there was a sudden influx in the usage of the semi-precious stone. This is further expounded upon through an analysis of Timur’s cenotaph at the Gur-i Amir in Samarkand—a large block of nephrite jade brought back from Khotan and placed on the conqueror’s tomb by Ulugh Beg.

The dragon motif is the central focus of the fourth chapter. From its astrological and apotropaic significances to its princely connotations, the dragon has held numerous significances and has appeared in a wide variety of forms within the Islamic world. The inclusion of the motif on objects of weaponry and in scenes of battle raise further

questions. Through an investigation of the various iterations of the dragon—particularly the double-dragon motif that is seen on the sabers central to this study—and how the creature was used within the Timurid context, I aim to shed light on why the motif may have been included on swords and what elements of their symbolic nature may have contributed to their appearance and association with the arts of war. These arguments lead into an analysis of the *Dhu'l-faqar*, one of the most familiar images within the Islamic—particularly, Shi'ite—context, for the dragon-sword would eventually come to be connected to the famous bifurcated sword. The swords from the Timurid period are further analyzed in their possible connections to Ali and the symbol that would later be unequivocally associated with him.

Because the jade dragon swords, along with other princely Timurid objects, would later end up in the treasuries of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires, the fifth and final chapter attempts to understand the afterlife of these objects in the later Islamic empires of the early modern period. Through an analysis of the continuation of Persianate and Turko-Mongol artistic elements, I attempt to shed light on what the cultural contributions of the Timurids may have meant for the later empires and how their legacy was continued. I analyze the ways in which empire's developments of the Persianate artistic tradition would impact the way in which it was adapted and utilized by the Safavids and the Ottomans, despite not seeing themselves as descendants of the Timurids, within their own agendas for power and legitimacy. Because the Mughal Empire saw itself as the successor of the Timurid Empire, the usage of their predecessors' legacy manifested differently, yet the motivations were generally similar to the other two empires discussed in this chapter. I focus specifically on how the acquisition and subsequent hoarding of these objects would have contributed to an

empire's image of wealth, power and legitimacy, and how the Timurid legacy would perpetuate and adapt for generations after the demise of the empire itself.

The Timurid jade dragon sword allows for several discussions regarding particular aspects of the objects and provides clues into the nature of the artistic and cultural atmosphere out of which they were produced. I argue that the communication of sovereignty and the establishment of legitimacy are at the heart of these objects and their production, and by analyzing the individual rulers and the political and cultural climate of their reigns, more can be understood about why these peculiar objects came into existence. This study thus aims to open up a greater discussion on Timurid material culture—beyond the arts of the book and monumental architecture—and the impact of individuals in changing the scope and understanding of the legacy that the empire would later come to be remembered by.

CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF ISLAMIC ARMS AND ARMOR

Within the field of art history, arms and armor hold a precarious position. Relatively understudied, these objects are scattered across the various categorizations that make up the field's scholarship, straddling the line between art, historical object and collectible. The study of arms and armor necessitates a greater investigation of the limitations and biases that exist within the objects and existing literature. This chapter aims to shed light on the issues of Islamic art historical scholarship that pertain specifically to arms and armor, the way in which these objects have been understood (and skewed) historically and how the current scholarship and the various actors involved approach and define the material.

Studying Islamic Arms & Armor

One of the primary issues having continuously concerned scholars in the field that remains relevant in our discussion of arms and armor is the question of what exactly is “Islamic” about “Islamic art.”¹ While most objects were produced in lands where Islam was the dominant religion, many did not serve a particular religious function. However,

¹ This topic has been discussed at length by scholars dominating the field. Among others, see Oleg Grabar, “What Makes Islamic Art Islamic?,” in *Islamic Art and Beyond*, 4 vols. (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), 3: 1–3; Idem, “Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art,” *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 8; Idem, “The Study of Islamic Art: Sources and Promises,” *Journal of the David Collection* 1 (2003): 8–22; Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 85/1 (2003): 152–3; Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, “Frameworks of Islamic Art and Architectural History: Concepts, Approaches, and Historiographies,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, 2 vols. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 1: 1–56; and Avinoam Shalem, “What do we mean when we say ‘Islamic art’?,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): 1–18. For discussion on the shift away from this issue and the nuances brought about afterwards, see Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2012): 1–26.

the name of the field itself implies a spiritual overtone for all the objects classified within, and while there have been attempts and general pleas to create new terminology for the field and to reestablish new categorizations for the objects, the many attempts have not yet shown to be particularly fruitful.² While scholars have become more vigilant in their clarification of the issues concerning terminologies in their studies and have published significantly on the topic of how to improve the field as a whole, the general public and even some within the academia have yet to fully understand the necessity of acknowledging these nuances. Unfortunately, the overgeneralizations of Islamic art still hold.³

The emphasis on the religious qualities of the objects is clear when understanding objects of arms and armor. In particular, the concept of *jihad*—defined as “the only legal warfare in Islam”—with the history of the Crusades and the symbol of the Islamic sword emphasize the religious connotations of military objects in the Near and Middle East.⁴ David Alexander—one of the most prolific scholars in this

² As a result of this discussion, one of the most noticeable changes within the field came with the renaming of the Islamic art galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In an effort to address the implications of the term “Islam,” the name was changed to “Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia,” with greater focus on the regional classifications. For further discussion on the re-opening and re-naming of the galleries, see Nasser Rabbat, “What’s in a Name? The New ‘Islamic Art’ Galleries at the Met,” in *Artforum* 50/8 (2012): 75–78. For further discussion on the general topic of terminologies and categorizations of Islamic art, see Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1973), 1–18; Shalem, “What do we mean,” 6–9; Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, “Why Persian Art Needs to be Studied and Collected,” in *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 10–15.

³ For more on the problems of a monolithic Islamic art and the general fragmentations within the field, see Necipoğlu, “The Concept,” 4–12; and Shalem, “What do we mean,” 9–14. In reference to the breaking up of the field into subdivisions, Grabar discusses the potential benefits given the limitations of the field in Grabar, “Reflections,” 2–3.

⁴ Several books have been written about Islam’s role in warfare historically and the general concept of *jihad*, which include introductions or conclusions that address 9/11 and the perception of the religion in America. Amongst others, see George F. Nafziger and Mark W. Walton, *Islam at War* (Westport, CT; London: Praeger, 2003); Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); and Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009). Definition of *jihad* from John L. Esposito (ed.), “Jihad,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The symbol of the Islamic sword is generally attributed to the “verse of the sword” in the Qur’an (sura 9:5); For more on the sword of

burgeoning field—has published a study regarding this very topic and also includes it as the first topic of discussion in his introduction to the Nasser D. Khalili Collection catalogue of Islamic arms and armor.⁵ The association should be further problematized when considering that *jihad* does not literally mean warfare but can be understood closer in terms to a pious struggle, frequently appearing in the Qur'an without military implications.⁶ Within these studies, the connection of these objects to religious symbolism is made rather abruptly and indicates that a more nuanced approach is needed when studying the arts of war.⁷

Of the few catalogues and publications available, there is also a great emphasis placed on the concept of war itself.⁸ Many art historians have approached weaponry in this manner, completely disassociating certain elements from the object as a whole and focusing primarily on the practical use of the piece of weaponry or armor. However, this approach is itself limiting and presents issues when trying to understand how these objects were used contextually. That is, however, not to say that all scholarship on these objects have been produced within the military lens. Marthe Bernus-Taylor acknowledges the significance of the objects beyond this context in the aptly named

Islam, see Ünsal Yücel, *Islamic Swords and Swordsmiths* (Istanbul: O.I.C. Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture; IRCICA, 2001), 5.

⁵ David Alexander, "Jihad and Islamic arms and armour," *Gladius* XXII (2002): 201–234; David Alexander, *The Arts of War: Arms and Armour of the 7th to 19th Centuries* (London: The Nour Foundation, 1992), 11.

⁶ "Seventeen derivatives of jihād occur altogether forty- one times in eleven Meccan texts and thirty Medinan ones, with the following five meanings: striving because of religious belief (21), war (12), non-Muslim parents exerting pressure, that is, jihād, to make their children abandon Islam (2), solemn oaths (5), and physical strength (1)," in Ahmed Al-Dawoody, *The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 56.

⁷ In his analysis of a Timurid cross-guard, Alexander connects the dragon imagery on the quillons with the Sword of Ali (*dhu'l-faqar*) and relates it to swords found all across the Islamic world throughout several centuries. Alexander, *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 151; However, Blair and Bloom address the issues of assuming the same for all imagery throughout this very fragmented field by asking, "How does one move beyond the individual case to the larger picture? Does every representation of a rabbit or a mouse mean the same thing?" Blair and Bloom, "The Mirage," 172.

⁸ These include Alexander, *The Arts of War*, 11–24; and Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* (Tübingen: Legat, 2006), 27–47.

introduction, “Arms Speak of More than War,” to the exhibition catalogue for The Furusiyya Art Foundation’s Collection.⁹ Bernus-Taylor prefaces the article by emphasizing the importance of these objects outside of their use in battle and explains the symbolism, imagery and general cultural significance of the material. Contrarily, some scholars completely disregard the functional and practical use of arms and armor.¹⁰ It might be more accurate to say that scholars tend to approach these objects with an emphasis on a single perspective without going in-depth to the various other facets in which the material is significant. While the military, along with the religious, aspect in the creation and use of Islamic arms and armor should still be a primary factor to consider when approaching this genre, an understanding of the nuances and the multi-dimensional aspect of these objects should be compulsory for a more honest representation in the scholarship.

The abundance of objects in collections also presents some problems to those working within this field. Because of the many limitations, including the lack of scholars and general resources, only a handful of the objects have been sufficiently catalogued, and it is impossible to understand what actually exists in museum storerooms.¹¹ In the Topkapı Palace Museum, there are 11,000 objects within the arms and armor collection alone and only a handful of catalogues published by the institution.¹² Because of the lack of study on arms and armor, the few publications available also tend to be more encyclopedic in character, providing a more general overview of the scope of the collection, with little focused research on any individual

⁹ Marthe Bernus-Taylor, “Arms Speak of More than War,” in *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection*, ed. B. Mohamed (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), 9–17.

¹⁰ Particularly regarding an object’s ornamentation and decoration, such as in Aydın, *The Arms of the Sultans: The Arms Collection of Topkapı Palace* (Istanbul: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism Publications, 2014), 86.

¹¹ Blair and Bloom, “The Mirage,” 165, 167.

¹² Aydın, *The Arms*, 9.

object. In his study on eight turban helmets, Alexander explains that his research should be understood, “as a first step in solving a problem whose unraveling will be completed only when the hundreds of such objects in Istanbul have been fully analyzed and grouped according to their type and epigraphical content.”¹³ The lack of study on these objects has also resulted in sweeping assumptions which necessitate a reevaluation of the objects previously studied. In his study on Islamic armor inscriptions, for example, L. P. Elwell-Sutton notes that not much attention has been given to these objects and that within the few studies that exist, there are many inaccurate generalizations.¹⁴ While steps are being taken toward improved publications and catalogues of these objects, the suggestions made by scholars for the field seem more like hopeful aspirations than concrete potentialities at least for the foreseeable future.

The sheer number of objects needing to be parsed through has also resulted the privileging of particular genres within the scholarship. Throughout the field of Islamic art, a greater emphasis has generally been placed on the arts of the court.¹⁵ Specifically with the weapons of the elite, this brings about further implications regarding the issue of functionality already discussed, for many collections develop a focus on objects that had never been used in battle. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 2006 catalogue for their collection of Islamic arms and armor, almost every single sword is richly ornamented, many with gold inscriptions and precious jewels.¹⁶ A catalogue published by the Topkapı Palace Museum is similar and even asserts that it was due to their ornamentation and beauty that “the role and place of the sword which was originally

¹³ David Alexander, “Two Aspects of Islamic Arms and Armor,” in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 18 (1983): 97–109.

¹⁴ L. P. Elwell-Sutton, “Persian armour inscriptions,” in *Islamic Arms and Armour*, ed. R. Elgood (London: Scholar Press, 1979), 6.

¹⁵ Blair and Bloom note the privileging of these items and the “recurrent use of such words as ‘princely,’ ‘courtly,’ ‘empire,’ and ‘sultans,’ in the titles of these exhibitions and books,” in Blair and Bloom, “The Mirage,” 161.

¹⁶ Alexander, *Islamic Arms*, 2015.

used as a war weapon in the course of history were equal to the other precious masterpieces of arts.”¹⁷ Because few publishers are willing to invest in more ambitious projects, especially those that would include more of the general every-day arms and armor, there is an even greater lack of available material. Scholars are thus limited to what is more easily accessible and what has been made available through the curator’s or cataloguer’s taste, hindering further research and skewing the overall nature of the field.¹⁸

For arms and armor, considering that very few of the objects have been catalogued and are found in publications, material is generally inaccessible to scholars. However, this situation is slowly ameliorated as interest in these objects grow, digitization efforts become more plentiful and allow for increased online access, and more studies are conducted by those who have access to more restricted countries. In 2006, for example, Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani published an impressively extensive catalogue of objects located in the collections of ten Iranian museums.¹⁹ Many objects were illustrated for the first time, including examples of arms and armor that simply cannot be found in any of the other available publications. The publication also included in-depth information on the physical qualities of every object and thoroughly-researched articles on weapon typologies and military history.²⁰ Khorasani’s contributions will likely prove to be highly invaluable for the course of

¹⁷ Aydın, *The Arms*, 86.

¹⁸ Aydın, *The Arms*, 165.

¹⁹ Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, *Arms and Armor from Iran: The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period* (Tübingen: Legat, 2006).

²⁰ Every object in the catalogue includes detailed measurements, translations of inscriptions, and written descriptions of decoration. The publication begins with several thoroughly researched chapters on topics ranging from histories of each weapon type, the importance of the weapons culturally and in warfare, and even background information on martial practices of warriors.

future scholarship within the field, and has been mentioned as “possibly the most notable achievement in this field for the last decade.”²¹

Issues with the History of Collecting Arms & Armor

The concerns that arise from what is displayed within museum galleries and how objects are selected for study stem from the overarching issue of the initial creation of the collections themselves. Grabar addresses this issue, recalling a remark made by Laurence Sickman (1906–88), “that the field of Islamic art was (or had been) dominated by personal and mercantile concerns which had little to do with the intellectual and critical functions of scientific and academic knowledge”.²² While this can be said about the numerous facets of art history, this can be argued to be moreso applicable to Islamic art specifically because the collection came before any study. This can be contrasted with the study of European and Far Eastern art which is considered to have had a tradition of scholarship that developed more separately from its collections history.²³ In the early days of Islamic art historical scholarship, collectors had a significant influence in the development of the foundation for the field that future scholarship would build upon and attempt to change and improve.²⁴

Linda Komaroff also observes the cyclical nature of this situation in that, “what was collected initially dictated what was studied, and what was studied has helped to refine collecting patterns.”²⁵ Due to the nature of the objects and the issues of

²¹ Kadoi and Szántó, “Why Persian Art,” 11, footnote 38.

²² Oleg Grabar, “Implications of Collecting Islamic Art,” in *Discovering Islamic Art: scholars, collectors and collections, 1850–1950*, ed. S. Vernoit (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 195.

²³ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁴ Linda Komaroff, “Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art,” *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 1–8.

²⁵ Komaroff, “Exhibiting,” 2.

availability and accessibility, the collections themselves have greatly influenced the general basis of the field and the scholarship available, and subsequently perpetuated the tendencies back into the motivations of later collectors. Because the history of collecting Islamic art and the general premise of these collections have problematic implications, the scholarship produced within the field has developed limitations due to these realities. While much has been written about the general history of certain museums and collections, there is little discussed about the ways in which certain collections themselves have skewed the progression of scholarship. Because of the nature of collecting itself and the expeditious acquiring of objects by nineteenth and twentieth century collectors, it would be restricting for scholars to not address these caveats. This facet of art history should be discussed further, deserving a greater study than can be presented here, which will allow for more nuance in approaching these objects and addressing gaps in the current scholarship.²⁶

When observing the arms and armor catalogues of major collections, the contributions and tastes of these collectors are quite evident and the intentions of said collectors should be further investigated. As previously discussed, there is a tendency for scholarship to privilege certain objects, but this is a particularly relevant issue when understanding that collectors had their own individual preferences in amassing these objects. In her introduction to the catalogue of the Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection, Marthe Bernus-Taylor claims that, “It is the collection of a man of taste, a refined aesthete [...]”²⁷ When considering the notion of taste when it comes to these

²⁶ More interest in the history of collections and their implications has grown, however, as can be seen in a number of conferences, including “Collecting and Curating Islamic Art in the 21st Century,” on November 8–22, 2013 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, “Collecting the Muslim World” on November 2–3, 2017 at Universiteit Leiden, and “Historical Arms and Armour in Museum and Private Collections” on October 24–26, 2017 at The Moscow Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum and Heritage Site.

²⁷ Bernus-Taylor, “Arms Speak,” 9. The Furusiyya Art Foundation is named after the historical Arabic term used for medieval knightly martial exercise, particularly during the Crusades and the Mamluk period.

collections, however, Orientalist motivations are impossible to avoid. North notes in reference to Islamic arms and armor that objects were collected, “not on the basis of their historical interest but for their lavish decoration and unusual form.”²⁸ This is particularly so when understanding that historically the collections rose out of the interests of nineteenth and twentieth century collectors.²⁹ While it should not be considered a hard truth that there are Orientalist overtones for those interested in the material since, as some argue, objects were collected for a variety of reasons, this can generally be seen in the intentions of many known collectors.³⁰ However, the personal enjoyment that stems from collecting should not necessarily be condemned, but rather addressed and considered when focusing on the handful of collections available to scholars.³¹

Ambiguities and Issues of Categorization

The issues resulting from having strict categorizations by media and taxonomy within Islamic art history need also to be addressed when considering the limitations facing

For more on *furusiyya*, see Guilhem Amin Douillet and David Ayalon, “Furūsiyya,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0226; The usage of this term in studies of Islamic arts of war is seen in another work by David Alexander, entitled *Furusiyya: The Horse in Art of the Near East*. By utilizing this term in both of these instances, the implicit relation of the objects to the Crusades causes issues in the way in which the pieces of Islamic arms and armor should be understood. The usage of *furusiyya* in this way results in a reductive understanding of both the objects and the terminology, as discussed previously with the issues of *jihad*; see David Alexander, *Furusiyya: The Horse in Art of the Near East*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: King Abdul Aziz Public Library, 1996).

²⁸ North, *An Introduction*, 7.

²⁹ For an overview of collections, see Stephen Vernoit (ed.), *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections, 1850 – 1950* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000), particularly 1–61. See also David J. Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880–1910,” *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000): 9–38.

³⁰ In his overview of the history of the British Museum’s collection of Islamic arms and armor, Malcolm Mercer attempts to distance the history of the collection from the debates surrounding Orientalism, calling for a more nuanced approach. Malcolm Mercer, “Collecting Oriental and Asiatic Arms and Armour: The Activities of British and East India Company Officers, c. 1800–1850,” *Arms & Armour* 15/1 (2018): 1–21, particularly 2–7.

³¹ Grabar, “Implications,” 200.

the study of arms and armor. Despite having been discussed and disputed extensively, the field still finds itself limited to these divisions.³² The ambiguities of classifying the genre of arms and armor present a particular case within the current scholarship. While it is generally considered as a subset of the better-studied categorization that is metalwork, these objects still do not hold a definitive place within this grouping. Despite this not having been previously addressed, the reason for this may stem from the existence of certain pieces of arms and armor that are not composed of any metal. If this classification is imposed on these objects, an Ottoman wicker shield or a piece of armor made of leather, one of the more standard materials for Islamic defensive wear, could not be included alongside a piece of chainmail or a steel *yataghan*.³³ However, these objects are arguably better understood when placed together, as opposed to having steel sabers and iron chainmail in a separate category. Despite a general understanding of weaponry as metalwork, however, most catalogues of Islamic metalwork also do not mention any pieces of arms and armor at all, focusing on more decorative, daily-use items.³⁴ One catalogue acknowledges arms and armor as a major category of Islamic metalwork but chooses to focus solely on vessels, utensils and jewelry—a common pattern in the available metalwork catalogues.³⁵ Due to the ambiguity resulting from the various materials used, the objects are considerably better served in catalogues specific to the genre and attempts to further categorize the material would be futile.

³² For the problems of Western categorizations on Islamic art, see Shalem “What do we mean,” 7–9.

³³ A *yataghan* is an Ottoman guard-less sword with a double-curved blade, used from the mid-sixteenth to the late-nineteenth century.

³⁴ In his study on Islamic metalwork, Melikian-Chirvani only mentions of swords are those that are depicted on other pieces of metalwork, specifically candlesticks and a bowl. Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, *Islamic Metalwork from the Iranian World: 8th–18th Centuries* (London: The Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982). No studies on weaponry are found in, to name a few, Linda Komaroff, *The Golden Disk of Heaven: Metalwork of Timurid Iran* (Costa Mesa, CA; New York: Mazda Publishers, 1992); Eva Baer, *Metalwork in Medieval Islamic Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983); or James W. Allan, *Islamic Metalwork: The Nuhad Es-Said Collection* (New York: Sotheby Publications, 1982).

³⁵ Rachel Ward, “What is Islamic Metalwork,” in *Islamic Metalwork* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 9–19.

The scholarship is further limited when considering the many studies that select individual pieces that fit within the scheme of a more specialized investigation of a certain object or material. However, this produces further ambiguity in where to place these objects when producing a study on a particular medium. When looking specifically at the objects of Timurid weaponry, for example, jade hilts are studied in relation to Islamic stonework and the connection of the object is made solely based on the material of just one portion of the object.³⁶ In one of these studies, the scabbard is pictured next to the sword, albeit not in its entirety, yet no details concerning it are mentioned in the associated text.³⁷ The various aspects that are so crucial to the object are ignored and the function of the object as a piece of weaponry is overlooked. If one wanted to understand the material of the blade itself, the information would have to be found in a completely different and separate study.³⁸ This situation is, of course, not limited to military objects exclusively or within the context of Islamic art, but the ambiguity of these particular objects seems to be more evident than in others.³⁹ While the current situation allows for a broader and more diverse range of scholarship in which these objects are included, conducting research within this field necessitates piecing together numerous approaches to produce even a general understanding of a particular piece of weaponry or armor.

³⁶ Kadoi incorporates a Timurid cross-guard into her study on jade without mentioning the weaponry aspect of the object, solely focusing on the material and iconography in Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 109–10. A cross-guard, pictured as the full saber with the scabbard, is mentioned only in regard to the Timurid's use of jade in Lentz and Lowry's study. Though the entire object is shown, albeit with half the scabbard cut off, the function of the object is only mentioned briefly in the catalogued description but not in context of the Timurid art tradition as a whole. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 222–6. For further discussion on the isolation of motifs in the field, see Grabar, "An Art," 17.

³⁷ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 222–6.

³⁸ James W. Allan, *Persian Metal Technology: 70–1300 AD* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979).

³⁹ Kadoi and Szántó identify arms and armor as its own genre of the minor arts and lists it separately from metalwork in Kadoi and Szántó, "Why Persian Art," 11.

The ambiguity of Islamic arms and armor is further accentuated by the nature of the objects themselves. Many of the catalogued objects are thought to be composites of parts from various regions and time periods. A sword could have a grip from eighteenth or nineteenth century Mughal India but a blade dated from seventeenth century Persia, while another saber could be considered Ottoman while having a European blade.⁴⁰ This is not a surprising phenomenon considering that the weapons trade was quite extensive across Eurasia with numerous centers famed for producing specific parts or types of weaponry.⁴¹ Considering their practical usage, many of these objects would also have parts replaced as needed. This has been noted by Hugh Kennedy who observes in his study of early Islamic swords that, “Their dating is not clear and the hilts and mountings have certainly been replaced [...]”⁴² Though this observation was made about weaponry from an earlier period, the same can be said for later material as well. Aside from replacement needed due to general wear and tear, objects of ceremonial and religious significance also face similar issues. As symbolically significant objects would be passed down, new decoration would be attached to pieces of arms and armor according to the needs and tastes of the subsequent owners. This can be seen on what is believed to be a sword of the Prophet Muhammad, now in the Chamber of the Sacred Relics in Topkapı Palace, which features a seventh-century blade and seventeenth-century Ottoman fittings (fig. 41).

While the origin of these objects is of primary importance, there is a need to study the material after it was initially produced. Many of these objects were not simply decorative, but rather were used and subsequently altered over the course of time. In

⁴⁰ Examples from Alexander, *Islamic Arms and Armor*, cat. 61, 164–5; cat. 66, 174–5.

⁴¹ For example, al-Kindi provides information on notable centers for steel production in his treatise. Al-Kindi, “On swords and their kinds,” tr. R. G. Hoyland and B. Gilmour, *Medieval Islamic Swords and Swordmaking* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2006), 13–44.

⁴² Kennedy, “Weapons,” 175.

their discussion of a monograph on the Great Mongol *Shahnama*, Blair and Bloom note the issues of the author's disregard of the object's history aside from specific moments deemed significant—its initial creation in the fourteenth century and its subsequent dismemberment during the twentieth century. Later scholarship on those intervening years has revealed more about the work itself and how the object was received in later centuries. They note, “In other words, scholars of Islamic art, like those in other disciplines of art history, are (belatedly) taking up the question of what happened to works of art after they were made.”⁴³

The realities of this field present several obvious problems for scholars. One of the major issues is in the identification of an object. While a blade could have a certain inscription indicating the time period or location in which it was produced, it cannot be assumed that every portion of the object would fit under the same description. Even the inscription itself can be completely unreliable. Hundreds of saber blades, for example, are inscribed with the name of a famous late fifteenth to early sixteenth century swordsmith and it is highly unlikely for every object to be genuine.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, because of the lack of available and known material, particularly for those created before the seventeenth century, it is difficult to distinguish exactly what was truly from a particular region or time and many objects still have yet to be classified.⁴⁵ Oftentimes, objects are labeled vaguely with broad categorizations, such as “Persian” or general “Turkmen,” because of the difficulty in understanding their true origin.⁴⁶ While

⁴³ Blair and Bloom, “The Mirage,” 164.

⁴⁴ For an example of one such saber and a further discussion about the inscription, see Alexander, *Islamic Arms*, cat. 64, 170–1.

⁴⁵ In his study on early Islamic military equipment, Hugh Kennedy notes the difficulty in dating objects due to the lack of material evidence available. Kennedy, “Weapons,” 168.

⁴⁶ Stuart W. Phyr, “American Collectors and the Formation of the Metropolitan Museum’s Collection Islamic Arms and Armor,” in *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. D. Alexander (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 7. This issue is present for the majority of the non-Ottoman objects in the Istanbul Military Museum.

scholars have tried to bridge this lack of information by relying on other visual material, particularly miniature painting, very little can be discerned regarding the minute details of individual pieces of arms and armor.⁴⁷ Despite the significant information revealed and better understood from this material, many gaps in the scholarship still persist.

The field of arms and armor presents an even greater ambiguity within the context of art history as a whole. While oftentimes these objects are included in art museums and displayed as having artistic value, the discourse surrounding and the presentation of this material suggests that scholars and museum administrators still have not come to a general consensus as to whether these objects can be classified as art. In the catalogue of the Topkapı Palace arms and armor collection, as mentioned before, there is an explicit claim that it is because of the beauty of the objects and the detailed ornamentation that allows for these pieces to transcend into the higher realm that is art.⁴⁸ However, this understanding of art is not only problematic in the theoretical sense but results in major issues when approaching the vast majority of what is considered to be arms and armor. Not only are there many less extravagant pieces of weaponry and defense wear that fill collections, this categorization of art further creates reason to privilege certain material and consider only particular items as having a place within art museums. This causes some material to be completely dismissed from the field as a whole which is detrimental to the study of art history. It makes little sense to definitively deem an elaborately decorated Ottoman saber as art while dismissing a garment worn by an officer from the same period as simply a remnant of military history when both contribute immensely to the same research areas.

⁴⁷ Some instances of this include: Michael V. Gorelik, “Oriental armour of the Near and Middle East from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries as shown in works of art,” in *Islamic Arms and Armour*, ed. R. Elgood (London: Scholar Press, 1979), 30–63; Re-visualizations of Islamic military equipment from miniature paintings were created for the Osprey Military’s *Men-at-Arms* series by Angus McBride.

⁴⁸ Aydın, *The Arms*, 86.

The ambiguity of arms and armor is accentuated by their separation and oftentimes exclusion of the genre as a whole. Komaroff observes that in contemporary practices of displaying Islamic art, there is generally no separation by medium and that these objects are displayed as unified.⁴⁹ However, this is simply not true for military objects. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, there is a single department dedicated to the arts of the Islamic lands, encompassing a vast range of media, from arts of the book and glassware even to elements of architecture, yet there is a completely separate department for arms and armor. While the galleries dedicated to the Islamic art collection do occasionally display military objects within their exhibitions “on rotating loan,” the divisions between the two are quite evident and emphasize a greater disconnect of arms and armor from the field as a whole.⁵⁰ By having an entire department devoted to the study of arms and armor, far-reaching comparisons may occur. However, because certain elements exist with the general history of arms and armor that connect these regions—since many of these faraway lands were in contact through trade and many artifacts were transported across large distances—the grouping of these objects in this way may allow for a greater understanding of weapons history and the exchanges that occurred between different lands and cultures. The implications that arise from a medium-based classification call for a more nuanced approach and should be further investigated.

In addition to the manner in which arms and armor are treated within a particular collection, the nature of the museums housing these objects need also be scrutinized. Because of their significance to military and national history in addition to their significance as art, several countries today have invested in the development of a

⁴⁹ Komaroff, “Exhibiting,” 3.

⁵⁰ Phyr, “American Collectors,” 16.

separate state museum dedicated to showcasing the nation's involvement in war. Within these institutions, pieces of arms and armor make up the main foci of the exhibitions, as they serve as a means of visualization in the telling of these events. Many countries simply have dedicated armories, such as the Kremlin Armoury Chamber in Moscow and the Royal Armouries in Leeds, that may not have particular nationalistic concerns but serve as a completely separate institution in which these objects are housed. In some instances, these objects were placed in treasuries because of their valuable decoration of precious stones and metals.⁵¹ While the categorization of these objects should not necessarily be considered detrimental to the field, the separation of this genre as such presents a few hindrances to art historical scholarship as mentioned previously. Because each type of museum holds different missions in the display of their collections and their own unique collections history, it is inevitable that the curation and research surrounding the objects would be skewed toward a particular perspective.

One of the most extensive collections of military objects, for example, is located within the Istanbul Military Museum (Harbiye Askerî Müzesi), operating under the auspices of the Military History and Strategic Studies Directorate of the Turkish General Staff.⁵² With undeniable nationalistic overtones, the museum organizes the collection in such a way that the objects support a specific narrative, with an unsurprising focus on Ottoman and early Republican Turkish military history. In other galleries dedicated to the arms and armor of other empires, little textual information is provided and many of the objects are not individually labeled. The vitrines also at times

⁵¹ Some treasuries include The National Jewelry Treasury in Tehran and The Imperial Treasury in Vienna. In Russia, many objects were kept in the Tsar's Treasury before being transformed into a museum by Emperor Alexander I in 1806, Elena Yurievna Gagarina, "Preface," in *The Tsars and the East: Gifts from Turkey and Iran in the Moscow Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), vii.

⁵² As opposed to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Directorate General of Cultural Assets and Museums that is generally in charge of managing cultural institutions throughout Turkey.

appear cluttered with objects, and there seems to be a goal in displaying as much material as possible.⁵³ The lack of focus on ornament or material significance of the objects, particularly of the non-Turkish material, is also evident, especially in comparison to the displays and exhibitions in art museums and galleries. Rather than emphasizing the value of an individual object, the secondary nature of the material to the museum's desired overarching historical narrative is palpable.

The "Who" behind the Scholarship

In addressing the limitations that stem from the histories of these collections, those who are producing research and writing about the material are also necessary to discuss. Within the study of arms and armor, the major actors in the field are curators and those affiliated with these institutions. While museums have been crucial to the furthering of scholarship and should not necessarily be criticized in their production of knowledge, an issue exists in the disconnect between the various types of institutions and scholars who are producing the research. With arms and armor, because there are only a few academics covering this material, the field is skewed almost completely toward what those in the museum are producing, which presents further limitations. Most significantly, an issue exists with the fact that curators focus primarily on what exists within their own collections. Even when other objects are brought into their research, it is clear that the structural basis for their study was in what they saw and found in their

⁵³ While there are obvious benefits to limiting the number of objects displayed, accessibility of the objects should be considered a strength in the way in which the Istanbul Military Museum displays their material. That said, Grabar asks, "[...] can one appropriately talk of 'works of art' when dozens, if not hundreds of similar objects are involved?" and suggests that perhaps they are better understood as, "ethnographic documents closely tied to life," and "more meaningful in large numbers and series than as single creations." However, he acknowledges the success of the Damascus room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which selects representative objects as opposed to displaying multiples of the same object, in Grabar, "An Art," 15.

own storerooms. Also, because most publications within the field are also collections catalogues, there is no need to extend research beyond a single collection. Instead, the focus is placed on giving a more encyclopedic overview of the collection as a whole, with definitions and descriptions of each weapon and armor type and how they were used, and minimal focus on any individual object.

When surveying the limited amount of literature published on arms and armor, military historians also make up a part of the few scholars producing work in this field. Their publications center on the objects mainly in an effort to understand the battle tactics of the time period and empire and the ways in which the soldiers would have fought or defended themselves. Usually, these analyses focus little on the ornament of the objects but rather the physical nature and materiality of the object as to understand the weapon or piece of armor within the battle context. This is particularly prevalent throughout Osprey's Men-at-Arms series. In David Nicolle's study within this series on Timur's warfare tactics, the text focuses particularly on strategy and the political situation during the period but also goes into detail about the types of arms and armor used. However, the emphasis is on the utility of these objects and how they would be used by soldiers. This is particularly evident from the brief mention of a jade cross-guard which Nicolle quickly dismisses, describing it as "impractical" and thus not serving any function in battle.⁵⁴ Though the ornament of these objects is integral in their creation, with as much effort placed into the intricate detailing as was considered for its usage, military historians fail to engage with the form and materiality of objects in their interest in function. The individual piece of weaponry or armor, as is also regarded

⁵⁴ David Nicolle, *The Age of Tamerlane* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1990), 37–41.

within other genres of the arts when viewed by historians, is overlooked and the typology as a whole is central to the study within this field.⁵⁵

Within the field of arms and armor, another group of so-called specialists that are often disregarded in academia deserve some mention. In describing one of the significant contributors to the study of Persian art, Arthur Upham Pope, Komaroff comments, “It is today somewhat difficult to define exactly what Pope was—scholar, dealer, charlatan, opportunist, entrepreneur? Perhaps, he should be viewed simply as the ultimate “spin-doctor” for Persian art and culture.”⁵⁶ While Islamic art historical scholarship has generally moved beyond this and is today dominated by academics and museum researchers, Komaroff’s description of Pope would not be too far off to describe certain contributors to the field of arms and armor. Self-proclaimed connoisseurs and hobbyists of military objects have contributed significantly to the research produced and are the main source of continual interest in these objects. Some within the field are often not limited to research but are also involved in collecting and dealing themselves, as seen in active online weaponry forums. Khorasani could quite possibly be classified as one such hobbyist, taking into account his professional background in a completely unrelated field, yet his publication on Iranian arms and armor should be considered invaluable for future studies.⁵⁷ Though the scholarship produced by those within this community should be closely scrutinized, the same could be said about the work of academics and their contributions should not be overlooked or perceived as insignificant to the progress of the research. Much of the current

⁵⁵ Some examples of this approach to arms and armor include Erik Hildinger, *Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia, 500 B.C. to 1700 A.D.* (New York: Sarpedon, 1997); Kelly DeVries and Robert D. Smith, *Medieval Weapons: An Illustrated History of their Impact* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007); and Andrew Ayton, “Arms, Armour, and Horses,” in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. M. Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186–208.

⁵⁶ Komaroff, “Exhibiting,” 7.

⁵⁷ The several forewords included in Khorasani’s publication are all written by several independent scholars and hobbyists, most if not all of whom he had met through a popular online weaponry forum.

literature and interest has developed and progressed due to the investment of this community.

Implications for the Present Study

While any definite solution to these issues is difficult to determine, acknowledging these concerns is one step towards improving future scholarship of the field. The lack of known weapons from a specific time period, which are also subject to the difficulties in identification and lack of access, and insufficient resources to alleviate these issues present continuous obstacles in any future research on these objects. The limited interest from the fields of academia, along with the inherent biases of the past scholarship and within the collections themselves, further complicate how these objects continue to be understood.

Despite these difficulties, approaching arms and armor with a broader understanding of the various elements at play in an object's significance will allow for more comprehensive and expansive study. Greater investment on the part of both museum curators and academics, especially with the accurate cataloguing of more unknown objects sitting away in storerooms, will be a significant step towards closing this gap within the field. Increased interest will also allow for further consideration of arms and armor as a categorization, likely to lead to a more mindful incorporation of these objects into the greater field of Islamic art history. Future efforts in further digitizing collections of arms and armor and providing more broader access going beyond geographic boundaries will also be a necessary step in alleviating many of the problems facing the field.

Despite the obstacles faced here, particularly with the lack of extant Timurid weaponry, this study attempts to address the objects while accounting for the various limitations inherent within the material. While not all of the issues outlined here are necessarily relevant to the jade Timurid dragon swords, this study attempts to provide a different perspective in understanding which significances could have been attached to these objects that previous studies on pieces of Islamic arms and armor have tended to overlook. Thus, this study covers not only the possible cultural, political and material elements of these weapons, but it aims to shed light on how they may have been understood in different contexts beyond their initial time and place of production. The research emphasizes the symbolic, iconographic and material significances in order to produce a more multi-dimensional understanding of the objects, resulting in conclusions that go even beyond the small number of weapons central to this thesis. Through this study, I aim to present the material by utilizing a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to the many aspects of Islamic weaponry and to better situate these objects within the overall framework of Timurid art. Beginning with the jade dragon swords, this study aims to provide a more dynamic and multifaceted study that allows for further insight into the larger picture of Timurid artistic production and the greater impact that the empire had on Islamic art history.

CHAPTER II

THE TIMURID EMPIRE AND ARTISTIC PRODUCTION DURING THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The rise of Timur (1336–1405) in the late fourteenth century was swift; his armies expanded the empire's foothold drastically from the regions of Transoxiana and Khorasan within just a few decades.¹ Timur quickly became known as a fearsome warlord, utilizing his keen political skills to claim sovereignty over a vast amount of land and a diverse range of cultures and peoples. At the empire's height, the Timurid Empire covered the expanse of Persia, Mesopotamia, Armenia, significant portions of Afghanistan and Azerbaijan, and would extend to as far as eastern Anatolia and parts of India. While the empire would eventually come to shrink following the death of the empire's eponymous founder during an abandoned campaign to capture China, the role of later Timurid rulers in further establishing the empire's claim to power was significant, leaving an impact on the longer lasting legacy of the empire.² While none of Timur's successors were ever able to achieve comparable military successes, their artistic, literary and scientific advances during the fifteenth century—that continued and refined what began under Timur—would establish the Timurid Empire's place as an artistic and cultural powerhouse. The reigns of Shahrukh and particularly Ulugh Beg—with their distinct ideologies and political agendas—are particularly noteworthy in understanding the rich cultural environment that developed during the early fifteenth

¹ For a complete study on the life and reign of Timur, see Beatrice Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

² V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), II: 53–54.

century. This period would give rise to some of the most defining elements of the Timurid artistic legacy that would continue on long after the demise of the empire in 1526.

This chapter aims to provide a historical context to the period within which the elements of the jade dragon sword highlighted in this study were most prominently incorporated into the empire's artistic production. An overview of the dynamics between the Sharukh and Ulugh Beg aims to shed light on the greater political and sociocultural elements that allowed for the rise of certain changes within the royal workshop. Because of Ulugh Beg's direct influence in allowing for specific elements of the sword to appear within the Timurid artistic mode, his reign and development of Samarkand will be of particular focus. The differences in how each ruler established their legitimacy—utilizing traditions of the past and in changing the landscape of their cities—would also shift the cultural dynamics of the time, along with Ulugh Beg's particular interest in China, are also highlighted here. In providing a more comprehensive view of the early fifteenth century, in addition to an overview of what would lead to the distinct Timurid artistic tradition, this chapter aims to provide a picture of the conditions out of which the jade dragon swords were produced and shed light on the importance of certain policies and agendas that would lead to significant changes and developments for Timurid art.

Ulugh Beg as Governor and Ruler

Upon the death of Timur in 1405, the empire became divided due to succession disputes and a period of political unrest would last for several years.³ The unity of the empire was threatened as infighting increased—the various potential successors declaring war against each other and the empire breaking up into separate principalities. Since the many sons and grandsons of Timur who were previously appointed as the governors no longer had to submit to an authority, they declared themselves as independent rulers over their own domain and governed accordingly. On May 13, 1409, Shahrukh, Timur's son, would occupy the Timurid capital and come to be recognized as the legitimate successor of his father. The expanse of territory acquired during Timur's rule would never fully be re-attained, yet many of the divided principalities would later unite to recreate a more unified empire under the rule of Shahrukh. Nearly all the other sons and grandsons of Timur would lose importance.⁴

Upon his rise to power, Shahrukh named his eldest son Mirza Muhammad Taraghay bin Shahrukh (1394–1449) as the governor of Transoxiana. Known as Ulugh Beg, meaning “Great Prince,” he was born to Gawharshad (d. 1457), the daughter of a Chaghatay noble, in Sultaniyeh during one of Timur's campaigns in Iran, and would come to hold significant power and influence within the empire's affairs alongside his father.⁵ Timur's grandson and Shahrukh's eldest son served most of his life as the governor of Samarkand, initially with the actual power entrusted to Shah-Malik due to his young age before taking full control over the city in 1411.⁶ While Shahrukh was

³ For more on the succession disputes immediately following the death of Timur, see Barthold, 53–82; and H. R. Roemer, “The Successors of Timur,” In *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, eds. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6: 98–101.

⁴ Roemer, “The Successors,” 98–99; Barthold, *Four Studies*, 83

⁵ Ibid., 43–44.

⁶ Ibid., 77.

recognized as the sovereign in his domains, Ulugh Beg held considerable power and respect, referred to in 1427 by Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid as, “the greatest, most just, most magnanimous, most learned Sultan, Master of the necks of nations, Master of the Arabian and non-Arabian sultans, Sultan of the East and West.” Despite serving as the governor of Samarkand for much of his political career, ruling only as amir for two years before being killed by his eldest son, Abdal-Latif Mirza (c. 1420–50), in 1449, Ulugh Beg was not regarded simply as a feudal prince or viceroy by his contemporaries. On a 1425 inscription in the Jilan-uti gorge, he is referred to as the “most great Sultan, Subduer of kings of nations, Shadow of God on earth,” while his father Shahrukh was reigning over the empire at the time.⁷

As governor of Samarkand, Ulugh Beg built his reputation as a learned scholar within the Muslim world.⁸ Ulugh Beg was so acclaimed for his scholarly gift that he was likened to Aristotle’s royal pupil by Muslim writers.⁹ He was known for his extraordinary memory and in an instance recorded by Daulatshah, Ulugh Beg is said to have been able to recall a book of lists from memory with only four or five discrepancies.¹⁰ He was known to have also held a particular interest in the arts and sciences and contributed significantly to the cultural production of Samarkand. In Khwandamir’s 1523–24 universal history, the best contemporary account of the Timurid Empire, it is written:

Mirza Ulughbeg, whose name was Muhammad Taraghay, was unique among the sons of His Imperial Majesty [Shahrukh] for his great learning and patronage

⁷ Cited and translated in Barthold, *Four Studies*, 83.

⁸ Barthold goes as far as to claim that no other scholarly monarch was seen before Ulugh Beg. *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹ Mir Dawlatshah Samarqandi, *Tadhkirat al-shu'ara*, in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 362.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

and among all his peers for his justice and equity. He united the wisdom of Galen with the magnificence of Kay-Kaus, and in all arts, but especially in mathematics and astronomy, there was no one like him. He memorized the Koran with all seven variant readings, and he constantly patronized people of learning and excellence.¹¹

From an early age, Ulugh Beg also showed an aptitude for astronomy, and he commissioned and acquired several books on the subject, eventually composing the Gurkanid ephemeris (*Zij-i Gurkani*), an Islamic astronomical table and star catalogue, as a replacement for earlier tables created by Nasir al-Din Tusi.¹² His contributions to the subject are particularly evidenced by a comment made by the Mughal emperor Babur during the sixteenth century that Ulugh Beg's astronomical tables were still, "used all over the world."¹³ Most fittingly, the architectural structure he is most renowned for is the observatory built at Samarkand.¹⁴

During his reign, Ulugh Beg was particularly concerned with the magnificence of his capital at Samarkand and the prosperity of the region of Transoxiana. The court at Samarkand also starkly contrasted with his father's court. Whereas wine-cellars could only be found in houses of the princes Juki and 'Ala al-daula in Herat, large celebrations were held in Samarkand for which musicians and singers were invited from other towns, and the royal banquets likely to have been held in the suburban palaces built by Timur.¹⁵ The city was also significantly transformed architecturally. His most

¹¹ Khwandamir, *Habib al-siyar fi akhbar afrad al-bashar*, in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 164.

¹² For more on Ulugh Beg's contributions to astronomy, see Benno van Dalen, "Ulugh Beg: Muḥammad Ṭaraghāy ibn Shāhrukh ibn Timūr," in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, Springer Reference, ed. T. Hockey et al. (New York: Springer, 2007), 1157–9.

¹³ Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 153.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵ Barthold, *Four Studies*, 114.

important contribution is understood to be the Registan (Place of Sand)—a large central square surrounded by a madrasa, mosque, khanaqah and caravansaray—a novel innovation in Islamic urban planning (fig. 3). In 1434–35, Ulugh Beg also oversaw the reorientation and addition of a portal to the Shah-i Zinda shrine complex. Furthermore, he established the Gur-i Amir as the Timurid dynastic shrine and made various additions, such as the dark-green nephrite jade cenotaph placed on top of his grandfather's tomb, which will be discussed further in Chapter III (fig. 4).

Of the various modes of patronage undertaken by the different Timurid princes and princesses, Ulugh Beg is the only one to have rivaled the architectural programs of his father and grandfather.¹⁶ Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, would later describe the sites built by Ulugh Beg in his memoir, the *Baburnama*:

Amongst Ulugh Beg Mirza's buildings inside the town are a college and a monastery (*khangah*). The dome of the monastery is very large, few so large are known in the world. Near the two buildings, he constructed an excellent Hot Bath (*hammam*) known as the Mirza's Bath; he had the pavements in this made of all sorts of stone; such another bath is not known in Khurasan or Samarqand.¹⁷

The emphasis on monumentality recalls the structures built by Timur and it is evident that there is a continuation of the architectural tradition begun under the eponymous founder of the empire. Of the buildings described by Babur, only the madrasa remains standing and rivals the monuments built by Timur in terms of scale and plan (fig. 5). Through overseeing the construction of several monumental structures in Samarkand,

¹⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 90.

¹⁷ Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, trans. A. S. Beveridge (London: Luzac & Co., 1971), 78–79.

Ulugh Beg was also able to further his image as an independent sovereign over his domain, despite ruling under the name of his father Shahrukh.¹⁸ After taking the throne in 1447, Ulugh Beg would move the capital of the empire back to Samarkand. Upon leaving Herat at the end of 1448, he would also remove his father's body from the madrasa of Gawharshad, Shahrukh's wife, to be reburied in Timur's family mausoleum, the Gur-i Amir.¹⁹ The importance of Samarkand was clearly communicated by Ulugh Beg and his actions established the primacy of the city where Timur's legacy was strongest.²⁰

Timurid Claims to Legitimacy

Throughout the history of the Timurid Empire, claims to legitimacy were significant in procuring power and justifying one's place as the rightful ruler. These claims were necessarily multi-faceted for the Timurid rulers utilized and espoused a multitude of traditions and cultures upon rising to the throne. While the Timurid Empire saw itself as the successor state to the Mongol Empire, thus continuing in the Turco-Mongol traditions of Genghis Khan, the Islamic identity would also be incorporated into the image of the Timurids and utilized politically to justify the expansion into other lands. The legitimization of the sultan's name was a necessity in establishing a stronghold in the region of Iran and Central Asia, and each Timurid ruler would thus utilize different methods according to his own agenda in order to successfully portray an image of sovereignty. During the fifteenth century, the contrast between Shahrukh and Ulugh Beg's methods was particularly evident and the policies and production of their reigns

¹⁸ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 90.

¹⁹ Roemer, "The Successors," 108.

²⁰ Sheila S. Blair, "Timurid Signs of Sovereignty," *Oriente Moderno* 15/76 (1996): 560; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 153.

provide evidence of their ideological motivations. As seen partially in his treatment of Samarkand, Ulugh Beg's emphasis on mimicking the rule of his grandfather played a major role in his own agenda for establishing legitimacy.

Taking control over both nomadic and settled populations at the onset of his conquests complicated Timur's efforts to establish the empire and himself as the rightful ruler. According to the Turco-Mongolian traditions that were generally accepted throughout the lands he conquered, only the descendants of Genghis Khan were able to rise to sovereign power as "khan." Timur was able to navigate around his lack of royal descent by utilizing the title of "amir," or commander, and installing a puppet khan who was descended from the Mongol ruler. Timur found a stronger personal connection to Genghis Khan through marrying a princess of the Chinggissid line, Saray Mulk Khanum (1343–1406), to further legitimize his position. Through this marriage, he was able to take on the title of "son-in-law" (*guregan*).²¹ In his desire to continue to recreate the empire of the Mongols, he also depicted himself as the guardian of the *yasa*, the law code of the Mongols issued under Genghis Khan and his successors.²² Beyond the formal legitimation of his rule, Timur also cultivated his own personal myth—based on actual events—as was a tradition of the steppes that would bring him favor with the people of his conquered lands.²³

While the Chinggissid tradition was a primary motivation behind Timur's efforts to establish legitimacy of his reign, he also was able to successfully take advantage of Islam's rise in the region as a political tool. He presented himself as a champion of the religion, under the guise of preserving the *sharia* law and in an effort

²¹ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 14.

²² Peter Jackson, "Yasa," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2013, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yasa-law-code>

²³ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 15–16.

to protect and further Islam. His dedication to the faith is also reflected in his architectural patronage of several monumental religious structures, including the Bibi Khanum Mosque in Samarkand and the Mausoleum of Khawaja Ahmed Yasawi, the twelfth-century Turkic poet and Sufi mystic, in Turkestan. In this way, Beatrice Manz argues that Timur was thus able to utilize two different systems, as protector of both the *sharia* and the *yasa*, that would help cement his place as ruler and pave the way for limitless expansion.²⁴ However, other evidence indicates that Timur generally disregarded the laws of Islam and engaged in activity that went against the religion. The Arab traveler and historian Ahmad ibn Arabshah castigates the warlord:

He [Timur] destroyed right custom and went forth wicked with insolent swords
that moved hither and thither.

He destroyed kings and all the noble and learned,
And strove to put out the light of Allah and the pure Faith,
With the tenets of Jenghizkhan, that wicked tyrant and unbeliever.²⁵

Despite claiming to be preserving religious order and furthering the way of Islam, it can be understood that these assertions were used as political tools to achieve his goal of world conquest.

After Timur's death, Shahrukh is generally understood to have distinguished himself from his father by asserting himself as first and foremost a Muslim ruler and by moving further from the Turco-Mongolian tradition that had been espoused in the earlier period.²⁶ During his reign, Shahrukh refrained from using the title of *guregan*

²⁴ Beatrice Manz, "Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty," *Iranian Studies* 21/1–2 (1988): 114.

²⁵ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane or Timur the Great Amir, from the Arabic Life of Ahmed ibn Arabshah*, trans. J. H. Saunders (London: Luzac & Co., 1936), 234.

²⁶ Manz problematizes this generalization and provides a more nuanced approach to the reign of Shahrukh, arguing that he was actually addressing different challenges while attempting to hold onto the legacy of Timur. Beatrice Manz, "Temür and the Problem of a Conqueror's Legacy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8/1 (1998): 31–34.

that Timur had previously claimed, and he also made no effort to appoint a Chinggisid shadow khan to legitimize a formal claim via Mongol traditions. This is further emphasized by coins issued by Shahrukh between 1409–10 and 1420 at mints in Herat and other regions of Iran, on which the legend giving the standard benediction to God is changed to replace the word “sultanate” with “caliphate.”²⁷ In a letter to the Ming emperor, Shahrukh stresses the importance given to the men of religion and that the Islamic *sharia* was authoritative.²⁸ Ibn Arabshah also records that Shahrukh had changed the customs of Genghis Khan and instead decreed that his rule should more closely follow the laws of Islam.²⁹ Shahrukh is said to have strictly practiced the religion, observing the fast during Ramadan, even while traveling, and summoning readers of the Qur’an to his court four times a week, and he was even called a “Muslim monarch *par excellence*.”³⁰ In establishing himself as a Muslim ruler, Shahrukh’s decision to move the capital from Samarkand to Herat is also particularly significant. By the time of his rise to the throne, Herat was a well-established center of Islamic urban civilization. The shift to a new capital was a clear political move, confirming the orientation in which Shahrukh would be ruling his newly assumed empire.

Stark changes, however, were seen with Ulugh Beg as he returned his claims to legitimacy to be closer in line with the personage of Timur by emphasizing the Turco-Mongolian traditions of the empire’s past. Mimicking his grandfather, Ulugh Beg again returned to using the title of *guregan* in order to strengthen his connection to Genghis Khan and the Mongol lineage, which was formalized through his marriages to the daughter of Muhammad Sultan, a descendant of the Golden Horde khan, Öz Beg, and

²⁷ Blair suggests that Shahrukh’s claims to legitimacy likely differed in his rule over the various regions of the Timurid Empire. Blair, “Timurid Signs,” 559.

²⁸ Roemer, “The Successors,” 104.

²⁹ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 229.

³⁰ Barthold, *Four Studies*, 113.

to the daughter of Sultan Mahmud Khan.³¹ By reinstating the usage of this title, Ulugh Beg made clear his connection to Timur and the claims to legitimacy that were emphasized in the early days of the empire. This claim to the throne is further supported by the coins issued by Ulugh Beg at Samarkand in 1447, which were a dramatic departure from those of his father. The legend reads: “protected by spirit of Timur Gurgan, Ulug Beg Gurgan, my [or our] word.”³² The coin also includes Timur’s *tamga*, or seal, with three circles, making the governor of Samarkand’s ties to his grandfather unmistakable.³³ The treatment of Samarkand as discussed earlier provides further evidence for Ulugh Beg’s desire to connect himself to Timur. By establishing Samarkand as a cultural capital, building upon the architectural program that was started by his grandfather and moving the official capital back to its original location, Ulugh Beg made clear his desire to reference the early days of the empire and the glory of Timur.

Despite the strong emphasis on the Turco-Mongolian past, Ulugh Beg’s identity as a leader over an Islamic empire was not necessarily left as an afterthought. As governor of Samarkand, Ulugh Beg oversaw the creation of numerous religious foundations and built several madrasas in Samarkand and Bukhara.³⁴ Numerous public displays of piety were also said to have been displayed by Ulugh Beg, who was said to have memorized all seven variant readings of the Qur’an.³⁵ He also commissioned a massive stone Qur’an stand, carved with inscriptions and arabesque designs, that is still seen in the courtyard of the Friday mosque in Samarkand (fig. 6).³⁶ The Qu’ran stand

³¹ Barthold, *Four Studies*, 86.

³² The Chaghatay Turkish reads: *Timur kurkan himmati-din Ulug-Beg kurkan sözüm* [or *sözümüz*], cited and translated in Blair, “Timurid Signs,” 560.

³³ *Ibid.*, 560.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁵ Khwandamir, *Habib al-siyar*, 164.

³⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 84.

is particularly noteworthy for it was placed in the congregational mosque of the city built by Timur, representing not only Ulugh Beg's religious piety but also serving as another example of his connection to his grandfather. The multiple identities at play and the need for concrete forms of legitimation are clear within Ulugh Beg's reign. Despite not practicing the same austere lifestyle as his father, the necessity of contributing to Islamic patronage and emphasizing his place as an Islamic ruler are evident, likely with similar underlying motivations as his grandfather.

The various identities of the Timurid Empire are thus evident in the activities of the different rulers and realized in varying manners. While the importance of portraying some image as a Muslim ruler was necessary in exerting power within the Perso-Islamic tradition, the Turco-Mongolian customs of the past still persisted throughout the empire. External influences—particularly the Chinese factor that will be discussed later—would also come into the empire as a significant and impactful force. These various elements would blend, often purposefully, to appeal to the various audiences and peoples over which the different rulers sought to exert influence.

Artistic and Cultural Developments during the Fifteenth Century

The political climate of the fifteenth century and the Timurid rulers' emphasis on the arts allowed for significant changes and developments within the artistic production of the empire. While the Turco-Mongolian past was central to the formation and formal legitimation of the empire, the Persianate tradition was consciously adopted with the rise of the empire.³⁷ Craftsmen and artists from these lands were brought to Samarkand, establishing a rich artistic environment in the empire's first capital city. According to

³⁷ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 161.

Ibn Arabshah, the relocated peoples included “learned men and craftsmen and all who excelled in any art, the most skilled weavers, tailors, gem-cutters, carpenters, makers of head-coverings, farriers, painters, bow-makers, falconers, in short craftsmen of every kind.”³⁸ While Chaghatay Turkish was spoken throughout the empire, Persian was the primary literary language for the cultured elites and would be almost exclusively used in poetry.³⁹ The artistic and cultural traditions that the Timurids inherited and intentionally appropriated upon conquering Iran would help establish a specific Timurid aesthetic that would then be used to disseminate a specific image of the empire.

Upon Timur’s rise to power, it is evident that he understood the advantage of cultivating his cultural prowess and utilizing the arts to reinforce his empire’s claims to sovereignty. By constructing ceremonial spaces, implementing strict behavioral codes and commissioning monumental buildings and extravagant objects, Timur was able to create an image of power and prestige for himself.⁴⁰ Spanish traveler Ruy González de Clavijo (d. 1412) recounts his own experience witnessing a ceremony in the royal court:

As soon as we came in sight of his Highness we made him our reverence, bowing and putting the right knee to the ground and cross our arms over the breast. Then we advanced a step and again bowed, and a third time we did the same, but this occasion kneeling on the ground and remaining in that posture. The Timur gave command that we should rise to come nearer before him, and the Various lords who up to this point had been holding us under the arms now left us for they dared not advance any nearer to his Highness.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane*, 161.

³⁹ Ibid., 161.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406*, trans. G. Le Strange (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 116.

The rigidity of the court ceremonial makes clear Timur's consciousness of developing an imperial image, which would impress upon visitors the need to pay respect and submit to the authority of the ruler whose presence with which they had been graced. The need to visually represent his power is also most typified by the extensive building campaign that Timur began to transform his capital at Samarkand. Encouraging his family members to also contribute to the building program, his architectural campaign included monumental structures that incorporated elements that were characteristic of early Timurid design, such as the glazed-tile facade.⁴² Size was of particular concern when it came to the construction of his buildings, as noted by Clavijo in reference to the great Friday Mosque in Samarkand, begun by Timur on May 20, 1399: "No sooner had it been completed than he [Timur] began to find fault with its entrance gateway, which he said was much too low and must forthwith be pulled down."⁴³ The monumentality of the structures would serve as a visual metaphor for the grandness and vastness of the empire itself.⁴⁴

Under the reign of Shahrukh, the cultural life of the empire flourished significantly, and significant advances were seen in painting, architecture, music, historiography and Islamic law and theology.⁴⁵ The contributions of Shahrukh's sons and many members of his court further encouraged the artistic and intellectual achievement, and various members of the royal family alongside Shahrukh contributed to this rise: Gawharshad and Baysunghur (1397–1433) at Herat, Iskandar-Sultan

⁴² Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 41. For more on Timurid architecture, see Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Bernard O'Kane, *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1987).

⁴³ Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*, 280.

⁴⁴ For a further analysis of Clavijo's description of the Timurid architecture, see David Roxburgh, "Ruy González de Clavijo's Narrative of Courtly Life and Ceremony in Timur's Samarqand, 1404," in *The 'Book' of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250–1700*, ed. P. Brummet (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 113–58.

⁴⁵ Roemer, "The Successors," 105.

(1384–145) and Ibrahim Sultan (1394–1435) in Fars, and Ulugh Beg at Samarkand.⁴⁶ In particular, Ghiyath al-Din Baysunghur served as an important patron of art and architecture and would contribute significantly to the artistic production of Herat, helping to raise the city as a cultural center.⁴⁷ Baysunghur became known for his promotion of calligraphy, bringing about significant innovations to the Persianate painting tradition, with one of the iconic illustrated versions of Firdausi's *Shahnama* being produced for him.⁴⁸ The production of painting at Shiraz under Iskandar Sultan, particularly evidenced by the famous poetic anthologies illustrated for him, also indicates the advances of artists during this period which would shape the course of painting for the Timurids. When compared to paintings produced during Timur's reign (see fig. 7), the refinement of line and color is evident in the later period (see fig. 8).⁴⁹ The fifteenth century also gave rise to such distinguished Sufi poets as Qasim al-Anvar and Shah Ni'mat-Allah Vali, along with the beginnings of an eastern Turkish literature alongside the Persian tradition.⁵⁰ Within the cultural interests of the royal household, a connection to the arts with the political motivations and ideologies of the princes was clearly understood. Works were commissioned by the Timurid princes that would augment their reputation and fuel rivalries between rulers, eventually shifting the standard for the arts of the Islamic world.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 80.

⁴⁷ H. R. Roemer, "Bāysonğor, Ġiāt-al-Dīn," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 1989, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baysongor-gia-al-din-b>.

⁴⁸ For a detailed study on Baysunghur's *Shahnama*, see Robert Hillenbrand, "Exploring a Neglected Masterpiece: The Gulistan *Shahnama* of Baysunghur," *Iranian Studies* 43/1 (2010): 97–126. For more on Timurid painting, see Güner İnal, "Miniatures in Historical Manuscripts from the Time of Shahrūkh in the Topkapi Palace Museum," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. L. Golombek and M.E. Subtelny (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 103–5; and Basil Gray (ed.), *Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th Centuries* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 1979), 121–78.

⁴⁹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 116.

⁵⁰ Roemer, "The Successors," 105.

⁵¹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 80.

Of the particularities of Timurid artistic culture, the royal workshop, known as the *kitabkhana*, was significant for the development of artistic production during this period. The central atelier allowed for the empire to create a unified aesthetic idiom, carefully orchestrated to project a specific image of power and prestige. The *arzadasht*, a progress report transcribed in Herat during the late 1420s, provides specific information regarding the nature of the *kitabkhana*, and gives evidence of the atmosphere of the workshop and the numerous artists who were employed to undertake many consecutive imperial projects.⁵² The level of detail in the report indicates that the project of the *kitabkhana* were closely monitored and reported, in this case to Baysunghur. Because the role of the *kitabkhana* as a royal workshop was strictly regimented with close oversight, a visual tradition that would become characteristically and distinctly Timurid was able to be cultivated and extant material evidence indicates a certain uniformity of the royal workshop's production. An image of the empire communicated through these works would then be disseminated outwards from the imperial court.⁵³ That said, it should be noted that despite the role that the royal workshop played in cultivating a distinct Timurid visual idiom, the period was characterized by cultural pluralism given the extensive patronage on part of the royal family and the different personalities and interests of these figures. The *kitabkhana* should not be considered to be the sole institution contributing to Timurid artistic production but was rather one factor in the diverse artistic landscape during the fifteenth century.⁵⁴

⁵² Anonymous, "Arzadasht," in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 323–27.

⁵³ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 166–68.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80, 97.

Beyond his transformation of Samarkand, Ulugh Beg had a significant role in shaping the artistic legacy that arose from the Timurid Empire during this time. Alongside the changes he made at Samarkand, he is particularly credited with the utilization of jade that was unprecedented within the Islamic tradition before the fifteenth century.⁵⁵ This particularly evidenced by a jade dragon-handled jug that would become known as a princely object associated with the Timurids (see fig. 9).⁵⁶ While this semiprecious stone was known and used within the Islamic lands from ancient times, the sudden influx during the Timurid period and the known usage of the stone by Ulugh Beg would have a lasting legacy within the region for generations to come.⁵⁷ Another one of Ulugh Beg's significant contributions to the Timurid cultural production comes in relation to the transmission of the empire's artistic legacy through an incongruous undoing of Timur's policy of forcibly transporting craftsmen and artists from captured lands to the empire's capital. On August 25, 1411, Ulugh Beg issued a decree freeing all such artisans under the rationale of restoring the "Sacred Law of Islam."⁵⁸ The significance of this decree, however, is most particularly seen in the effect of dispersing the established Timurid style throughout Timurid Iran and Central Asia by sending out the very artists who were in charge of producing the iconic Timurid artistic visual idiom.⁵⁹ The carefully contrived imperial artistic image that was produced at the royal court was thus disseminated throughout the Timurid lands and

⁵⁵ Robert Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal Jades," in *Jade*, ed. R. Keverne (New York: Annex Publishing Limited, 1991), 275–76.

⁵⁶ A discussion of this jug is provided in Chapter III.

⁵⁷ While jade is considered to have been an element of the "Chinoiserie" seen during this period, I argue that the utilization of this stone should be not viewed necessarily in the same light. This is discussed further in Chapter III.

⁵⁸ John E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1990), 50.

⁵⁹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 63.

beyond, the impact of which would become particularly clear in the artistic production of concurrent and subsequent empires.⁶⁰

Relations with China

Of the empire's external affairs, beyond the campaigns for expansion, the fifteenth century is particularly characterized and noteworthy for the improved diplomatic relations between the Timurids and Ming China (1368–1644), which would have a significant impact of the cultural and artistic production of the empire. The relationship had begun from the early days of the empire with the earliest diplomatic envoys and tribute missions sent from Samarkand to the court of the first Ming emperor during the reign of Timur and would continue on into the fifteenth century. The interactions and exchanges that occurred between the two empires were extensive and grew particularly due to the interest of Ulugh Beg, and the cultivated relationship would come to significantly influence the empire's artistic production, merging into the Timurid visual aesthetic.

From the rule of Timur, tributary missions would be sent from Samarkand to the Ming Empire, despite generally serving commercial exchanges and involving lavish “gifts” exchanged between the two rulers.⁶¹ In one such mission arriving in China on March 24, 1392 with sixty-four horses, six camels, velvet, swords and armor, the Chinese openly welcomed the envoys and responded to the tribute by repatriating 1,236 Muslim soldiers back to Samarkand.⁶² The contact between the two empires were

⁶⁰ This is discussed further in Chapter V.

⁶¹ Yolande Crowe, “Some Timurid Designs and Their Far Eastern Connections,” in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. L. Golombek and M. Subtelny (Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill, 1992), 170.

⁶² Morris Rossabi, “Cheng Ho and Timur: Any Relation?,” *Oriens Extremus* 20/2 (1973): 131.

frequent, yet the relationship would turn sour after a letter—purportedly written by Timur but likely to have been a forgery—was sent alongside a tribute mission in 1394 recognized the Ming emperor for his preeminence.⁶³ While the Ming emperor was incredibly pleased with the declaration of submission, upon sending his first major embassy to Samarkand to express gratitude, the angered Timur detained the embassy and began to lay plans to conquer China and avenge his name.⁶⁴ The invasion, however, was never actualized as the conqueror would fall sick during the expedition and die before ever reaching Chinese territory.⁶⁵

While the relationship existed from the empire's formation, stronger ties were cultivated after Timur's death and both Shahrukh as well as Ulugh Beg showed noteworthy interest in maintaining these contacts. By the fifteenth century, relations between the Timurid Empire and Ming China were a stark contrast to the tumultuous relationship during the early decades of the empire. The situation pacified and significantly improved, as indicated by the stronger diplomatic ties and increased number of envoys sent between the Ming court at Peking and the Timurid cities of Herat and Samarkand. This was accomplished as Shahrukh entered into tributary relations with Ming China as a mutually beneficial means to allow both courts access to goods.⁶⁶ A letter brought to Shahrukh by the diplomat Ch'en Ch'eng (1365–1457) after departing from China on July 13, 1416 makes clear China's desire for better relations with the Timurids and for increased trade and tribute between the two empires.⁶⁷ The relationship that was cultivated during this period allowed Ming China access to the

⁶³ Joseph F. Fletcher, "China and Central Asia, 1368–1884" in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, ed. J. K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 209.

⁶⁴ Rossabi, "Cheng Ho," 131–33.

⁶⁵ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 73.

⁶⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 106.

⁶⁷ Morris Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia," *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 62/Livr. 1/3 (1976): 25–26.

much-coveted Central Asian horses, along with increased military intelligence, while the Timurids received numerous desired goods, including porcelains and embroidered silks.⁶⁸ By the second quarter of the fifteenth century, the number of embassies sent between the Timurid Empire and Ming China would decrease due to shifting policy and interruption of trade routes (i.e. conflict in Central Asia), but their relations were considered to be restored by 1432.⁶⁹

While the ties between the Timurids and Ming China were evident since the empire's foundation, Ulugh Beg showed particular interest in the Far Eastern empire in a manner distinct from his predecessors. Ulugh Beg's emphasis on China within the foreign affairs of the empire is evidenced by his own individual efforts to strengthen diplomatic ties between the two states. Going beyond the delegations of his father, Ulugh Beg as the governor of Samarkand maintained his own separate relations with Ming China. As mentioned in various Chinese sources, several embassies, bearing numerous extravagant gifts, were sent to Ulugh Beg in Samarkand from 1415 to 1445.⁷⁰ In 1445, the Ming emperor wrote a letter expressing gratitude:

I am thankful to you, king, that you have sent tribute from so far a country as yours, and in reward I send you some pieces of silk stuff and garments for your wife and children, and as a particular mark of my esteem I add some vessels of gold and jade, a spear with a dragon's head, a fine horse with saddle, and variegated gold-embroidered-silk stuffs.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 106; and Barthold, *Four Studies*, 109–12.

⁶⁹ A letter delivered to Shahrukh in 1432 from the Ming Emperor explains the interruption of trade as having been resulted from external obstacles, which would have been understood as strife in Central Asia. Emil Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments Towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910), II: 285–6.

⁷⁰ Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, 262–3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

The particular investment on the part of Ulugh Beg is furthered evidenced by the records of tribute missions in the Ming Shi-lu, otherwise known as the Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty. During the reign of Yung-lo (r. 1402–24), the third emperor of the Ming dynasty, significantly more tribute missions are recorded to have been sent from Samarkand, indicating Ulugh Beg's own initiative in strengthening the relations between the two empires during this period. While ten of the missions were sent from the Timurid capital, Herat, seventeen were sent from Samarkand.⁷² Chinese ambassadors who, on their way to Herat, were also recorded to have visited Samarkand in 1419 with presents for Ulugh Beg and visited again on their way back to China a couple months later.⁷³

Ulugh Beg's personal interest in Ming China beyond the investment of his father or grandfather is likely to have allowed for a greater Chinese influence on the empire's royal workshops. By strengthening the tributary relations between Samarkand and Peking, greater amount of goods were exchanged between the two courts, with Ming China generally receiving Central Asian horses and the Timurids receiving a variety of desired goods, including works of art.⁷⁴ While Iran and Central Asia had many earlier contacts with China that allowed for Far Eastern elements to be assimilated into the artistic production of the region, the taste for Chinese goods in the fifteenth century Timurid Empire was drastically different than what was seen in earlier periods. Rather than a steady incorporation and fusion of cultural elements, the Timurids saw a change that Basil Gray argues was more similar to the taste for "chinoiserie" in

⁷² Rossabi, "Two Ming Envoys," appendix, table nos. 1–2, 29–32.

⁷³ Barthold, *Four Studies*, 110.

⁷⁴ Of the Chinese art that were brought into Timurid lands, the paintings were generally of provincial quality. Evidence suggests that an imperial Chinese painting was sent to the Timurid court on at least one occasion. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 187.

eighteenth century Europe, essentially a systematic assimilation.⁷⁵ Within the ruling circles, several Chinese motifs, including the dragon, the phoenix, the Dog of Fo, the Ch'i-lin, swimming ducks, flying geese, and the "mandarin square," along with a greater desire for blue and white china, gold-painted red lacquer, and patterned silks were seen in the Timurid Empire.⁷⁶ Timurid artists would often look at Chinese models that had entered into the empire and produce close copies or create new fusion works.⁷⁷ The Ming-Timurid exchange was evident in the production of the *kitabkhana* as the influences would be assimilated and merged with the Persianate tradition that had been adopted by the Timurids. The incorporation of the Chinese elements would be implemented into the empire's artistic production to the extent of becoming a key characteristic component of the Timurid artistic style that would eventually be disseminated outward.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The early decades of the Timurid Empire into the fifteenth century evidently showed the various identities and cultural elements that were at play in establishing and legitimizing the rule of the empire. The various rulers of the empire would navigate these in varying ways, utilizing their Islamic identity along with the Turco-Mongolian tradition to different extents, in addition to the amount of emphasis given to the continued legacy of the empire's eponymous founder. Despite their efforts to gain and

⁷⁵ The nature of "Islamic Chinoiserie" will be discussed further in Chapter III.

⁷⁶ While Gray includes jade as one of these Chinese elements, I argue that the semiprecious stone had a longer usage within the Central Asian context and cannot be considered the same as the other motifs and material that he lists. This is discussed further in the following chapter. Basil Gray, "Chinese Influence in Persian Painting: 14th and 15th Centuries," in *The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts from the 14th to the 18th Century*, ed. W. Watson (London: University of London, 1972), 15.

⁷⁷ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 187.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

retain power, political unrest would eventually lead to the loss of significant amounts of territory and the short reign of the Timurid Empire would come to an end after less than two centuries.⁷⁹

The artistic, cultural and intellectual life of the first half of the fifteenth century was incredibly rich and would have a lasting impact in the region even beyond the dissolution of the empire. Starting with Timur, the understanding of the importance of the arts in cultivating and furthering the empire's claims to sovereignty, allowed for Timurid artistic production to flourish. After his death, the royal family would continue to significantly patronize arts, refining what began under Timur and developing a distinct Timurid artistic aesthetic. The first half of the fifteenth century under the reign of Shahrukh and Ulugh Beg was a period of extensive cultural exchange and investment into artistic production that resulted in incredibly fertile ground for significant innovations in the cultural production of the Timurid Empire. With the utilization of the *kitabkhana* to create a distinctive aesthetic image that would be perpetuated outwards from the royal court, the Timurid artistic tradition would be strategically solidified during this period and utilized according to the ruling elites' own agenda and ideologies.

The motivations of Ulugh Beg allowed for specific distinct changes and innovations to arise as a result of his actions. The Chinese influence that pervaded throughout the artistic production of the fifteenth century can be understood to be a direct effect of the relations built up by Shahrukh and Ulugh Beg, likely to have been more affected by the particular interest of the latter. Interestingly, these Chinese elements would be assimilated into the works of the *kitabkhana* and become a

⁷⁹ Roemer, "The Successors," 108–25.

characteristic aspect of the Timurid artistic legacy.⁸⁰ The external affairs of the empire similarly had an impact on the nature of the works created and the various cultural elements that entered into the empire as a result of the empire's political affairs allowed for a new artistic idiom to be established, refined and disseminated in a way that would solidify the Timurid cultural legacy and its outward influence for generations to come.



⁸⁰ Roemer, "The Successors," 232.

CHAPTER III

JADE IN TIMURID WEAPONRY

It is said that *yashm* and a species of this stone are called *hajar al-ghalbali*, and the Turks employ it for decorating their saddles, swords and belts, so that they may vanquish their enemies.

—Al-Birūnī (d. 1050), “Book on Mineralogy”

(*Kitāb al-Jamāhir fī-Ma’rifat al-Jawāhir*)¹

Of the many jades produced during the Timurid period, the jade dragon sword presents a notable example due to its intricate carving and presence on a piece of weaponry, with the hilt made almost entirely of nephrite jade (figs. 1, 2). Generally, the typical sword guard is produced with some type of metal, especially for those intended solely to be used in battle, and thus the utilization of the semi-precious stone, known as *yashm* in Arabic and *yeşim* in Turkish, in the decoration of weaponry raises questions as to who and what these objects were intended for. The value of the object’s material along with its apparent ineffectiveness in the military context raise questions as to why these objects were created in the first place—considerations further emphasized by the general understanding of scholars that these objects were not believed to have ever been used in battle.

¹ Al-Biruni, “Yashm,” in *Al-Biruni’s Book on Mineralogy: The Book Most Comprehensive in Knowledge on Precious Stones*, ed. H. M. Said (Islamabad: Pakistan Hijra Council, 1989), 171.

An examination of the material is also further necessitated in that the usage of the stone in the Islamic lands is generally attributed to Ulugh Beg and the Timurid artistic production of the fifteenth century.² However, a longer history of the usage of jade within the Islamic world is evidenced by earlier archaeological evidence, along with al-Biruni's "Book on Mineralogy." The material itself is further complicated with its inherent associations to China and the reductive categorization of this material as "chinoiserie." To unpack the significance of the material, more nuance is needed in understanding the cultural elements that come into play in its usage in Islamic artistic production. Through an investigation of the history of the material within the Islamic lands and the various other types of jade production during this period, this chapter will shed light on the incorporation of the material on weaponry and the significance it may have held within the context of the fifteenth century Timurid Empire.

"Islamic Chinoiserie" and Jade in Art Historical Scholarship

Before an analysis of the material, a reevaluation of the place of jade in Islamic art history and the past scholarship produced on the subject is necessary in order to provide a clearer understanding of the various cultural elements at play in its usage outside of the Chinese context. Islamic jade is generally categorized as "chinoiserie" by scholars and is considered to be a direct result of the Timurid-Ming relationship that was cultivated during the fifteenth century.³ However, the notion of the existence of an "Islamic chinoiserie" raises certain issues regarding the ways in which culture is

² Robert Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal Jades," in *Jade*, ed. R. Keverne (New York: Annex Publishing Limited, 1991), 275-76.

³ For example, see Basil Gray, "Chinese Influence in Persian Painting: 14th and 15th Centuries," in *The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts from the 14th to the 18th Century*, ed. W. Watson (London: University of London, 1972), 15; and Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal," 274-6.

essentialized in the literature. Approaching the Timurid jades with preconceived notions of what the primary or dominating cultural forms are presents complications in our understanding of cultural transfer, artistic influence, and appropriation. A longer history of the material and its symbolic significance within the region, in addition to greater interactions with Ming China, indicate the difficulties in categorizing the material as a result of one particular influence. By addressing the various issues in the historiography, the arguments presented here will be better contextualized and understood with greater nuance.

“Chinoiserie” is generally used to describe the Western artistic expression, encompassing a wide variety of mediums, including furniture, pottery and textiles, that incorporates elements of Chinese artistic production as interpreted by the European eye and primarily used as decor. It arose during the seventeenth century from a longer history in which Chinese imports were prized for their rare and exotic qualities and was fueled by extravagant written accounts and elaborate illustrations from travelers through which Europeans could vicariously visit the faraway land.⁴ Though the name touts a reference to the region around which the initial fascination with the style surrounded, the imitation objects that were produced cared little for authenticity. To the average European in the seventeenth century, the “East” was a singular entity of strange customs and opulent wealth.⁵ The elements that comprised the mindset around “chinoiserie,” which included constructed notions of India and Japan as well, “was being defined by the commercial rhetoric of the market and the social rhetoric of

⁴ Dawn Jacobson, *Chinoiserie* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 31.

⁵ Ibid., 31. This perspective is indebted to Edward Said’s studies on “Orientalism,” which has resulted in subsequent reinterpretations of cultural production stemming from relations with the “East”—including “chinoiserie”; see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978), particularly 18–112.

fashion.”⁶ The European customer within the market for “chinoiserie” goods was more concerned with the constructed notion of the East, haphazardly adapted into the European artistic style, that could then be displayed in their homes. The emphasis was placed on the decorative and ornamental element of European “chinoiserie,” rather than any symbolic or cultural significance that came with the Chinese influence.

When considering Islamic art, the incorporation of Chinese elements into artistic styles and techniques differs historically from what was seen in seventeenth-century Europe—the period out of which rose the first instance of what is now considered chinoiserie.⁷ While there may have been a similar fascination of cultures beyond the boundaries of the Islamic empires, China was not necessarily the same mysterious place as it was for the European.⁸ Records reveal significantly closer cultural contacts and greater awareness of Chinese affairs. While there were moments when empires were closed off entirely to foreign visitors, the diplomatic envoys and trade routes between Islamic lands and China in the pre-modern world were numerous and are thought to have had significant influence on how cultural elements were exchanged.⁹ The appropriation of artistic elements was also practiced in a very different manner than what can be seen in the European chinoiserie of the eighteenth century.

⁶ Emile de Bruijn, “Virtual Travel and Virtuous Objects: Chinoiserie and the Country House,” in *Travel and the British Country House: Cultures, Critiques and Consumption in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. J. Stobart (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2017), 70.

⁷ Harold Osborne and Marc Jordan, “Chinoiserie,” in *The Oxford Companion to Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662037.001.0001/acref-9780198662037-e-540>.

⁸ De Bruijn notes the difference between the understanding of China in the European mindset compared to how Italy was understood and how goods from each region were perceived and embraced: “The effort required to reach China made it seem more distant in a psychological sense.” De Bruijn, “Virtual travel,” 64.

⁹ See Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-modern Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), particularly 56–90. The movement of Chinese objects through trade is best known in relation to ceramics and porcelain. For more on the dissemination of Chinese ceramic objects, see John Miksic, “Chinese Ceramic Production and Trade,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, online ed., 2017, available at <https://www.oxfordre.com/asianhistory/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-218?rskey=emY3Yg&result=3>.

Rather than a simple incorporation of various Eastern elements into artistic production, artists closely studied the art that made its way into the Islamic lands from China and adapted elements that would later come to define their own artistic and cultural style.¹⁰

Studies on the Chinese influence in Islamic art also emphasize the tremendous importance that the Mongol Empire must have had on the transfer of these cultural elements. *Pax Mongolica*—literally “Mongol Peace”—allowed for a period of relative stability on the Asiatic continent with distant geographies becoming politically united under the auspices of the Mongols. This resulted in the expansion of trade routes and the connection of regions from as far as the lands of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) in China to the Ilkhanate (1256–1335) in Iran. As a result, a more concrete link can be seen than the kind experienced in seventeenth-century Europe, and the cultural exchange that occurred cannot be considered in the same vain as was the case with European Orientalist art and chinoiserie.¹¹ The symbolic and cultural significance would have also persisted in the images and objects transferred, thus indicating a clear separation from the usage of Chinese elements in a purely decorative fashion.

However, not all Chinese-influenced aspects within the Islamic context should necessarily be considered out of the scope of “chinoiserie.” The specific timeframe and period during which elements are introduced should be closely examined as to fully understand the reasons for these exchanges. The links between various regions under the unified Mongol Empire clearly differs from the relationship that was cultivated between the separate empires of Ming China and the Timurids. The distinction is made

¹⁰ This is particularly noted with the Timurids. See Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 187.

¹¹ Skelton, “Islamic and Mughal,” 276; However, the notion of *Pax Mongolica* should be qualified, particularly for the period after the mid-thirteenth century, for the various Mongol khanates were often at war. Peter Jackson, “Mongols,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online ed., 2002, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mongols>.

between the gradual incorporation of a particular element into the cultural identity of a region and the clear appropriation resulting in a sudden appearance of an image that had not existed before. This is particularly seen with objects that are believed to have been direct copies of Chinese objects that made their way into Timurid hands. For example, a ceramic jug (to be discussed further in the following chapter) decorated with a re-creation of a well-known Chinese motif along with various *kitabkhana* reproductions of Chinese paintings provide evidence of this (see figs. 10).¹² Basil Gray goes as far to suggest that similarities appear to exist between the European approach to Chinese art and how the Timurids were interacting with their Eastern neighbor. According to his argument, some elements are considered to have been clearly appropriated from Chinese artistic production due to a fascination with the Eastern style and were adapted into the Timurid context, such as with the usage of dragons, phoenixes, ducks, cranes and various other types of stylized vegetation and clouds, that mimicked similar Chinese forms from the period.¹³ While Gray's argument of this appropriation lacks nuance in examining the presence of these motifs during earlier periods, it is clear that there was a shift with the Timurids and their incorporation of Chinese elements and practices.

By instinctively categorizing any object incorporating anything that is generally considered to be a main element of Chinese artistic production outside of the Far Eastern context as “chinoiserie,” the true and complex history of cultural exchange within the Islamic lands is concealed and oversimplified. The usage of such terminology not only produces a certain framework in which the objects such as jade are immediately comprehended, but the transfer of categorizations based in Western

¹² Skelton, “Islamic and Mughal,” 187.

¹³ Gray, “Chinese Influence,” 15; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 108.

scholarship perpetuates the Eurocentric perspective that unfortunately plagues much of the available scholarship. What is understood to be Chinese is considered as such, but the history of jade in particular reveals the nuances that exist and the multifaceted nature of what can be considered to be “culture.” The complexity of the cultural understandings of jade and how the material was perceived across different contexts is evidenced by an eighteenth-century case of a Qianlong emperor. Writing numerous poems praising the superiority of Mughal jade, the Chinese ruler claimed that, “all the best carvings are from Hindustan,” and many Chinese replicas of the Mughal Indian objects have been found from this period.¹⁴ It can thus be understood that jade was not necessarily considered to be inherently “Chinese” even by a Chinese emperor and the nature of the material must thus be separated from such assumptions that limit a more honest understanding of the semiprecious stone.

When examining the Chinese elements that existed within Timurid artistic production, it is necessary to consider the “Eastern” influence with more nuance beyond the categorization of “chinoiserie.” Because of the complex relations historically between the two regions, it is necessary that the influences and similarities that may seem to exist are not reduced to a simple exchange or transfer. The reductionist notion of Chinese culture in the Islamic context is particularly an issue when considering the history of jade. However, evidence shows that there was a longer history for the usage and significance of jade in the Islamic lands and provides further complications as to how this material should be approached and understood in the different contexts in which it was utilized.

¹⁴ Mai Chih-ch'eng and Teng Shu-p'ing, *Catalogue of a Special Exhibition of Hindustan Jade in the National Palace Museum* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1983), 90.

Historical Usage of Jade in the Islamic Lands

The natural deposits of nephrite jade were primarily sourced from the Kunlun Mountains near Khotan in Central Asia. Despite the general assumption by scholars that the semiprecious stone was not used in the Islamic lands until the Timurids during the fifteenth century, archaeological findings have revealed the usage of the material several hundred years earlier within the East Iranian world.¹⁵ In recent decades, these past works have been readdressed, and more importance has been given to jade usage before the fifteenth century and particularly before the rise of Islam. Manuel Keene has played a key role in exploring the earlier usages of jade within the Islamic lands, and his studies have significantly shifted the views asserted in older scholarship of the nature of jade production outside of the Chinese context.¹⁶ An exploration of the longer history of Islamic jade indicates the evolution of artistic and cultural traditions from the region that may have been inherited and adapted by the Timurids and later transformed during the early modern period.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the hardstone may have been sourced from the region of Khotan and used in Iran and Central Asia beginning from ancient times.¹⁷ Most peculiarly, many of the earliest extant examples of jade from Central Asia

¹⁵ Scholars as recently as 1996 have asserted that jade was not used in the Islamic lands before the fifteenth century, including Robert Skelton who claims: “Although the material was thus known in the Islamic lands before the 15th century, there is no evidence of it being worked by lapidaries under Islamic patronage until Timur’s grandson Ulughbeg [...]” Robert Skelton, “Islamic Art, §VIII, 8: Jade,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, 34 vols. (1996), 16: 527. For a general history on pre-Timurid jades, see Manuel Keene, “Jade: ii. Pre-Islamic Iranian Jades,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 14/3 (2007), 325–6; and Fredrik T. Hiebert and Nicola Di Cosmo (eds.), *Between Lapis and Jade: Ancient Cultures of Central Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

¹⁶ Manuel Keene addresses the various misconceptions that existed in the earlier literature as they pertained to jade. See Manuel Keene, “Old World Jades outside China, from Ancient Times to the Fifteenth Century: Section One,” *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 194–6.

¹⁷ William Trousdale, *The Long Sword and Scabbard Slide in Asia* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), 2. Due to necessary limitations, this study touches only briefly on the history of pre-Islamic jades. Keene provides a detailed investigation on ancient and pre-Islamic Iranian jades, in Keene, “Old World Jades,” 196–205.

and Iran can be seen in the form of weapons. Scholars have been led to believe that these early objects were associated with the long iron sword, which is considered to have originated with the Yuezhi, a northern nomadic group that was prevalent in China by the fifth century BCE.¹⁸ Several jade sword guards were later excavated from ancient Bactria and provide further evidence of the longer traditions of utilizing the material on weaponry.¹⁹

By the beginning of the Islamic period, lapidary production was already well-established in the region and the use of precious and semiprecious stones would not have been a novelty in the artistic production of eastern Iran.²⁰ Of the findings at the Nishapur excavation, one particular jade belt fitting, believed to be from the ninth-tenth century is quite revealing. It is unlikely to have been the only object of its kind, and in a 1982 catalogue entry of the object from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it is speculated: "It is probably merely a matter of accident that no other jade pieces were retrieved by the Museum's excavations there. A mate identical to the present piece was seen on the Tehran art market in 1978."²¹ Despite the particular significance of Chinese jade throughout history with the earliest usage occurring in the region, there is evidence that the stone was not necessarily considered to be limited to a singular cultural tradition during the early Islamic period. As early as the eighth century, white jade from Samarkand was said to have been brought to Chinese court.²² Notwithstanding the lack of surviving physical material from the ancient and early medieval period, the available

¹⁸ Trousdale, *The Long Sword*, 70.

¹⁹ Keene, "Jade: ii. Pre-Islamic Iranian Jades," 325–6.

²⁰ For an overview of Islamic lapidary production, see Manuel Keene, "The Lapidary Arts in Islam: An Underappreciated Tradition," *Expedition Magazine* 24/1 (1981): 24–39.

²¹ Keene, "Old World Jades," 193; Marilyn Jenkins and Manuel Keene, *Islamic Jewelry in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982), cat. nos. 12, 33.

²² Mai Chih-ch'eng and Teng Shu-ping, *Catalogue of a Special Exhibition of Hindustan Jade in the National Palace Museum* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1983), 77.

evidence provides some sense of jade production that would have begun much before the Timurids changed the way in which the hardstone came to be understood.

It may thus be useful to further consider the location of the main source of jade and its accessibility to various peoples. Historically, the city of Khotan passed hands between various empires and the changes in the prevalence of jade production appears to have been rather affected by the political struggles of the region. Minted coins with Chinese writing from Khotan indicate the influence of the Han dynasty from the first century. While the region would switch between Chinese and Tibetan hands during the next several centuries, the Muslim Qarakhanids conquered Khotan and ended its era as a Buddhist state.²³ Turkic languages would become the lingua franca throughout the region by the end of the eleventh century and by the thirteenth century, it was noted by Marco Polo that, “the inhabitants all worship[ped] Mohamet.”²⁴ The political circumstances of the region may be evidenced by the decline in the quality of Chinese jade production by the fourteenth century.²⁵ The changing between hands of the primary, if not only, source of the material during this period and the fluctuating access to the material through the shifting of trade routes may provide further evidence as to the widespread cultural usage of the hardstone and why ambiguities exist to the extent of the Chinese influence even in the historical evidence.

The longer history of the material thus raises questions as to what traditions were being passed down between generations and how these practices merged and evolved with outside influences. The notion of a pure unitary culture is misguided and

²³ James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 55–56.

²⁴ Marco Polo, “Chapter 33: Of the City of Khotan, which is abundantly supplied with all the Necessaries of Life,” in *The Travels of Marco Polo the Venetian*, ed. J. M. Dent (London: J.M. Dent, 1908), 96–97.

²⁵ Stanley Charles Nott, *Chinese Jade Throughout the Ages: A Review of its Characteristics, Decoration, Folklore, and Symbolism* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1936), 50–51.

the transformation of jade within the Islamic lands cannot be understood merely as an influence that came from China to Iran. Even in China, Nott notes that the early Ming jades were influenced by foreign peoples.²⁶ The fusion of Persian traditions with adaptations of certain Chinese visual elements occurred more gradually than what can be considered direct appropriation and the limiting of a material to a single cultural tradition leads to great oversight, yet the exchange between the two regions should not be overlooked.²⁷ While the usage of the hardstone in Iran and Central Asia was clearly present before the Timurids change the nature of jade production in the Islamic lands, the general conception of the material during the period is up for debate. If the material and history was known to the Timurids, the nature of its contribution to a cultural identity is further complicated. The various usages that existed throughout history indicate the difficulty in approaching a vast expanse of land where multitudes of peoples, tongues and material cultures converged.

al-Biruni on *Yashm*

In understanding the reasons behind Ulugh Beg's utilization of jade, it is necessary to investigate what would have been understood of the material during that time. Unfortunately, there are few known extant written sources on the significance of jade from the medieval Islamic period, but one particular text provides intriguing insight into the nature of jade and its cultural significance in this region. This invaluable text, entitled "Book on Mineralogy" (*al-Jamahir fi-Ma'rifat al-Jawahir*) and written by the eleventh-century Persian scholar al-Biruni (d. 1050), provides detailed descriptions on

²⁶ Nott, *Chinese Jade*, 50.

²⁷ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 187.

numerous precious and semi-precious stones, including a section on jade.²⁸ While some scholars have assumed that the prominence of jade in the Islamic context was a result of the Chinese influence that came during the Timurid era, this text reveals that jade had an established importance within the Islamic lands from the medieval times. In his treatise, he notes that the semi-precious stone is linked to Central Asian Turks who inhabited the region between Iran and China and he singles out the region of Khotan as being the main (or rather, only) known source of jade.²⁹ Of the two known types of jade, the *yashm* he speaks of here is undeniably of the nephrite variety. This is important to note as there are of the two known types of jade, nephrite and jadeite, the former was not generally used in art production until the seventeenth century.³⁰ He also mentions the two particular colors of the material—white *yashm* which comes from the valley of Fash and a dark-colored stone from the valley of Qarafash—both of which can be seen on the Timurid objects.³¹

He continues on to describe a specific type of the *yashm* stone, called *hajar al-ghalbali*, which is used by the Turks to decorate saddles, swords and belts, as cited earlier. According to al-Biruni, others followed the ways of the Turks and also utilized the material for rings and knives. This is particularly intriguing because the material is used specifically for objects of arms and armor and was utilized in this matter, “so that they may vanquish their enemies,” which he remarks as coming from the *Kitab al-Nuhab*.³² The utilization of the material on objects of weaponry is thus fitting considering the symbolic nature of the stone as one granting victory. While there is a

²⁸ al-Beruni, “Yashm,” 170–71; For more on the personality of al-Biruni and his *al-Jamāhir fī-Maʿrifat al-Jawāhir*, see Syed H. H. Nadvi, “Al-Birūnī and his *Kitāb al-Jamāhir fī-Maʿrifat al-Jawāhir*: Ethical Reflections and Moral Philosophy,” in *Islamic Studies* 13/4 (1974): 253–68.

²⁹ A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, “Precious and Semi-Precious Stones in Iranian Culture,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 11 (1997): 127–9; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 221.

³⁰ Skelton, “Islamic and Mughal,” 170–72.

³¹ al-Beruni, “Yashm,” 170.

³² *Ibid.*, 171.

lack of information regarding when and where this significance originated from, the talismanic property of the stone is intriguing and sheds light onto the earlier usage of the material in the Islamic context. By specifying the particular objects on which *yashm* was used, al-Biruni provides evidence into the longer Islamic tradition of incorporating jade into objects of weaponry that presented itself outside of the Chinese context. Despite related symbolic significances of Chinese jade, the earlier evidence provided in the “Book on Minerology” indicates that if there was a transmission of these elements from China to the Islamic lands, it did not occur with the sudden influx of jade usage by the Timurids. Despite the lack of material evidence of jade on earlier objects of this type, the utilization of the jade on the Timurid swords would likely not have been unusual and its significance not considered a sudden Chinese import.

Another aspect of this treatise that should be considered is al-Biruni’s emphasis on the difficulty of sourcing the material from the region of Khotan. According to his treatise, white *yashm* is mined from the valley of Fash found in the chief town of the Khotan region, called Ajmah. The difficulty in gaining access is expressed in his statement, “no one can reach its source,” despite being contradicted in the next line indicating that the stones were still used: “The large pieces of the stone go to the kings and the smaller ones to the subjects.” Here, it is indicated that there is an acknowledgement that large pieces of stone, likely because of their rarity from being too difficult to transport, have greater value and are reserved for the highest classes. When discussing the black-colored jade, he notes that a person had once “taken a 200 *ratl* piece of *yashm* for the king of Qatai in the old times.”³³ The specifying of 200 *ratls*,

³³ al-Biruni, “Yashm,” 170.

equivalent to around 92.5 kilograms, suggests the costliness of large amounts of jade and also gives an indication as to the weight of what a large piece was considered.³⁴

Beyond the role of jade as a stone of victory, al-Biruni also discusses the other supposed medicinal and preventative elements of the stone. He explains, “the Turks use it [...] so as to avoid pain resulting from heavy victuals,” and even lists the types of foods that would cause such pain: “vermicelli, unleavened bread, roasted meat and meat balls.” The medicinal properties of the stone are further elaborated upon in relation to a stone known as *yashb* which, despite the differences in name and color, al-Biruni treats the same as *yashm*. The dual nature of the stone as both a stone of victory and as some sort of medicinal preventative might shed light upon how the different sizes of the stone were used by both the elite and the subjects. It is also interesting that al-Biruni specifically distinguished *yashm* from what he calls a “white Chinese stone, which they occasionally call *bash*.”³⁵ While both are used to alleviate stomach pains, he makes the differences between the two stones clear while also providing evidence that *yashm* was not considered to be an inherently Chinese material, while *bash* could have been considered to be as such.

Whether Ulugh Beg had read this particular work by al-Biruni cannot necessarily be confirmed, it is likely that the Timurid ruler, who was known for his dedication to studying the arts and sciences, would have come across the famous Persian polymath’s writings.³⁶ Also, considering the manner in which al-Biruni speaks of the talismanic and preventative properties of the material, it is unlikely that such a

³⁴ For conversions of *ratl* to present-day measurements, see Mansour Zarra-Nezhad, “A Brief History of Money in Islam and Estimating the Value of Dirham and Dinar,” *Review of Islamic Economics* 8/2 (2004): 60.

³⁵ al-Biruni, “Yashm,” 170–71.

³⁶ Khwandamir, “Habib al-siyar fi akhbar afraad al-bashar” in *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art*, ed. and trans. W. M. Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), 164; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 97.

tradition of using the stone would have been lost by the time the Timurids entered into Persian lands just a few centuries later. However, the significance of *yashm* to the Timurids should not necessarily be concluded to have been the same as what is evidenced in one written source from an earlier period. While it can be taken as a strong indicator of what the material would have represented and why it was utilized in such a manner during the fifteenth century, it is clear that Chinese elements were present and likely would have been a factor as well. That said, al-Biruni's text is an invaluable and unparalleled source into understanding the nature of the material in the medieval Islamic world and provides concrete evidence of the longer history of jade in the region.

Timurid Production of Jade Objects

Despite the presence of jade from ancient times in what would become the Islamic lands and the clear indication of its usage in the medieval period as manifested by al-Biruni's remarks, there is a paucity of material evidence for jade production prior to the Timurid era. The first instances and only surviving examples of early Timurid jade and hardstones can be seen in the form of seals attributed to the royal figures, Miranshah (1366–1408) and Gawharshad (d. 1457) (figs. 11, 12).³⁷ The most extensive usage of the semiprecious stone, however, can be most clearly seen with the reign of Ulugh Beg and his influence on the artistic production of the empire, evidenced by the inscription of his name on many of the objects. So much so that the incorporation of the hardstone into Islamic artistic production is unequivocally associated with the later Timurid ruler.³⁸ The almost sudden appearance of such a large amount of jade coming from the

³⁷ However, the utilization of various other hardstones for royal seals indicate little as to the importance of the material during the early Timurid period aside from its value. Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 225.

³⁸ Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal," 275.

royal workshop calls into question the particular significance of the semiprecious stone that arose out of the fifteenth century. The influx of material during this period is particularly interesting because of the hardness of jade and the commensurate difficulty in working with it. Highly skilled craftsmen are thus necessary to be able to produce intricate carvings and would not have been a simple addition to the royal workshop.³⁹ An investigation into the utilization of jade on a number of princely objects may provide greater insight into the motivations behind such a change within the artistic production of the period.

Of the objects at the center of this study, the full saber, located and displayed in the Topkapı Palace museum (fig. 1), displays a full white nephrite hilt, complete with a guard and pommel carved from the material. Another object of this sword type, known and catalogued in Topkapı Palace Museum's collection but without any published photographs, is described to be nearly identical to the displayed saber but comprised of a dark green jade hilt of lesser quality.⁴⁰ The last of the known objects of this type from the Timurid period, a sword guard located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Arms and Armor collection, is carved from a dark green variety of nephrite (fig. 2). While this particular guard is detached from its original saber, it can be assumed that the hilt of the original object would have been similar, if not identical, to the ones located in the Topkapı Palace; the similarities in the quality of the material and the craftsmanship of the nephrite indicate that these objects hold the same origins. Because of the lack of wear on the steel blade, the swords are believed to have been primarily for ceremonial

³⁹ Robert Skelton, "The relationship between the Chinese and Indian jade-carving traditions," in *The Westward influence of the Chinese arts, from the 14th to the 18th century*, ed. W. Watson, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia, no. 3, Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art (London: University of London, 1973), 98.

⁴⁰ A photograph of questionable quality is available in David G. Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar* (PhD diss., NYU, 1984), cat. no. 33.

use.⁴¹ These swords present a particularly interesting case among Timurid jades because of the sheer impracticality of such a material in an object of weaponry. Considering al-Biruni's comments on jade within the Turkic/Islamic tradition and his explanation of *yashm* as a stone of victory, the usage in these objects was likely intentional and indicative of a greater symbolic element that existed with the incorporation of the semiprecious stone.⁴²

Several other jade objects were created during this period, generally in the form of some type of drinking vessel.⁴³ The most significant of these is the iconic Timurid jug (figs. 9, 13). Several of these jugs exist, all with the same general form—a large, rounded body curving into a thinner neck and often flaring out slightly at the opening. While the idiomatic jug is found either with or without a handle—often in the form of a dragon, discussed in a later chapter—this vessel type is never without its characteristic globular shape. Aside from jade, other examples of this jug type in metal and ceramic also exist (see figs. 10, 14, 15, 16). Despite the slight variations of the general shape of the object, it is clear that the Timurid jug becomes uniformly consistent by the mid-fifteenth century, providing evidence for the uniformity that arose from the establishment of the *kitabkhana*.⁴⁴ Objects of this category also include other cups and vessels (see figs. 17, 18), some of which also include a similar dragon handle adjusted for the size of the object (figs. 19, 20). The smaller objects do not include the same kind of inscription on the larger jugs but the similarities of quality provide evidence that they can be attributed to the same period and workshop. While there exist many metal

⁴¹ David J. Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 416, cat. no. 158.

⁴² David Nicolle, *The Age of Tamerlane* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1990), 41.

⁴³ For more on other types of jade objects from the Timurid period not discussed here, see Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 224–5.

⁴⁴ Variations of this jug were produced without the dragon handle but the form of the jug-shape itself remains consistent.

versions of the jug with the identical form, the jade version in particular would become associated with the imperial classes as a princely object likely due to the value of the hardstone.⁴⁵

Despite the extensive usage of jade in the distinct Timurid style, the origins of some objects from this period are disputed among scholars. This is particularly evident with a certain jade “cup,” which appears to follow Chinese models, yet is still inscribed with the name of Ulugh Beg (fig. 21). While the vessel also features a zoomorphic handle relatively similar to the dragon-handled jug, scholars have suggested that the potential Chinese origins of this object are highlighted by the similarities that the object has to the Chinese *cheng*, or water reservoir, that would be used to grind ink.⁴⁶ The feline handle is also a well-known element of these types of vessels from the Chinese context as early as the Song period (960–1279). The distinctive jade jug from the Timurid period is also disputed among scholars believing that the object may be evidence of Chinese workmanship.⁴⁷ However, various unglazed ceramic jugs excavated at Nishapur, dated to the ninth century, appear to have been the true early versions of this object type and indicate a longer history of the form itself.⁴⁸ The Chinese “cup” is also believed to not be of imperial quality but is likely to have been the workmanship of a craftsman from a provincial Central Asian center imitating a Chinese example.⁴⁹ This is supported by Ming sources indicating that while jade was included in the objects of tribute sent along with missions from Samarkand and Central Asia to China during the reign of Yung-lo (r. 1402–24), the third Ming emperor, no

⁴⁵ This is particularly evident in the usages of the various jugs after the fall of the Timurids as they ended up in the royal treasuries of later empires. This is discussed further in Chapter VI.

⁴⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 223–4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 224. See also S. Howard Hansford, *Chinese Carved Jades* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 80.

⁴⁸ Charles K. Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), 209, cat. nos. 7.15–16.

⁴⁹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 354, cat. no. 124; Morris Rossabi, “Two Ming Envoys to Inner Asia,” in *T’oung Pao*, 62/Livr. 1/3 (1976): appendix, table nos. 1, 2, 29–32.

jade objects are listed as being included in the gifts sent in return by the Chinese. The lack of documented imperial jades coming from the Ming court further complicate notions of a Chinese influence when considering the Timurid usage of the material.

Al-Biruni's descriptions become all the more intriguing in relation to the Timurid jades. The medicinal properties of the stone, if understood and utilized during the fifteenth century, would provide insight into why the material was utilized primarily for jugs and drinking vessels.⁵⁰ If it were to serve as a preventative measure against stomach pains, the incorporation of jade into objects used for consuming food and water is apt. Since the stone was utilized primarily for objects produced within the royal workshop and on objects used for the royal classes, the jade objects would come to be known as an imperial symbol. However, the most significant connection of the jade to the Timurid objects is most clearly understood with *yashm* as a stone of victory. While this may not have necessarily played a role in the creation of the Timurid jugs, the significance of using jade on weaponry, according to al-Biruni's text, would have been palpable. The symbolism of victory over one's enemies along with the imperial connotations that arose during the Timurid period would have allowed for the usage of jade within the artistic production of the empire to elevate notions of power on different levels.

The princely nature of jade is undeniable in the extant objects from the Timurid period. The detail and skill of production is exceptional, and it is improbable that any of these objects would have been used by anyone beyond the royal classes. The sword

⁵⁰ This brings to mind other historical examples of the belief that certain stones/materials could detect poison. One such example is the Ottoman belief that celadon would sweat or break upon touching with poison, leading to one of the most extensive collections of celadon wares in the world. For more, see Irem Pala and Ungsoo Kim, "A Scientific Research on an Ottoman Superstition: Do the Celadons Change Their Color When Touched by a Poison?" *Social Sciences Studies Journal* 5/31 (2019): 1302–313, particularly 1303–306.

in particular would have been a clear indicator of the wealth and power held by its carrier, communicated through the lavishness of the valuable material and its intricate decoration. As discussed in Chapter I, the association of military strength and claims to sovereignty are most clearly communicated through the image of the sword, and the combination of these elements with an incredibly rare material would have added an element of grandeur to the saber's owner.

Timur's Cenotaph at Gur-i Amir

Of the various jade objects from the reign of Ulugh Beg, the usage of this material is most notably recorded in accounts of the then-governor of Samarkand transporting several large blocks of nephrite jade on his return from the 1424–25 military campaign against Moghulistan. Two of these blocks would be used as a cenotaph, placed on top of the tomb of Timur at Gur-i Amir in Samarkand, which was converted into the Timurid family mausoleum by Ulugh Beg (fig. 4).⁵¹ While the smaller jade objects produced in the royal workshop provides evidence for the material as representing wealth and sovereignty, the incorporation of jade in such a prominent location as Timur's tomb further these notions and may suggest a greater symbolic importance that may have been associated with the semi-precious stone. The jade cenotaph may also provide a clearer understanding of the reasons for the incorporation of jade into the empire's artistic production and the reasons behind Ulugh Beg's seemingly sudden interest in the semi-precious stone.

⁵¹ V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), II: 100–101.

The movement of these jade blocks into Samarkand is documented by multiple Timurid historians. Hafez-e Abru (d. 833/1430) in his general history under the title of *Zobdat al-tawarik* and ‘Abd-al-Razzaq Samarqandi (d. 887/1482) in *Maṭla‘-e sa‘dayn* both mention that the men who were given the task of transporting jade blocks from Qarshi to Samarkand numbered 2,000. While Hafez-e Abru and ‘Abd-al-Razzaq only mention one stone, Minorsky notes that the historian Mohammad ibn Khwandshah ibn Mahmud, or more commonly known as Mir-Khwand, (d. 1498) notes that there were originally three blocks of the nephrite jade.⁵² It is said that the Chinese emperors had offered large sums of money for the jade, indicating the known value of the material by both Ulugh Beg and the Chinese.⁵³ The recording of this specific element in Ulugh Beg’s acquisition of the nephrite may indicate the Timurids’ superiority in this exchange, trumping the Chinese rulers’ strong desire for the blocks of jade.

As perhaps the most significant usage of jade by Ulugh Beg, the investigation into the symbolic nature of the object is necessary to better understand the other ways in which the stone was utilized during this period. The cenotaph captures many of the ruler’s intentions and motivations behind implementing such artistic novelties, and his continued usage of the material is unlikely to have been done so on a whim. The imperial connotation of jade clearly communicated and solidified with its implementation on the most significant physical remainder of the empire’s founder: Timur’s tomb. While several studies on the genealogy of the Timurids include the cenotaph as a point of reference in understanding the dynastic assertions that were being made, there has been little analysis on the role of Ulugh Beg in the furthering of these

⁵² Barthold, *Four Studies*, 100.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101.

claims.⁵⁴ The decision to utilize the material on an important dynastic site for the Timurids is revealing, and a further analysis of the various aspects of this cenotaph reveal particularities in what the material may have represented for Ulugh Beg, encapsulating various ideological motivations of the later Timurid ruler.

The most compelling elements of the cenotaph worth investigating are the two Arabic inscriptions on the tomb, both of which were inscribed after Ulugh Beg's return in 1425 and no earlier than twenty years after the death of Timur. The first and shorter of the inscriptions is engraved on the marble in the crypt and appears incomplete:

No father is known for this illustrious man but only his mother Alanquwa (Alan Qo'a); it is told that she was not a prostitute [she was made pregnant] by the intervention of a ray of light; [it is said that he was one] of the descendants of Asad Allah al-Ghalib 'Ali b. Abi Talib.⁵⁵

The second, inscribed on the jade stone, gives a more detailed description of Timur's origins:

No father is known for this illustrious man but only his mother Alanquwa; it is told that she was of a sincere and modest character; she was not a prostitute. She was made pregnant by a ray of light that entered over the top of the door and appeared to her [in the form] of a perfect mortal and it is said that he was one of the descendants of Amir

⁵⁴ In Aigle's discussion of the Timurid "myth of origins," and in Woods' discussion of the development of Timur's genealogy, both discuss the cenotaph's inscriptions as a way to introduce their topic and mention Ulugh Beg's role very briefly. See Denise Aigle, "The Transformation of a Myth of Origins, Genghis Khan and Timur," in *The Mongol Empire Between Myth and Reality*, 2 vols. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 2:121–33; and John E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam*, ed. M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1990), 81–108.

⁵⁵ The believed missing fragments are supplied by Denise Aigle in accordance with the second inscription. Aigle, "The Transformation," 122.

al-Mu'minin 'Ali b. Abi Talib and it may be that her illustrious children
verify [the reasons] invoked by their mother.⁵⁶

The inscriptions give explicit details of the various genealogical links that are being tied to the empire's founder.⁵⁷ Most significantly, the nomadic Turkic traditions are clearly highlighted in the claims of Timur as the son of Alan-Qo'a, a genealogical myth that can be traced back to the Mongols.⁵⁸ In the Mongol's myth of origins, Chinggis Khan is also said to have been a descendant of one of these miraculously conceived children. In the *Secret History of the Mongols*, considered a biography of Chinggis Khan of sorts, the story begins with a recapitulation of this myth. In this text, it is said of the three sons born to Alan-Qo'a and the "ray of light:"⁵⁹

They are the sons of Heaven.

How can you compare them

To ordinary men with black hair?

When they become the rulers of all,

The common people will understand too!⁶⁰

The mythology makes clear the link between the miraculous birth—the "ray of light" representing heaven—and the divine appointment of the conceived child, recalling the story of Jesus Christ and the Immaculate Conception. To claim a ruler as a son without a human father, the personhood of said child is made sacred—separated from the mere masses—and thus legitimizes his rise to the throne. The utilization of this myth in

⁵⁶ Aigle, "The Transformation," 122–3.

⁵⁷ For more on the genealogy of Timur, see Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," 83–125.

⁵⁸ Larry W. Moses, "Epic Themes in the Secret History of the Mongols," *Folklore* 99/2 (1988): 171.

⁵⁹ Moses describes the ways in which various scholars have discussed the text, saying that it has been called, "a legend, a summary of tales, an heroic epic, an epic poem, and, as well, as literal history," in Moses, "Epic Themes," 170.

⁶⁰ Igor de Rachewiltz, "The Secret History of the Mongols," *The Mongolia Society Bulletin* 9/1 (1970): 58.

creating a divine reason as to the success of a conqueror is reproduced for the Timurids with an added layer. By claiming Timur as a descendent of Alan-Qo'a, the inscriptions imply the empire's progenitor not only with this notion of a heavenly appointment, but they also associate Timur with Chinggis Khan and the Mongol traditions.⁶¹

The emphasis on the Mongol heritage is one that is well-known concerning the Timurids. However, it should be noted that while Timur managed to strengthen his ties to the Mongols after attaining the title *güregen* through his marriage to Saray Mulk Khanum—who would be called Great Empress, the very title that Chinggis Khan's wife once held—the same was not necessarily the case throughout the history of the empire.⁶² As discussed in the second chapter, the various rulers of the Timurid Empire had different ideological motivations that were emphasized during their respective reigns. While Timur explicitly emphasized his links to the legendary Mongol conqueror, Shahrukh strayed further towards establishing his claims as an Islamic ruler.⁶³ However, Shah-Rukh's son and successor, Ulugh Beg, made clear changes during his short reign to re-emphasize the ideologies put forth by Timur.⁶⁴

While the genealogical claims made by the Timurids are clearly similar to those of the Mongols, the inscriptions on Timur's tomb provide partially differ from the earlier myths surrounding Alan Qo'a. John E. Woods notes that by specifying that the “Radiant Being” of Mongol mythology, “appeared to her [in the form] of a perfect mortal,” the inscription implicitly associates Alan-Qo'a with the Virgin Mary and, “her supernatural consort [...] with the Abrahamic Holy Spirit mentioned in the Qur'an

⁶¹ Aigle, “The Transformation,” 123.

⁶² Beatrice Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14–15.

⁶³ Sheila S. Blair. “Timurid Signs of Sovereignty,” *Oriente Moderno* 15/76 (1996): 559.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 560.

(19:17).”⁶⁵ Interestingly, the inscriptions also explicitly highlight Timur’s identity as a Muslim by claiming that he may have been a descendent of Ali. By doing so, the inscriptions attempt to posthumously legitimize the religious identity of Timur by establishing this genealogical link literally in stone.⁶⁶

Genealogical claims are indisputably one of the most significant tools in affirming power and legitimacy within the Islamic world.⁶⁷ To claim that the empire’s progenitor was not simply a devout Muslim but that he had blood ties to one of the most prominent members of the Prophet’s house indicates specific political motivations in the creation of the cenotaph. Woods argues this in his analysis that by, “linking the houses of Ali and Chingiz Khan, this claim combines the two most powerful notions of dynastic legitimacy current in post-‘Abbasid, late Mongol Iran and Central Asia.”⁶⁸ In the act of incorporating the cenotaph into Timur’s tomb, it is likely that Ulugh Beg was attempting to cement the reputation of the empire’s eponymous founder as both a Mongol and Islamic ruler. The inscriptions of the tomb also likely indicate Ulugh Beg’s desire to continue and be associated with Timur’s legacy and to return back to the same ideologies that existed with the foundation of the empire.

The usage of the jade is likely to have been related to an understanding of how it would have been understood and interacted with by later viewers. The incredible value of the material would have been particularly clear to anyone entering the Gur-i Amir. In relation to al-Biruni’s text, the usage of the material as a princely object would

⁶⁵ Woods, “Timur’s Genealogy,” 87–88.

⁶⁶ That is not to say that Timur himself did not emphasize his identity as a Muslim ruler. While he did utilize this aspect during his reign, the placement of the inscriptions after his death indicate certain motivations of the one doing so, i.e. Ulugh Beg.

⁶⁷ For more on the significance of genealogy within the Islamic context, see S. Bowen Savant and H. de Felipe (eds.), *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁶⁸ Woods, “Timur’s Genealogy,” 87–88.

be most relevant here including his explanation of the difference based on size. The implications of this is evidenced by the enormous size of Timur's tomb considering the rarity of such amounts of jade, and viewers entering were likely aware of this. The greatness of the Timurids in their usage of jade would have particularly been understood by Chinese onlookers, for the significant value of the material was known across these contexts.⁶⁹ In relation to the apotropaic qualities of the stone, al-Biruni also notes: "Turks believe *yashm* to avert the evil eye," a talismanic property that could also be considered in relation to the cenotaph. If this element was a factor in the usage of the jade, it could have been used as a means of protection to keep anyone from desecrating the tomb.⁷⁰

The meaning laden signification of the cenotaph would clearly not have been lost upon those entering into Gur-i Amir. This raises further questions as to why jade was specifically chosen to be added to Timur's tomb and utilized in such a significant indicator of the lasting legacy of the empire's founder. While there could exist a presumption that jade was used simply for the high value of the material, the deliberateness of the addition of the cenotaph several decades after Timur's death and the purposeful inscriptions render this conclusion unlikely. However, the incorporation of the semi-precious stone by Ulugh Beg into other areas of the imperial arts further leads to an understanding of the greater importance of the material as one indicating wealth, status, and consequently, sovereignty. Because of the prominent incorporation of nephrite on Timur's grave, the jade usage within the empire's may have perhaps referred back to and communicated a connection with Ulugh Beg's addition to the Gur-i Amir. Given Ulugh Beg's desire to strengthen his ties to his grandfather, this reason

⁶⁹ Barthold, *Four Studies*, 101.

⁷⁰ al-Beruni, "Yashm," 171.

for the subsequent increased usage of jade within the artistic production of his court would only be fitting.

Conclusion

In examining the historical usages of jade within the Islamic lands and the ideological motivations underlying the artistic and cultural patronage of Ulugh Beg, the jade swords begin to create a picture as to what cultural, social and political elements surrounded the artistic production of the Timurid Empire during the fifteenth century that would lead to the creation of such objects. While the swords initially appear to be yet another display of wealth and power on part of the empire's elite, a greater understanding of the significance of the material used provides more nuance in the way in which the Timurids were creating a specific artistic identity. Despite the incomplete history of jade within the Islamic context, the usage of the stone in arms and armor and the Chinese element that came throughout the history of the Timurids sheds light upon which cultural identities they inherited and which parts they felt necessary to emphasize and proclaim to onlookers.

It is also important to consider who would have been viewing these objects and what the usage of the jade material may have meant to those beyond the Timurid realm. Because of the known value of jade to the Chinese—especially when considering that the Chinese emperors offered a large sum of money for the very blocks that would end up at the Gur-i Amir—the usage of the material could possibly be simply attributed to an attempt by Ulugh Beg to communicate the empire's wealth, power and dynastic legitimacy to their Eastern neighbors. Regardless of why the material was first utilized,

jade would become unequivocally associated with the later Timurid ruler and the princely significance attached to the stone would last for generations afterwards.

With Ulugh Beg, jade came to be one of the most significant materials utilized in his royal workshops, and because of his interest in the semi-precious stone, *yashm* was further incorporated, or perhaps reintroduced, into the artistic traditions of the Islamic world. Of the objects produced during the Timurid Empire, the jade objects of the fifteenth century came to be one of aspects of the incredibly refined and lauded Timurid visual aesthetic that would come to influence the artistic production of the later periods. While the stone is generally associated with its significance in the Chinese context, literary sources, indicating a longer history of jade within the Islamic lands, problematizes the boundaries of cultural influence and exchange that are generally understood within the historiography. The significance of the material outside of China, supported by extant material and written evidence, provide insight into its importance for the Timurid Empire and what its usage would have symbolized. Aside from the monetary value that the material would have held, the symbolic meanings attached to jade likely had an impact for its prevalence in the Timurid arts and provide insight into why it would eventually be incorporated into pieces of weaponry. With jade holding the power to “vanquish their enemies,” there would have been no better material to be utilized in presenting the guise of wealth, strength and power, especially on an imperial sword.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAGON MOTIF

When the king saw the menaced walking person
He became a dragon as he set eyes upon the dragon.
—Nizami (d. 1194), *The Seven Beauties (Haft Paykar)*¹

The dragon was used extensively across what would become the Islamic lands since ancient times and utilized throughout a vast range of media. When investigating the dragon motif further, various cosmological, apotropaic and religious elements come to light in addition to an association with princely figures, indicating the multi-layered meanings that the image would come to represent. The multitude of dragon-types seen across the Asiatic continent along with its various significances across contexts indicate the complexity and multifaceted nature of this image and how it would come to be utilized and perceived. Similar to the rise of jade production, the usage of the dragon motif was particularly considerable during the reign of Ulugh Beg (1394–1449) and the confronting dragon sword-type would be established as a princely object by the early fifteenth century. The usage of this symbol throughout various mediums and in differing forms raises numerous questions regarding its origin within the Islamic world, the significance it assumed with the Timurids and why this symbol would be incorporated into objects of weaponry.

¹ Jamal al-Din Elyias Ibn Yusif Nizami, *Haft-paykar*, ed. M.H. Vahid-e Dastgardi (Tehran, 1936/1315), 24; translation in Abbas Daneshvari, *Of Serpents and Dragons in Islamic Art* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2011), 52.

While Timurid jade has been established by scholars as a material used for imperial objects, the usage of the dragon during this period has lacked a similar investigation into its role as a symbol of sovereignty. This is particularly intriguing given that the dragon motif is found on many of the same jade objects covered in Chapter III (figs. 1, 2, 9, 19, 20). An analysis of objects of various media will allow for a greater understanding of what the dragon may have represented for Ulugh Beg, with the double-headed or confronting dragons being specifically highlighted due to the doubling effect seen on the Timurid swords. The associations of the dragon sword with the *dhu'l-faqar*, the sword of Ali, are also analyzed and lead into a discussion of how the dragon sword would come to be heavily associated with the religious figure by the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire.² Through an investigation of various dragon-types seen within this period, the chapter will focus on the various reasons for the inclusion of the creature in the Timurid artistic vocabulary, what it had come to represent by the fifteenth century and how these significances continued to hold in the years afterward.

The Dragon Motif in Islamic Lands

While most often associated with its significance in the Chinese and European contexts, the image of the dragon holds an extensive and intriguing history within the Islamic tradition.³ Despite the emphasis on the aniconic nature of Islamic art—with past scholarship strongly focusing on the rich developments in calligraphy and vegetal design—the usage of animal iconography on objects and architectural structures

² Due to the nature of this study, a complete analysis of the association of the dragon sword with the *dhu'l-faqar* necessitates a discussion of the Ottoman context. However, this differs from my discussion of the Timurid legacy in later periods, particularly with the afterlife of the objects, which is covered in Chapter V.

³ Due to the numerous studies already conducted on the Islamic dragon, only a few of the motif's significances are outlined here. For a more complete study, see Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

presents a fascinating case of potent symbolic representation that would not have been lost on the contemporary viewer.⁴ The dragon in particular is one such motif holding a plethora of significations, and the inclusion of the creature on a wide array of object-types can be seen across the Islamic world. While the scholarly literature particularly emphasizes the astrological significance of the dragon, as a representation of either (or both) the solar or lunar eclipse, other ways in which the image was used provide a more complex picture of its role as a symbol.⁵ The motif also appears in various, and often contradictory, configurations, from having protective elements to appearing as the personification of evil, and its role within the military and ceremonial context, particularly on the sword, thus calls for further examination.

Throughout the Islamic lands, the meanings attached to the dragon were numerous and provide further insight into the ways in which they were manifest within artistic and cultural production. The Islamic dragon is particularly compelling when considered in relation to the princely image. In Iranian legends, for example, to defeat the dragon was, “to manifest virtuous conduct and to endow the royal persona with heroic qualities.”⁶ In various literary sources, the motif as a representation of power and sovereignty is evident through the usage of allegories highlighting a ruler or hero’s “superhuman” attributes.⁷ However, the image of the dragon in the context of the intrepid hero appears to be contradictory as one of both good and evil. In the legend of Bahram-e Gur in the Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* (c. 977–1010), he splits open the belly of

⁴ Pancaroğlu provides insight into how this has been mistreated in the scholarship and proposes that: “Recognizing such historiographic deformations is important for unburdening the issue of figural representation in Islamic cultures.” Oya Pancaroğlu, “Figural Ornament in Medieval Islamic Art,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. F. B. Flood and G. Necipoğlu, 2 vols. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), 2: 501–20.

⁵ For more on the historiography and problematization of the dragon as an eclipse monster, see Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 9–17; and Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 133–88.

⁶ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 111. For more on the royal connotations of the dragon, see *Ibid.*, 111–129. See also, Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 47–54.

⁷ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 112.

a dragon he had killed and finds a young man inside.⁸ Through this act of bravery, Bahram turns into a dragon, becoming the very creature that he had just slain.

Within these stories, the serpentine creature is something to be conquered, yet the slayer in turns becomes the dragon, indicating that it also stands as a representation of the hero's power and strength.⁹ Because of this dual representation along with the allegories discussed above, the dragon appears to have conflicting symbolic significances even within the same image or story. When considering the astrological significance of the dragon and the double-dragon image, to be discussed further later, the contradictions also lie in the figure representing both light and darkness. The dual meaning of the image may be best explained by a verse in the twelfth-century text, *Miftah al-Nijat*, by Sufi writer and poet Ahmad-i Jami: "The world is a snake, poisonous and vicious. Only he who knows the magic of handling it benefits from it."¹⁰ Daneshvari argues that this dual meaning is best seen in the story of Moses' staff turning into a serpent. In the Old Testament, Moses also fashions a bronze serpent (*nehushtan*) after God sends serpents among the people of Israel to serve as a protection against the snakes and a cure for anyone who was bitten.¹¹ The snake in this instance was used as both a symbol of the punishment inflicted by God along with providing the very remedy to this plague.

Scholars have generally considered the interactions between the Islamic lands and China as allowing for the introduction of the dragon imagery within Islamic art.

⁸ Ferdowsi, *Shahnamed: The Epic of Kings*, tr. Reuben Levy (Tehran: Yassavoli, 2010), 309.

⁹ Numerous other examples of the dragon-slayer exist, such as the Iranian mythical king Fereydun and St. George of Anatolia. For an in-depth study on the dragon-slayer in Anatolia, see Oya Pancaroğlu, "The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia," in *Gesta* 43/2 (2004): 151–64.

¹⁰ Translation in Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 54.

¹¹ Ibid., 54. For more on the *nehustan*, see Karen Randolph Joines, "The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87/3 (Sept. 1968): 245–56.

While the interactions across the Asiatic continent cannot be denied, especially considering the impact of the Mongol Empire and *Pax Mongolica*, the reductive approach of deeming the presence of the iconography as a result of a unidirectional intercultural transmission should be avoided. In much the same way as the nature of jade discussed in the previous chapter, the placement of the dragon motif under the categorization of Chinoiserie should again be problematized and observed with a certain nuance for the Timurids. The Chinese type has generally been considered to be the source of inspiration for the development of the Persian type in the post-Mongol period, yet the existing visual material reveal that the situation is more complicated than a mere transferal. Despite certain dragon types within the Islamic context in the late medieval period appearing to have been inspired from Chinese art, other instances of the Islamic dragon indicate a possible indigenous development of the iconography.¹² The distinctions between the various dragons from the two contexts can also be better understood in the stylistic analyses by Golombek, Mason and Baily in their study of the figure as it appears on Timurid ceramics.¹³

Despite the problematic nature of the way in which cultural transmission and transculturation is considered in the usage of the same images between contexts, there is a clear link between China and the Near East, and the influences and interactions within the geographic expanse of the Asian continent cannot be denied. However, these interactions should be considered with more nuance when analyzing the material and visual evidence at our disposal. The Mongol Empire, for example, should be given

¹² For an investigation of the supposed Chinese origins of the Islamic dragon, see Daphne Lange Rosenzweig, “Stalking the Persian Dragon: Chinese Prototypes for the Miniature Representations,” in *Kunst des Orients* 12/H. 1/2 (1978/1979): 150–76.

¹³ Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason & Gauvin A. Bailey, *Tamerlane's Tableware: A New Approach to the Chinoiserie Ceramics of Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1996), 102–104.

particular consideration regarding the impact the empire had on the nature of cultural exchange in the pre-Timurid period and especially considering the extensive usage of the dragon motif under the Mongols. The unification of much of the Asiatic continent under a single imperial government and the relative stability during the period of *Pax Mongolica* would undoubtedly allow for greater long-distance travel and communication.¹⁴ While the Seljuk-style dragon was common in Iran, Anatolia and Central Asia before the Mongol period, it was under the Mongol empire that the Chinese dragon was introduced during the rule of the Chaghatayids (1227–1363), the Batu'ids (1227–1502) and the Ilkhanids (1256–1353). This would lead to the rise of a Chinese-style Mongol version of the dragon, such as the example seen on the tile revetments at the Takht-i Suleiman, built in the 1270s in the Azerbaijan region of Iran (fig. 22). However, the continued usage of the Seljuk-style dragon along with the Chinese-inspired type provides evidence as to the complicated nature of the dragon variations that were established in the pre-Timurid era.¹⁵

Double-headed and Confronting Dragons

Among the numerous understandings of the Islamic dragon, the doubling of the image or the double-headed serpentine figure raises further questions. The doubling effect occurs quite commonly within Islamic iconography and appears to hold related, yet distinct significances. The image as a decorative element on weaponry in particular often includes the second figure and its significance for the military object should not be overlooked. Because the motif appears across a variety of contexts and in a multitude

¹⁴ Peter Jackson, "Mongols," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online ed., 2002, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mongols>.

¹⁵ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 4.

of forms, the history of its usage indicates a more complex understanding of how the dragon motif itself was used in the Islamic lands.¹⁶

In certain forms, the double dragon takes on an apotropaic significance within the Islamic world. The image of the creature served as a talisman and act as a protective force. In Nizami's *Seven Beauties (Haft Paykar)*, he mentions "dragon-like locks on treasures rested."¹⁷ The usage of the dragon in this way is most evidently seen on city gates and doors as a means to ward away demons from the sacred spaces.¹⁸ Dragon doorknockers in particular are seen stylized in a variety of forms and its usage continued well into the nineteenth century, evidenced by various Safavid and Qajar examples.¹⁹ The most well-known example of this type can be seen on the door of the Great Mosque of Cizre, dating to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century (fig. 23).²⁰ The doorknockers display two outward facing knotted dragons with entwined tails. The double-dragon can also be seen on the Talisman Gate in Baghdad (*Bab al-Talsim*)—the date of which is unknown but it is described in accounts as early as the twelfth century (fig. 24). While the dragons are similarly knotted as the ones depicted on the doorknockers in Cizre, the Baghdad dragons are shown facing inward toward a seated

¹⁶ The double-dragon also shows many similarities to the double-headed eagle—to the point of the existence of hybrid eagle-dragon images. Due to the scope of this thesis, these comparisons are unfortunately not presented here. For more on the double-headed eagle, see Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 123; and A. U. Peker, "The origins of the Seljukid double-headed eagle as a cosmological symbol," in *10th International Congress of Turkish Art Proceedings, Geneva, 17–23 September 1995*, ed. F. Déroche, C. Genequand, G. Renda & M. Rogers (Geneva: Foundation Max Van Berchem, 1999), 559–63. See also Suna Çağaptay, "On the Wings of the Double-Headed Eagle: *Spolia in Re* and Appropriation in Medieval Anatolia and Beyond," in *Spolia Reincarnated: Afterlives of Objects, Materials, and Spaces in Anatolia from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, eds. I. Jetviç and S. Yalman (Istanbul: ANAMED, Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, 2019), 311–354.

¹⁷ Jamal al-Din Elyias Ibn Yusuf Nizami, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, tr. and ed. J.S. Meisami (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 221.

¹⁸ For more on dragons on entrances and portals, see Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 21–22.

¹⁹ See Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 93.

²⁰ For a study on the Cizre doorknockers, see Bilici, "Bronze Door-Knockers of Cizre Great Mosque: A New Example," in *Ēran ud Anērān, Transoxiana Webfestschrift, Series I, Webfestschrift Marshak* (2003): 111–22.

figure. Here, the dragons not only serve as an apotropaic device but also show the sovereign's taming of the dragons—recalling elements of the dragon-slayer motif.²¹

The dual nature of this image also provides another facet to the motif's connection to light. In Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn Ahmad Tusi's *Ajayib-nama*, a dragon is described with one head being set at dawn and the other in the place of sunset devouring both the sun and the moon.²² Daneshvari argues that this text clearly refers to the dragon being responsible for the changes between day and night, "For if the dragon of the morning devours the moon, it also gives us the morning sun and vice versa."²³ This is evidenced by a reference in Al-Marzuban's (d. 1000) tenth century text, the *Marzuban-nama*, which describes: "At dawn the dark snake of night spat the disk of the sun from its eastern mouth."²⁴ The association with light may have also been present when considering serpentine door-knockers. Because of the double-dragon present on these objects and the motif's astrological and cosmological significance, "it is quite possible that their light symbolism asserts the presence of God and piety in the household and [...] functioned as apotropaic signs and protective forces."²⁵ If this apotropaic significance was inherently associated with the double-dragon, the usage of the motif on a piece of weaponry would have been quite fitting.

Similar to the dragon-slayer, the double-dragon presents another facet of the motif representing notions of kingship and sovereignty. The dragon motif is often connected to scenes of accession and enthronement, which can be seen in images of a

²¹ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 208.

²² Muhammad ibn Mahmud Ibn Ahmad Tusi, *'Ajayib-nama*, ed. M. Sutudeh (Tehran, 1966/1345), 311; Translation in Daneshvari, 60.

²³ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁴ Al-Marzuban, *The Marzuban-nama: A Book of Fables Originally Compiled in the Dialect of Tabaristán and Translated into Persian by Sa'du D-Din i Warāwīnī*, ed. Mirzā Moḥammad Qazvini, (London; Leiden, 1909), 96–97; English translation in Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

seated ruler is flanked by dragons. One of the earliest extant examples of this can be seen in a folio from the Compendium of Chronicles (*Jami' al-tawarikh*), illustrated under the guidance of Rashid al-Din during the fourteenth century (fig. 25). In this image, four rulers are depicted seated on pedestal thrones with dragon heads protruding outwards from the backrests.²⁶ The dragon-throne also appears in a miniature from the Ilkhanid period illustrating a court scene (fig. 26). In this image, the throne can be seen again with two gold dragon-headed finials protruding from the back of the throne and curving inwards.²⁷ The symbolism of the serpentine motif on both sides of an object signifying power—the seat of the king—cannot be neglected. The clear association of the figure as propping up the eminent personage and drawing attention to the person within its grasps makes clear the legitimacy of sovereignty that the double-dragon would have indicated.

These elements are particularly intriguing when considering how the double-dragon imagery may have come to appear in the context of weaponry. In one of the few studies done on the Timurid *shamshir*, David Alexander suggests that the double-dragon guard may have been a later iteration of a Chinese sword from around 600 CE (fig. 27).²⁸ The Chinese sword is the oldest existing piece of weaponry to include the confronting dragon image and is also thought to be the earliest example of the motif itself.²⁹ On the bronze-gilded pommel of the sword, two dragons are carved facing each other with an empty socket between their mouths, which is believed to have once held

²⁶ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 225.

²⁷ For more on the dragon throne, see Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 113–115; For a history of the throne in Persian, particularly Ilkhanid, painting, see David Donovan, “The Evolution of the throne in Early Persian Painting: The Evidence of the Edinburgh Jami al-Tawarikh,” in *Persica* 13 (1988-89): 1–76.

²⁸ David G. Alexander, *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2015), 151, footnote 7.

²⁹ Helmut Nickel, “The Dragon and the Pearl,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991): 139.

a pearl.³⁰ The motif of dragons chasing a “flaming” pearl is rather common in Chinese iconography, often interpreted to be related to either the solar or lunar eclipse (see fig. 28).³¹ This is particularly striking when considering the similar Islamic understanding of the double dragon as being connected to the notion of light and to the day-and-night cycle.

Despite the significant amount of time between the Chinese sword and the Timurid examples, there is evidence suggesting that the symbol was not unknown to the Timurids during this period. In a study on a fragmented ceramic jug dated to the fifteenth century, Maria Vittoria Fontana investigates the motif of the confronting dragons as it appears on the decoration (fig. 10). In this study, Fontana provides an analysis of the blue-on-white imagery showing two dragons facing each other, two oval shapes, likened to the pearl, under their jaws, and notes that the Chinese origin of the image cannot be mistaken.³² The influence of the visual elements from the Chinese understanding of the confronting dragons on the production of the Timurid jug seems undeniable. The existence of this object from the Timurid period suggests that this image of the Chinese dragons was known to the craftsmen of the time and that other objects of this period which include the confronting dragon motif may have been produced with the Chinese examples in mind. Alexander’s inclusion of the seventh century Chinese sword in his study may not have been as far of a stretch as it may initially have seemed.

³⁰ For a study on this sword, see Stephen V. Grancsay, “Two Chinese Swords Dating about A.D. 600,” in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 25/9 (1930): 194–6.

³¹ For more on the “flaming” pearl, see Nickel, “The Dragon,” 139–46.

³² Fontana notes, “Ceramics showing dragons in blue on white under a colourless glaze are not that frequent in this period,” in Maria Vittoria Fontana, “A blue-and-white Timurid jug with two confronting dragons,” *Oriente Moderno* 15/2 (1996): 592.

Despite the long tradition of the confronting dragon motif in the Islamic context, the presence of Chinese symbolism in the region complicates what would have been known to those creating these objects and where the origins of these motifs truly lie. The transfusion of cultural influences presents a particularly interesting case with the Timurid dragon and what elements were consciously and unconsciously appropriated in the development of their artistic and cultural identity. In Fontana's analysis of the Timurid jug, she notes that due to the placement of the pearl-like ovals underneath the dragon figures, "unaware" of their presence, they seem "to be a misunderstanding of the [...] canonic depictions. [...] In the Sinnelein jug [sic] the pearl, doubled, seems to have become a mere ornamental device or an element whose original significance is lost."³³ While the image was adopted into the Timurid context, it appears to have been simply a copy of what the Timurids saw of Chinese art. This is particularly so considering that the production of blue-and-white ceramics was not common during this period within the Islamic lands, while it would have been farther east.³⁴ The original significance of the dragons chasing a "flaming" pearl should not be considered to have existed within the understanding of the Timurid jug but the fascination with the dragon was likely present. The related meanings of the dragon as representing the eclipse, a significance that presents itself much earlier in the Islamic context as previously discussed, may indicate a much earlier transfer of images but cannot be concluded to have resulted from the Timurid-Ming exchanges from this period.

³³ Fontana, "A blue-and-white," 593, footnote 11.

³⁴ Ibid., 592.

Dragons in Timurid Art

The presence of the dragon motif on a wide range of objects from the late-fifteenth century indicates some association of the image to Ulugh Beg or a particular interest of the ruler in incorporating the symbol into the empire's artistic production. Interestingly, in a 1445 letter from Ming China, Ulugh Beg is thanked for his tribute and in return is given, "a spear with a dragon's head," alongside numerous other extravagant gifts.³⁵ His association with the creature is also particularly evidenced by an intricately carved wooden chest belonging to the ruler himself (fig. 29). Sheila Blair identifies the wooden box as a sign of sovereignty, indicated by its presence in a miniature painting depicting 'Ali Sir Nava'i before Sultan Husayn Mirza, and posits that the importance of the object is emphasized by its placement in the upper portion of the painting. She argues, "the painting shows us that a small fancy chest was an important symbol at the accession of a Timurid prince later in the 15th century," and that one of the few wooden Timurid chests surviving today, "may well have been made to mark Ulugh Beg's accession."³⁶ Within the Timurid context, the royal patronage contributed greatly to the development of wood carving and the medium was effectively able to capture the Timurid visual aesthetic.³⁷ Amidst the dense floral and vegetal motifs filling the entire surface of Ulugh Beg's box, considered to be "the crowning achievement of Timurid woodworking, a dragon is also carved on the top of the lid alongside ruler's title "the great sultan" and "the most noble *haqan*."³⁸ The presence of the motif calls into question what the exact significance of the figure may have been for the ruler. The inclusion indicates that the

³⁵ Emil Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources: Fragments Towards the Knowledge of the Geography and History of Central and Western Asia from the 13th to the 17th Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910), II: 263.

³⁶ For a full discussion on the wooden box, see Sheila S. Blair. "Timurid Signs of Sovereignty," *Oriente Moderno* 15/76 (1996): 563–8.

³⁷ Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 206–208.

³⁸ Translation in Blair, "Timurid Signs," 565.

motif likely had a particular princely connotation during this period and may have been intrinsically tied to the image of the ruler. The wooden chest had a longer tradition in the Islamic lands as marking a ruler's accession and is believed to have been another royal object testifying the sovereignty of Ulugh Beg.³⁹

The association between the dragon and light seems to also be emphasized in the artistic production of the Timurids, particularly in objects relating to fire. One of the most well-known forms of Timurid metalwork is the candlestick, a number of which have survived to this day. One such candelabra includes the creature protruding from the base of the object and leading upwards to the sockets, ending in the form of open-mouthed dragon heads facing toward one another (fig. 30). The entwined bodies of the dragons that form the shaft of the candlestick indicate a possible astrological significance and the image of the fire that the object would have held seems unlikely to have evaded the artisans who created it. The dragon also makes an appearance on numerous flint strikers which would have had the same connotations (fig. 31).⁴⁰ These objects clearly raise the association of the dragon to fire—for the creature's breath was considered as such—and therefore further the connection of the motif to the symbolism of light.⁴¹

Of the other dragons found within Timurid art, some of the most fascinating examples of the motif are those on various vessels. The most characteristic manifestation of the Timurid dragon—that would later be emulated in the later empires—is that which appears on the jug handle on the Timurid-type jug discussed in Chapter III (see fig. 9). On these basins, the s-shaped body of the figure curves from

³⁹ Blair, "Timurid Signs," 565.

⁴⁰ For more on flint strikers, see Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 74.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

the bottom and reaches the top as an open-mouthed dragon head at the opening of the jug. The tail of the dragon curves up back towards the body and a vegetal pattern fills the circular space formed by the shape of the tail. The form of the dragon is standard for the many stone, wood and metal Timurid objects on which the motif is featured. A number of small jade cups also include this imagery but omit the tail end of the motif (see fig.19, 20).

The apotropaic significance of the dragon is likely to be present with these objects; as a beneficent creature, the presence of the serpentine figure is thought to have acted as a protector of the contents within the vessel.⁴² The protective element can also be seen in conjunction with the medicinal properties of the jade, which was believed to prevent illness according to al-Biruni. The association of the dragon with princely figures is also probably a strong component of the motif's incorporation. As discussed, this Timurid jug-type would be established as an imperial object by the fifteenth century and would become a distinct element of the Timurid artistic legacy that would disseminate outward from the empire. The importance of the jug as such likely further enhanced the connection between the dragon and Ulugh Beg.⁴³

The Islamic Dragon in the Military Context

The various ways in which the dragon was used thus call into question the motivations behind incorporating the same imagery on military equipment. The same dragon-type found on the Timurid jugs and the candlestick can be seen on the jade dragon swords

⁴² For more, see Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 156–7.

⁴³ Interestingly, the Timurid jug was widespread enough to have been believed to have even made its way to Ming China. This is indicated by the existence of a Ming blue-and-white ceramic vessel of a slightly modified form, which is most closely related to various Timurid vessels made of metal and jade. Lentz & Lowry, *Timur & the Princely Vision*, 224; David J. Roxburgh, *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London, Royal Academy of the Arts, 2005), 423, cat. no. 185.

(fig. 1, 2). While the sword does not include the entire body of the dragon figure, the quillons ending in the dragon heads indicate that these objects were most likely to have been products of the same royal jade workshop from which the jugs originated.⁴⁴ Because of the similarities in production between the jade jugs and the swords, the significances associated with the jug are likely to have been an element of the swords as well. However, the usage of the Islamic dragon in the military context provides another facet to the many layers of meaning present within the symbol. While the Timurid dragon sword is not believed to have been used in battle, there are implicit associations of such an object to its inherent functional element. Because the notions of military power and sovereignty were so closely tied together during this period, an investigation of the motif's usage within other objects of war is useful to better understand the nature of dragons present on the Timurid hilts.

When investigating the various objects of Islamic arms and armor, the serpentine creature appears frequently in a wide variety of forms. Some of the objects on which the dragon can be seen include smaller objects such as belt hooks, rings, lances, maces and flint strikers, as discussed in relation to the symbolism of light, and in the form of dragon-mouthed barrels on cannons, rifles and pistols (see figs. 32, 33).⁴⁵ While more research is likely necessary to fully understand and contextualize the motif as it appears in these forms, the relevance of the dragon as a protective and talismanic image is clear.

⁴⁴ Alexander, *Islamic Arms*, 150–51.

⁴⁵ For a few of these objects, see Julian Raby, *The Arts of War: Arms and Armour of the 7th to 19th centuries*, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. XXI (London: The Nour Foundation, 1992), cat. no.93; Alexander, *Islamic Arms and Armor*, cat. no. 115; Bashir Mohamed, *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection* (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), cat. nos. 127, 128, 228.

This is most noticeable in relation to the flag standard, or *'alam*. Standards were the objects topping the military flags that were carried into battle and were usually teardrop-shaped, oftentimes with various adornments protruding outward from the main body of the object (see fig. 34). Particularly in the Safavid context, these decorative elements are seen in the shape of dragon heads, similar to the dragon heads on Ottoman and Safavid dragon swords. The dragon-standards present a fascinating case of the symbolic nature of the serpent motif in the military context, considering the symbolism that the *'alam* alone carries. Raised high above the soldiers, the standards invoked both an image of a dark shadow over the enemy and a sense of protection over the warriors carrying the flag. The dragon-standard as a distinct form is also present within the literary sources. In the *Qissa-ye Hamza* during one of the battles of the *Garhasp-nama*, Hamza is described as standing “in the shade of the dragon-standard.”⁴⁶ Similar to the presence of the dragon on gates and portals, the apotropaic quality of the dragon symbol that was discussed previously is unmistakable.

The dragon is also often associated with other types of edged weapons in various literary sources within the Islamic context. In Nizami's *Sharaf-nama*, the ruler's sword is metaphorically referred to as such: “With this sword I'll capture the crown's diadem and the throne/With this dragon (sword) I'll take the moon.”⁴⁷ In the twelfth-century *Seven Portraits (Haft Paykar)*, poet Ilyas ibn Yusuf Nizami Ganjawi (d. 1209) compares the blades of Bahram Gur's army to dragons and in Rashid al-Din Watwat's (d. 1182–1183) *diwan*, he writes: “Thousands of lion-hearted and elephant bodied warriors/Are eaten by dogs [after being slain] by your dragon-lance.”⁴⁸ Of the extant material objects, the dragon appears on a wide array of daggers and axes in various

⁴⁶ Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁸ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 39.

forms (see figs. 35, 36). The sword in the form of a dragon can also be seen in much earlier traditions in what is thought to be of Indo-Iranian origin. In a story from Biblical times, King Nebuchadnezzar of the ancient city of Babylon is believed to have made a dragon sword for himself which possessed magical qualities.⁴⁹

The Dragon Sword as *Dhu'l-faqar*

While the dragon held a variety of significations and uses within Islamic art as discussed, there tends to be an immediate religious understanding when considering the iconography as it appears on weaponry. In the Islamic context from the fifteenth-century onwards, the dragon-sword has been unequivocally associated with one of the religion's most perennial symbols—the *dhu'l-faqar*.⁵⁰ Otherwise known as the sword of Ali, examples of this sword-type can be seen throughout the Islamic lands and a few examples are claimed to have been the originals from the time of the Prophet Muhammed. The association of the *dhu'l-faqar* with the dragon-sword is particularly true for swords featuring a hilt with quillons in the shape of the double-dragon motif. While the true intentions of the makers of these objects should be questioned and while not all swords including the motif of the dragon should necessarily be interpreted as being an example of the *dhu'l-faqar*, the dragon-sword's religious connotations are particularly substantial to provide another means of exploring the complex history of the dragon in Islamic weaponry.

While it would later become unequivocally associated with the Prophet's cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the origin of the *dhu'l-faqar* is said to have begun as the sword of

⁴⁹ Blair, "Timurid Signs," 152.

⁵⁰ David G. Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar* (PhD diss., NYU, 1984), 77.

the Prophet Muhammad.⁵¹ While the early history is difficult to trace, the sword is believed to have been taken from a Meccan leader defeated during the Battle of Badr in 624 CE, and the association between the sword and Ali was made early on with accounts claiming that he received it either in subsequent battles or that it “passed into his possession when the Prophet died in 632 CE.”⁵² As early as the ninth century CE, the *dhu’l-faqar* was inextricably associated with the fourth Caliph, with Ibn Hisham recounting, “A traditionalist told me that I, Abu Najih said: ‘Someone called out on the day of Uhud: There is no sword but *dhu’l-faqar* and no hero but Ali.’”⁵³ The history and myths surrounding the sword have resulted in the possession of the *dhu’l-faqar* to become a symbol legitimizing the true successor to the caliphate after the death of Muhammad, especially since the sword was considered to be one of the sacred relics of the Prophet.⁵⁴ The political motivations surrounding the usage of the sword as a symbol are oftentimes explicit. Some hadiths and myths claim that with the inheritance of the sword, Ali had also inherited the leadership of the Islamic community thus highlighting his position as the rightful successor.⁵⁵ The usage of the *dhu’l-faqar* to reinforce Shiite religious beliefs is evident—though the image of the sword also came to serve as a significant symbol within the Sunni context—and continues to be an important icon for the Shi‘i community to the present day.⁵⁶

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the early history of the *dhu’l-faqar*, see Alexander, *Dhu L’Fakar*, 15–18; and Jane Hathaway, “The Forgotten Icon: The Sword Zülfikâr in Its Ottoman Incarnation,” *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 27/1 & 2 (2003): 2–5.

⁵² Alexander, *Dhu L’Fakar*, 15–6.

⁵³ Abu Muhammad Ibn Hisham, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah*, ed. Muhammad Fami al-Sarjani (Cairo, 1955), pt. 3, 40; Translation in David G. Alexander, “Dhu’l-faqār and the Legacy of the Prophet, Mirath Rasul Allah,” in *Gladius XIX* (1999): 164; On the talismanic element of this saying, see 165, footnote 39.

⁵⁴ Alexander, “Dhu’l-faqār,” 158.

⁵⁵ Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 37.

⁵⁶ While the Shi’ites believe that the sword was passed on from the Prophet to Ali, Sunni Muslims consider the *dhu’l-faqar* to have been given to the Abbasid Caliphs. The disagreement is strictly tied to the legitimization issues prominent within the religious discourse between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims. Ibid., 15.

The association with the dragon-sword to the *dhu'l-faqar* is apparent when examining the myths and stories that surround the prophet's son-in-law and cousin. Within what is known about the life of Ali and his succession to the Prophet Muhammad, the dragon is a recurring theme that can be seen in several visual representations of the fourth caliph. In a lithographed book from the Qajar period, an infant Ali is depicted stretching out from his cradle and fighting a dragon (fig. 37).⁵⁷ The image relays the story of Ali as a young child demonstrating a superhuman strength, ripping the dragon apart after being attacked by the creature. Ali is also depicted slaying a dragon with the *dhu'l-faqar* in the *Khavarannama* (Book of the East) by Ibn Husam (d. 1470) (fig. 38). A similar image is seen in fourteenth-century poet Mustafa Zarir's *Siretü'n-nebi*, where Ali is shown having cut off the head of the dragon with his bifurcated blade (fig. 39). In the seventeenth century *Falnâme*, prepared by an artist named Kalender Paşa and given to Ottoman Sultan Ahmet I (r. 1603–17), Ali is again illustrated fighting a dragon, albeit without the *dhu'l-faqar* (fig. 40). This is particularly poignant in the Shi'a context considering that in the myths of the dragon-slaying hero, there is an element of legitimization in this ability to conquer the monster.⁵⁸ In one of the miracles said to have been performed by Ali, his staff is also said to have turned into a dragon, raising pre-Islamic connotations related to the story of Moses' staff turning into a serpent as previously discussed.⁵⁹ The dual, seemingly contradictory significances of the dragon as both good and evil are present in this story and are likely to have been related to this image. The sword as a dragon may also recall notions of the

⁵⁷ Ulrich Marzolph, "The Pictorial Representation of Shi'i Themes in Lithographed Books of the Qajar Period," in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*, ed. P. Khosronejad (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 89–90.

⁵⁸ Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 50–1.

⁵⁹ Kuehn, *The Dragon*, 22–23; Daneshvari, *Of Serpents*, 54.

dragon-slayer, perhaps relating to the hero, or in this case the hero's weapon, turning into a dragon himself once conquering the beast.

While the connection between Ali and the dragon sword may be explicit enough to lead to conclusions that weaponry involving the serpent-image carries a religious reference, the quintessential visual understanding of the *dhu'l-faqar* generally does not include any evidence of the dragon. In depictions of the sword, the strongest emphasis lies on the most distinguishable characteristic—the bifurcated blade.⁶⁰ Despite the sword being characterized and identifiable solely by the blade, the dragon appears to have become associated with depictions of the sword by the fifteenth century and appears as a recurring element throughout several examples of the *dhu'l-faqar*.⁶¹ The examples where the dragon appears thus raises more questions regarding the motif's inclusion when considering the implicit religious connotations that may have been understood by the viewer. Because an understanding of a depiction of the *dhu'l-faqar* needs solely the bifurcated blade to some extent, the inclusion of a dragon in visual depictions and reproductions of the sword provides another layer to what would have been understood of the motif. While few concrete understandings of what may have been connoted by the dragon can be reached, the handful of dragon-swords shed light onto when the association of this motif may have been fully established and how the Timurid examples should be understood.

Aside from the two Timurid sabers held in the Topkapı Palace Museum, other examples of this sword-type can be found in two objects believed to be the Prophet's

⁶⁰ The origin of this iconic trait can be traced to an alleged dream of the Prophet who, according to Ibn Ishak (c. 704–767), was said to have seen a notch at the top of his sword. Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 10–11. It is believed that the original blade would not have been split in such a prominent manner, considering the ineffective nature of such a sword, the depictions exaggerate it due to the probably reliance on the characteristic to make the image identifiable for viewers. Alexander, “Dhu'l-faqār,” 172–174.

⁶¹ Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 77.

swords—one of which is currently displayed in the Chamber of the Holy Relics (fig. 41). On the hilt of this sword, the quillons end in upward-curving dragon heads that extend outwards and curve back towards the blade. The neck of the dragon is long and thin, protruding further outwards than the dragon heads seen in the Timurid type. The heads of the dragon are also much smaller in comparison to the Timurid dragons and stylistically quite dissimilar. This type is akin to the type seen more frequently on later dragon swords and on a variety of other objects from the sixteenth century onwards (see figs. 42, 43, 34). Despite the variations in the form and stylistic characteristics of the dragons, the sword hilt with dragon-headed quillons remains quite distinctive as a particular sword-type.

While the sword itself may be one of the oldest examples of this sword-type found within the Islamic context—believed to have been created during the time of the Prophet in the seventh century—it should be noted that the current handle and scabbard attached to the original blade were both added by the Ottomans during the sixteenth century. Regardless of whether the blade was truly that of the Prophet's, the fittings of the weapon are clearly not characteristic of that time and the type of decoration seen on this object cannot be considered to have even been known by the Prophet and his companions. The lack of any extant examples from the Prophet's era or from any of the several centuries afterwards suggests that the sword type did not gain any traction until at least the eleventh century but particularly from the fifteenth century onwards.⁶² While the original fittings of the sword are unknown, they are unlikely to have been stylistically comparable to those currently attached to the blade, especially considering the impracticality of the decoration for a battle context.

⁶² Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 91.

The fittings of the sword by the Ottomans with a reimagination of what the Prophet's sword was meant to look like thus presents a fascinating case of how the double-dragon sword was considered and associated with the Prophet and Ali. The addition of the dragon-headed hilt to the relic suggests the possibility that, by the sixteenth century, the motif as included on the sword would have been a recognized weapon-type for the Ottomans and that it was already associated with the Prophet and the *dhu'l-faqar*. While this particular sword is not considered to have been an example of the *dhu'l-faqar* itself, there appears to be a distinct association between the Prophet and the dragon-sword more generally for the Ottomans. The princely connotation of the sword as seen in the Timurid examples may have also been at play, yet the religious element appears to be too significant in the extant swords and images to relegate the motif simply to a sign of wealth and royalty. This is further supported by the usage of the dragon motif in various other objects from the early Ottoman Empire.

Of these objects, another sword of this type is the so-called "Sword of Osman" held in the Topkapı Palace Museum (fig. 44). The richly decorated sword features a similarly styled quillon block terminating in upward-curving dragon heads as can be seen in the Sword of the Prophet. It is assumed that the sword originally held a particularly laden symbolic significance in the girding ceremonies of rising sultans as one of the various objects known as the "Sword of Investiture," also regarded as the "Sword of the Prophet" during the period.⁶³ The relation between this sword and the *dhu'l-faqar* is most clearly indicated by the Arabic inscription on the gold plaque, which reads the quintessential saying: "Victory from God and a speedy victory; Go

⁶³ Murad IV is said to have been girded with the "Sword of the Prophet" and the "Sword of Sultan Selim" in 1623. Alexander notes: "It appears that until the nineteenth century, the Ottomans did not always use the same sword in their ceremonies of investiture, and that the dragon sword in the Treasury was only one of a numbers of swords used at one time or another," Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 82.

preach to the believers Oh Muhammad; There is no hero like ‘Ali and no sword like the *dhu l-fakar*.”⁶⁴ The association is unmistakable.

It has been suggested, however, that the sword was likely misattributed and unlikely to have truly belonged to the Prophet Muhammad. Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682) notes, “As to the sword used in the ceremony, it is regularly spoken of as the Sword of the Prophet. But among the official relics of the Prophet at Constantinople a sword is never mentioned. We may venture a guess that the sword at Eyyub was originally attributed to another Mohammad, the Conqueror himself.”⁶⁵ Alexander further scrutinizes this by noting that the “Sword of Investiture” was more recently identified as being the sword of the second Caliph, ‘Uthman, which also seems rather unlikely. The hilt and decoration of the weapon most likely dates to the sixteenth century and the blade to the fourteenth, thus leading to the conclusion that it may have instead been the sword of a different Uthman—the founder of the Ottoman Empire, Osman I (1258–1326).⁶⁶ Even with the misattribution, however, the inscription seen on the blade of the sword further strengthens what can be considered a known or conscious association between the *dhu l-fakar* and the dragon-headed hilt that would have been present during Ottoman times.

Some of the clearest examples of the inclusion of the double-dragon motif to the *dhu l-fakar* image can be seen in a number of Ottoman military flags (*sancak*) from the early sixteenth century.⁶⁷ On a central panel of a *sancak* from the seventeenth

⁶⁴ Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, cat. no. 28.

⁶⁵ Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 609–10.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Dhu L-Fakar*, 83.

⁶⁷ The usage of the *dhu l-fakar* in the Ottoman military context is understandable when considering the significance of Ali to the Janissary corps. The origin of the motif’s presence on *sancaks* is said to have begun with Orhan Gazi (1288–1360) who, on the creation of a new military structure during the nascent years of the empire, is believed to have adorned the banner of the Janissaries so as to place them under the protection of Ali. Riza Nur, “L’Histoire du croissant,” *Revue du Turcologie* 1/3 (1933): 115–16, 344–45; The significance of the sword is further highlighted by its appearance on the tombstones of various

century currently located in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection in London (fig. 45), the image of Ali's sword is vertically depicted with the characteristic blades facing downwards, prominently displayed in the center of the red flag.⁶⁸ At the top of the sword, a rounded pommel is depicted with a crescent surrounding a star, and vegetal designs make up the handle of the cross-guard. Two dragon heads protrude from the hilt, curving out and wrapping back in such a manner that the mouths of the dragon meet the handle of the sword. Another nineteenth century example, currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, shows a similarly rendered *dhu'l-faqar* (fig. 46). Again, the dragons in the Ottoman context appear stylistically more similar to the "Sword of the Prophet" and the so-called Sword of Osman. The physical sword and the sword-image both incorporate dragon heads with long, thin necks that protrude further out from the handle. While the image on the *sancak* curves back toward the handle in a more extreme manner, the similarities in the curve and the neck are undeniable.

The Timurid Dragon Sword in Relation to the *Dhu'l-faqar*

While the connection between the dragon-headed hilt and the *dhu'l-faqar* is present within the Ottoman context, the same cannot necessarily be said for all examples of this sword-type found within the Islamic context and should be addressed accordingly. That said, the association is present and frequent from the fifteenth century onwards and the consistency between the two elements suggest that they were understood to be

Janissary officials. Hathaway, "The Forgotten Icon," 7; The usage of the *dhu'l-faqar* as a symbol within the military context is believed to have had strong political implications, especially considering the religious tensions that may have been raised when considering the sword's relation to 'Ali. Zeynep Yürekli argues that the Ottoman army's usage of the motif secularized it—separating the image from its Shi'i connotations and allowing the symbol to be displayed within an orthodox Sunni context. Zeynep Yürekli, "*Dhu'l-faqār* and the Ottomans," in *People of the Prophet's House: Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*, ed. F. Suleman (London: Islamic Publications Ltd, 2015), 165.

⁶⁸ Ottoman flags were either red, the Ottoman dynastic color, or white, corresponding to the color of the Janissaries' headgear. Hathaway, "The Forgotten Icon," 7.

inextricable. The connection between the Timurid examples and the Ottoman swords and whether there is a relation between the two seems difficult to ascertain. The Timurid hilt and the known Mamluk and Ottoman examples of the *dhu'l-faqar* maintain the same general form with the protruding dragon heads on both sides of the scabbard, yet the differences between the portrayal of the dragon and the style of the hilt itself are immediately perceptible. While few conclusions can be made about the stylistic differences between these objects, the significant contrast between the two sword-types call for a more nuanced approach in relating these objects to the strong religious implications that scholars have tended to bring in.

When considering the dragon sword in Islamic art, it is understandable to naturally associate any examples encountered with the *dhu'l-faqar*, or the sword of Ali. However, this assumption detrimentally limits the manner in which these objects are studied, and a more nuanced approach is needed in order to understand the usage and movement of the iconography of the dragon throughout the Islamic world. While the bifurcated sword alone has come to immediately bring to mind the figure of Ali, the dragon-sword without the blade does not have the same immediate implications.⁶⁹ In one of the few studies of the jade Timurid hilt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see fig. 2), David Alexander does not propose any definite assessment of the object as a representation alluding to the *dhu'l-faqar*, and the absence of any further investigation to how the dragon was used in Islamic weaponry and where the double dragon-headed image may have originated is misleading.⁷⁰ The facile assumption that the Timurid examples as an allusion to the heavy-laden religious symbol is risky and could potentially lead to a misunderstanding of the multifaceted and multicultural usage of

⁶⁹ Zeynep Yürekli, “*Dhu'l-faqār*,” 163.

⁷⁰ Alexander, *Islamic Arms*, 151, footnote 7.

iconography and images within Timurid cultural production. That said, the relation of the dragon sword generally to the sword of Ali is clear and the connotations may have existed to the contemporary viewer, but the objects should be more carefully approached when assuming the historical religious significations that they may have had.

Despite the issues regarding the reductive associations and analyses of the dragon sword, it should also be noted that the Timurids did place a great importance on the personhood of Ali. The religious legitimization is particularly exemplified by Timur's cenotaph in the Gur-i Amir in Samarkand which Ulugh Beg had prepared after bringing back a block of nephrite jade from one of his military campaigns. One of the two inscriptions on the tomb reads: "it is said that he was one of the descendants of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali b. Abi Talib."⁷¹ While the inscription makes a genealogical link to Genghis Khan and the Turco-Mongol traditions in a manner seen more prominently during the early Timurid period, as discussed in Chapter III, the direct reference to Ali indicates a greater religious motivation that came with Ulugh Beg's rule. The sword itself may or may not have been a reference to the fourth caliph, but the understanding of Ali in their religious motivations and efforts to legitimize their place as the ruling Islamic empire would have been significant in the artistic and cultural empire of the royal workshops. The Timurid dragon-headed sword hilts may be another example of the various clashing cultural identities at play.

While the Timurid objects cannot be definitively understood as being an example of the *dhu'l-faqar*, they are characteristic of the types of transformations of form and meaning of a certain object-type that had had a longer and more complex

⁷¹ Aigle, "The Transformation," 122–23.

history within the Asiatic continent. It can, however, be more clearly understood as a princely weapon, with the Timurid dragon-sword having connections to the earlier traditions involving similar objects. As with later Ottoman dragon swords, it is plausible that these objects could have been related to the notion of the *dhu'l-faqar*, perhaps alluding to the religious legitimacy of Ali's succession through the usage of an object that could have had implicit associations with the fourth Caliph.

Conclusion

The usage of the serpent figure in the Islamic context has had a long tradition in various contexts for varying purposes, from serving as a talismanic image to representing kingship and power. The Timurid dragon swords provide an interesting case of how the dragon motif was used on Islamic weaponry and the significances it may have held or been influenced from. While the dragon is known to have appeared on various objects from the Timurid royal workshop and are generally understood to have been a symbol of kingship, the motif provides clues to the ways in which cultural transmissions and transcultural processes took place within the artistic and cultural production during Ulugh Beg's reign and afterwards with the Timurid legacy. The group of Timurid swords provide evidence not only of how the Islamic dragon manifested itself during the late medieval period but also indicates the significant cultural influences that came from farther east, indicating a more complex and multi-layered image.

By the early modern period, it is evident that the dragon sword can definitively be understood as a reference to the Prophet, and the Timurid dragon swords are likely to have influenced the development of these later weapons. The inscriptions on the cenotaph at the Gur-i Amir also indicate that there was a stronger emphasis on the

personhood of Ali during this period and provide further evidence for the Timurid objects—made from the same material as the cenotaph—having a connection to the fourth caliph. While the Timurid jade dragon sabers may not have been a direct example of the sword of Ali, the weapons indicate a step in the evolution of the object-type that would soon become known as a representation of the *dhu'l-faqar*.



CHAPTER V

THE TIMURID LEGACY

After significant infighting and a gradual loss of territory, the fall of the Timurids came in 1526 upon the Uzbek invasion into Herat.¹ However, for several generations after the empire's demise, the cultural impact of the Timurids would still persist within the region and undeniably perpetuated throughout the successive empires of the Safavids, Ottomans and Mughals. The development of the Persianate tradition by the Timurids—especially with the refinement and standardization of a unique artistic idiom and the innovations brought about—would prove significant. The elements of the Timurid artistic tradition that were implemented during the fifteenth century in particular would be dispersed far and wide, likely due in part to Ulugh Beg's decree freeing the artisans brought to Samarkand by his grandfather.² The dissemination of the Timurid cultural legacy would be further extended after the Uzbek conquest of Herat, which would scatter princes, artists and poets, along with works of art, beyond the Timurid realm.³ These elements would continue on and evolve in varying ways among the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Indian Empires.⁴ The life of the objects produced in the Timurid period would also continue to hold significance in relation to sovereignty

¹ For more on the final decades of the Timurid Empire, see H. R. Roemer, "The Successors of Timur," in *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, eds. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6: 98–101.

² Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989), 63.

³ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁴ While the Timurid legacy would have an impact on other states that rose after the fall of the empire, particularly with the Uzbeks that conquered much of their territory in Transoxiana, this chapter addresses these three empires for they dominated the Muslim world and also in an effort to limit the study's scope. For more on the Timurid impact on the Uzbek Empire, see Stephen Frederic Dale, "The Legacy of the Timurids," *Journal of the Asiatic Society* 8/1 (1998): 51–54; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 305–10.

and legitimacy, and the inheritors, or perhaps subsumers, of the Timurid tradition would utilize it according to their respective agendas. The manifestations of its impact allow for greater insight into cultural dominance of the Timurid legacy during the early modern period and its utilization by later empires in their own efforts to establish cultural dominance and legitimacy.

The Safavid Empire (1501–1722)

In the last decades of the Timurid Empire, the Safavid dynasty grew to be a threatening force steadily rising in the region of Iran. After the fall of the Timurids, the Safavids would be heavily influenced by the artistic tradition that the Timurids had developed during the fifteenth century, seeing themselves as the inheritors of the Persianate tradition.⁵ Despite taking on the Persianate cultural identity and developing the level of cultural prowess and imperial patronage that Timur once had, the connections between the two empires were not quite as clear. The Safavids did not consider themselves as a continuation of the Timurid rule, which was instead assumed by the Mughal Empire established by Babur. The political and religious alignments of the Safavids would also indicate a clear departure from the Timurid past.⁶ However, the Timurid legacy would continue to persist in the Safavid Empire and would be utilized according to the Safavids' own imperial agenda in taking control over a region that was under the sphere of the Timurid cultural influence and in which many Timurid artists remained.

⁵ See Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 17–19. It should be noted, however, that Shah Ismail showed a preference for Azeri Turkish, indicating the various identities that also came into play for the Safavids. Amelia Gallagher, "Shah Isma'il's Poetry in the Silsilat al-Nasab-i Safawiyya," *Iranian Studies* 44/6 (2011): 898.

⁶ Zeren Tanındı, "Bābor, Ṣāḥīr-al-Dīn Moḥammad," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2008, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/babor-zahir-al-din>; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 310.

While the Safavids did not see themselves as the successors of the Timurid Empire per se, evidence suggests that the legacy of Timur did play a role in legitimizing the rule of the Safavid Empire. This is particularly evident in various Safavid chronicles that indicate that contemporary historians were interested in promoting Safavid legitimacy through drawing ties to Timur's name.⁷ In the *Zayl-i 'alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi*, it was reported that an amir of Imam Quli Khan, the governor of Hormuz, was presented with the sword of Timur as a gift to Shah Safi (r. 1629–42) in 1633. The sword was considered to be a sign of great fortune and a positive omen assuring the success of Shah Safi in his world conquests.⁸ In this example, the culturally significant sword symbolizes the power and reign of Timur, and the passing down of the object would further signify the legitimacy of the Safavid Shah's sovereignty. The importance given to the Timurid legacy is further strengthened by an account given in the sixteenth century *Gulistan-i hunar* where Ya'qub Khan is said to have been executed for destroying Timurid madrasahs, taking stones from these buildings to build a fortress.⁹ Several references to the Timurid dynasty are also made in Qazi Ahmad's late sixteenth century chronical, the *Khulasat al-tawarikh*, in his discussion of the early Safavid order.¹⁰

The continuation of the Timurid legacy during this period is most supported by the influence within the Safavid cultural and artistic sphere. In a vast range of art forms—including painting, literature, architecture, metalwork, textiles, carpets, and

⁷ Sholeh A. Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy in Three Safavid Chronicles," in *Iranian Studies*, 31/2 (Spring 1998): 149.

⁸ Iskandar Beg Munshi and Muhammad Yusuf, *Zayl-i tarikh-i 'alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi*, ed. S. Khwansari (Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Islamiyah, 1938), 129–30; Cited in Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy," 149–58.

⁹ Qazi Ahmad Munshi Qummi, *Calligraphers and Painters*, trans. V. Minorsky, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, vol. 3, no. 2 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1959), 69–70.

¹⁰ For a discussion of these, see Quinn, "Notes on Timurid Legitimacy," 150–54.

wood and stone carving—Timurid practices can be clearly seen to have continued.¹¹ The appointment of Persian painter Kamal al-Din Bihzad (d. 1535) to the head of the royal Safavid atelier, who previously held a prominent position within the late Timurid Empire, particularly influenced the court's tastes. Bringing elements of the Timurid *kitabkhana* and the refinement seen in the painting of the fifteenth century, the Timurid aesthetic—particularly that which is associated with Herat—would be incorporated into the newly established Safavid style of painting.¹² This is particularly seen in the great Safavid *Book of Kings* (*Shahnama*), executed for Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76) from about 1522–35, which incorporated Turkmen and Timurid styles of painting into the new Safavid artistic idiom, seen in its 258 paintings. A great number of other Timurid painters and calligraphers were also brought to work for the court workshop and would subsequently train other Safavid artists, allowing for the Timurid aesthetic to perpetuate in this way.¹³

In terms of portable art, Timurid objects were highly valued by the Safavids and their acquisition is likely to have significantly contributed to the influence that was seen in their artistic patronage. Timurid drawings, paintings and sketches were especially important in their transference of the earlier artistic legacy, and manuscripts continued to be valued up until as late as the early seventeenth century.¹⁴ While Timurid objects likely made their way to Tabriz early on, it can be assumed that a significant amount of booty was taken after the Safavid conquest of Herat in 1510.¹⁵ In particular, the Safavid works of carved jades, along with books—both quintessentially Timurid modes of

¹¹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 310.

¹² *Ibid.*, 311.

¹³ For more on Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, see Stuart Cary Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976); and Robert Hillenbrand, "The Iconography of the Shah-namah-yi Shahi," in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. C. Melville (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 53–78.

¹⁴ Lentz & Lowry, 310–11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

artistic production—indicate the importance of the Timurid tradition. This is especially the case regarding the distinctive Timurid jug type discussed in Chapter IV, of which jade and metal variations produced during the late Timurid period would come to be owned by the Safavids.¹⁶

One particular example of the jug—a dark green nephrite vessel inscribed with the name of Shah Isma’il (r. 1501–24)—is particularly intriguing (fig. 47). The vessel features the distinctively Timurid globular body with a wide mouth, including the characteristic carved dragon handle. Because of its similarity to early Timurid examples, it has been suggested that it was produced in the royal workshop of Ulugh Beg and later ended up with the Safavids, who would then decorate the vessel with detailed gold arabesques and inscriptions according to their own tastes.¹⁷ However, the jug could have simply been made particularly for Shah Isma’il given that Timurid artists were brought to work for the Safavid court. Regardless, the addition of the inlay and inscriptions transform the jade vessel into one that is simultaneously both Timurid and Safavid and indicate the value given to this object for the Shah. It may be likely that the imperial connotations attached to this jug during the Timurid era would have persisted, given the rarity of the semiprecious stone and the skillful carving of such material that is difficult to work with.¹⁸ The usage of the Timurid object in this manner further implicates the importance given to this jade vessel in helping to establish the imperial image within the cultural and artistic sphere of the region. The value given to

¹⁶ For a discussion of a group of these vessels, see Linda Komaroff, “Timurid to Safavid Iran: Continuity and Change,” *Marsyas* 20 (1979–80): 11–16.

¹⁷ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 310–11; J. M. Rogers, *The Topkapı Sarayı Museum: The Treasury* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 52; Robert Skelton, “The Relations Between the Chinese and Indian Jade Carving Traditions,” in *The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts from the 14th to the 18th Century*, ed. W. Watson (London: University of London, 1972), 103.

¹⁸ Rogers, *The Topkapı Sarayı Museum*, 52.

the jade jug as a princely object is clear, despite the fact that the Safavid' interest in jade carving was never able to compete with that of the Timurids.¹⁹

While the legacy of Timur and the artistic developments of the early fifteenth century would continue during Safavid rule, some scholars consider the importance of the Timurids for the Safavids to be negligible.²⁰ However, the continuation of elements of the Timurid traditions of architecture and painting, along with the incorporation of Timurid artists into the Safavid royal workshop indicate that the legacy was very much present for the Safavids, albeit much differently than would be seen with the Ottomans and Mughals. The developments to the Persianate traditions seen during the fifteenth century would have a lasting impact on the artistic production of the Safavid Empire and the legacy of Timur evidently persisted throughout the region of Iran long after the fall of his empire.

The Ottoman Empire (1299–1923)

In relation to the Timurids, the Ottomans are best known for their role in the Battle of Ankara in 1402, during which came the confrontation of the two Turkic rulers Timur and Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402). While Timur would defeat Bayezid, taking the Ottoman Sultan as prisoner and prompting a period of crisis within the Ottoman Empire known as the *Fetret Devri* or “Interregnum Period,” the Ottomans would still come to embrace the cultural legacy of their opponent in their later rise as the dominating force east of the Timurid lands.²¹ Like the Safavids, the Ottomans did not see themselves as the

¹⁹ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 311; Skelton, “The Relations,” 103.

²⁰ In describing the extent of the Timurid legacy, Dale argues: “the non-Timurid, culturally non-Turkic Safavid and modern Afghan states in which the Timurid legacy was, respectively, the most ephemeral and the most diffuse.” Dale, “The Legacy,” 43.

²¹ Roemer, “The Successors,” 157.

descendants of the Timurid Empire, but the artistic traditions that developed in Iran and Central Asia during the late medieval period nonetheless had a significant impact on the cultural production of the early Ottomans.²² However, they differed from the Safavids in that they rose from nomadic Turkic tribes in Anatolia—with more complicated ties to the Persianate tradition than existed for the Safavids.²³ Despite similar ethnic backgrounds of the Ottomans and the Timurids, the Ottomans would still remain ambivalent about the figure of Timur himself while revering the cultural achievements that resulted from the empire.²⁴ The Ottoman Empire is especially intriguing due to the many extant fifteenth-century Timurid objects that would end up in empire's capital of Istanbul as spoils of war. The jade dragon sword with the white nephrite hilt (fig. 1) is one such object that would find its home in the treasury of the Topkapı Palace. In their formation as an empire, rapidly conquering and expanding across Anatolia and into the Balkans, the Ottomans would subsume the established Timurid visual mode that shaped the imperial cultural production of the region to represent their power and legitimize their reign through an artistic idiom that would have been understood and received by their conquered subjects.

²² By the reign of Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66) during what is considered to be the “Classical” Ottoman period, the empire developed a distinctly Ottoman artistic aesthetic, moving away from the earlier Persianate traditions upon which the empire initially rose. For more, see Gülru Necipoğlu, “A Kanun for the State, A Canon for the Arts: Conceptualizing the Classical Synthesis of Ottoman Art and Architecture,” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son temps: actes du Colloque de Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 7–10 mars 1990 / Süleymân the Magnificent and his time: acts of the Parisian Conference, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 7–10 March 1990*, ed. G. Veinstein (Paris: Documentation française, 1992), 194–214.

²³ The Seljuks, considered to be the predecessors of the Ottomans, adopted the Persian language and were highly Persianized in culture to the point of even tracing their origins back to ancient Persian kings. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Šāhrbānu,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2005, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sahrbanu>.

²⁴ Dale, “The Legacy,” 43. In his article on the complicated nature of the cultural and ethnic identity of the Ottomans, Kafadar discusses the confrontation between the Ottoman Turks and the Central Asian Turks. Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One's Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum,” *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 7–25.

The cultural framework of the early period of the Ottoman Empire was one that arose from various identities and numerous pre-existing traditions, and the Persianate cultural tradition was particularly crucial for the Ottomans in establishing their legitimacy as the new imperial power.²⁵ The Timurid artistic vision would play a significant role in shaping the artistic and literary patronage of the Ottomans, and the political ideals behind the court ceremonies and practices would be based upon those of the earlier Turkish and Mongol states. The Persianate culture would be significant within the Ottoman imperial court to the extent that Persian would be used as the court language, not being replaced by Ottoman Turkish until the late sixteenth century.²⁶ With the arrival of Timurid objects to the Ottoman Empire after successful campaigns against the Safavids, along with earlier exchanges between the Ottoman and Timurid courts during the fifteenth century, many objects would be created that would incorporate distinctively Timurid characteristics.²⁷ Of the Timurid influences that can be seen, some of the most significant and well-studied examples are the architectural structures built during the early Ottoman period. In particular, the *cuerda seca* tilework—a technique used heavily in Samarkand during the late fourteenth century—would be seen in both Bursa, particularly with the Green Mosque, and in Istanbul, with the Tiled Pavilion outside of Topkapı Palace. Inscriptions on the early fifteenth-century Green Mosque in Bursa indicate that the mosque’s decoration was completed by the

²⁵ For more on the various cultural elements that characterize the early modern period, particularly in terms of architecture, see Robert Ousterhout, “Ethnic Identity and Cultural Appropriation in Early Ottoman Architecture,” in *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 48–62; Idem, “The East, the West, and the Appropriation of the Past in Early Ottoman Architecture,” *Gesta* 43/2 (2004):165–76; and Zeynep Yürekli, “Architectural Patronage and the Rise of the Ottomans,” in *Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. G. Necipoğlu and F. B. Flood, 2 vols. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 2: 742–58.

²⁶ Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 315.

²⁷ For some examples of the exchanges between the Timurids and the Ottomans, see Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, trans. R. Manheim, ed. W. C. Hickman, Bollingen Series, No. 96 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 501; and Zeki Velidi Togan, *On the Miniatures in Istanbul Libraries*, Publications of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Istanbul, no. 1304 (Istanbul: Baha Matbassi, 1963), 27, 36.

artist Naqqash Ali, a native of Bursa who spent many years serving in the Timurid court after being forcibly relocated by Timur.²⁸ The movement of the artist from Central Asia back to Bursa likely attributed to the many Timurid elements that eventually came to Ottoman architecture—much in the same way that was seen for Safavid painting.

Alongside the Persianate influences that are evident in the empire's earlier artistic production, the continuation of the Timurid legacy for the Ottomans can be further understood by the accumulation of objects originating from Iran within the treasuries of the Ottoman Empire. While many treasuries existed within the empire's capital of Istanbul, the imperial treasury in the Topkapı Palace, known as the Enderun Hazinesi, presents a particularly intriguing case as the most important of the sultan's personal treasuries.²⁹ It came to represent the wealth and power not just of the current sultan, but of all the past sultans that would contribute to the extensive collections that were held in the treasury's storerooms. While the treasury was used as a personal space for the sultan, with restricted access to anyone outside of the sultan's household, it would even come to be a subject of fascination for foreign onlookers due to the notions of the massive riches and grandeur of the sultan that were spread through the European imagination.³⁰

²⁸ For more on Timurid influences in Ottoman architecture, see Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 317–9; and Gülru Necipoğlu, "From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-Century Ceramic Tiles," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 136–70.

²⁹ Other treasuries existed in the earlier capitals of Bursa and Edirne, but the significant amassing of objects for the imperial treasury began with Selim I. The lack of archival records from the earlier periods also limit this study to the treasuries in Istanbul. Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 21; The Enderun Hazinesi was referred to by a variety of other names, including Hazine-i Enderun-i Hümayun, and the Inner Treasury, or İç Hazinesi. Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 9–10.

³⁰ Regarding the Enderun Hazinesi and the treasury in the Yedikule Fortress, the seventeenth-century English traveler Frynes Morrison records such a speculation: "The treasure is vulgarly said to be laid up there, but the great Turke seldome goes thither, and since it is true that where the treasure is, there is the mind, I thinke it probable (which I have heard of experienced men) that most of the treasure lies in the Seraglio, where the great Turke holds his Court." Frynes Morrison, "An Itinerary (1617), Observations of the Ottoman Empire," in *Amazons, Savages, and Machiavels: Travel and Colonial Writing in English, 1550–1630: An Anthology*, ed. A. Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 177.

The usage of the Enderun Hazinesi as a structure symbolizing the wealth and power of the empire throughout its history calls into question the nature of the objects filling its storerooms. Most of the objects that ended up in the treasury were taken as booty after victorious military campaigns or as gifts received from other empires, resulting in the Topkapı Palace becoming the holder of one of the most significant collections of Persianate art outside of Iran. While the provenances of the objects are difficult to trace, especially considering the inability of scholars to match inventory records of the treasury with any extant objects due to the brevity of the entries, it is likely that the Timurid jade dragon sword was also one of the objects taken from the Safavid treasury during the sixteenth century.³¹ Upon Ottoman Sultan Selim I's (r. 1512–20) return from his victorious campaigns against the Safavids and Mamluks, the Enderun Hazinesi was filled with booty taken from the treasuries in Tabriz and Cairo.³² Because Islamic law and custom somewhat restricted the amount that a sovereign could take as booty, the selection of the jade Timurid objects would have been particularly deliberate.³³ The understanding that Selim I was selective in what he could take as spoils of war is further supported by the lack of objects inscribed with the name of the

³¹ It should be noted that a significant portion of the Persian objects in the treasury were a result of diplomatic gifts and the Ottomans' own personal interest in Persian art. While these objects are likely to have been taken as booty, there is still the possibility that some were acquired through different means. Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 21.

³² Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The MIT Press, 1991), 133.

³³ Regarding the *khums*, meaning a fifth and referring to the portion of the *ghanima* (spoils of war) required to be distributed to the poor, the Quran states: "The remaining fifth belongs to Allah, and to the Messenger, and to the kinsman (who has need), and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer," *Qur'an*, sura 8, verse 14. Discussed in relation to distributive justice in Islamic law, in Hussein Hassan, "Contracts in Islamic Law: The Principles of Commutative Justice and Liberality," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 13/3 (2002): 266–9. J. M. Rogers, however, claims that according to Islamic law, the Sultan had "a right to no more than one-fifth of the spoils of battle or loot." This is likely to be an error in interpretation. Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 17.

Safavid Shah Ismail, despite Selim I's troops sacking his palace, the Hasht Bihisht, in September 1514.³⁴

Of the material that did include the name of the shah, the dark green nephrite Timurid-type jug with gold inlay, discussed earlier in relation to the Safavids, is particularly significant. The inscriptions and the eventual location of the object in the Ottoman treasury indicate the rich life of the object as it moved, being passing down between empires. If the object was truly a Timurid-produced jade, as suggested by some scholars, it can thus be inferred that this object was produced in the Timurid workshop, moved into the Safavid court where it would later be decorated according to their own tastes and then taken as a spoil of war after an Ottoman victory over their rivals.³⁵ The jug as an imperial symbol is further evidenced by the afterlife of this particular object, valued in all three contexts in which it existed. For the Ottomans specifically, the jug may not only have represented their victory over the Safavids but may have indicated their regard for the Timurid artistic legacy—not solely through their artistic patronage but also through their acquisitions.

Apart from the jug, other jades believed to have been taken from the Safavids into the Ottoman treasury are particularly revealing in highlighting the later lives of the objects after the fall of the Timurids. Several jade pieces can be seen in the palace's storerooms, indicating the value given to the rare semiprecious stone during the Ottoman period.³⁶ Two of the Timurid-type jade swords eventually ended up in Istanbul along with various examples of the vessels described in Chapter IV. While no longer in the treasury, another jade cup provides evidence of the Ottomans themselves

³⁴ However, the sum taken as booty would still have been sizeable, considering that rulers would often use these funds to build Friday mosques. Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 17.

³⁵ Robert Skelton, "The Relations," 103.

³⁶ Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 52.

implementing various additions to older Timurid jades (fig. 21). Now in the British museum, the cup's broken rim was filled in with silver and inscribed in Ottoman script: "The boundless generosity of the Almighty," indicating that the object was likely held in the Ottoman treasury during the sixteenth century.³⁷

The ceremonial function of the treasury provides further evidence of the symbolic nature of the structure and the contents within. Aside from its purpose as a storeroom for the empire's riches, the space served an important role in the accession ceremony of the rising sultan that indicated its importance as a symbol of the sultan's power and as a representation of the Ottoman dynastic lineage. Upon assuming the throne, the new sultan would enter into the Enderun Hazinesi and contemplate the riches accumulated by previous rulers. The French orientalist, François Pétis de La Croix (1653–1713), recounts in his 1684 memoir, "His Highness, after the prayer, visits the first of these four halls, thanking God for making him the possessor of such riches."³⁸ After the accession ceremony in 1595, Mehmed III is said to have visited the decorated Inner Treasury and bestowed gifts unto the pages, dictated by customary law (*kanun üzre*).³⁹ The treasury was also an important space for the two annual *bayram* celebrations for which the pages would spend a month in preparation, adorning the entire complex with the many extravagant objects. After one of these celebrations, Ahmed I (r. 1603–17) is recorded to have visited the treasury to survey his riches. Visiting the display of objects several times, he is said to have contemplated the

³⁷ The Ottoman text reads: *Karam-I Hakka nihayet yokdur*. Rogers, *The Topkapi Saray Museum*, 52.

³⁸ François de La Croix, *Mémoires du Sieur de La Croix, cy devant secrétaire de l'ambassade de Constantinople, contenant diverse relations très curieuses de l'Empire othoman*, (Paris, 1684), 142.

³⁹ Ahmed Tayyazade Ata, *Tarih-i Ata*, 5 vols. (Istanbul: Yahya Efendi Matbaası, 1291–1293 [1874–1876]), I: 255–6. See also Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 140.

transitory nature of life and to have thanked God for providing all of the riches before him.⁴⁰

Of the Persianate objects amassed in the treasury, the collection of weaponry comes second in quantity only to the manuscripts.⁴¹ In considering the symbolism of the sword within the Islamic context, the significance was seen as discussed with the Safavids in the passing down of Timur's sword as a form of legitimacy. While this same symbolic function of the sword was seen in the accession ceremonies of the Ottomans, attaining the weapons of another empire's leader, however, would have communicated a different message—one that would have furthered the portrayal of victory and domination over the "other."⁴² To take a weapon from another's treasury as a trophy after a victorious military campaign would have had clear symbolic implications for the new owner, triumphalist in nature. The large amounts of non-Ottoman weapons stored in the Enderun Hazinesi of the imperial palace, especially considering the usage of the treasury space as one for personal contemplation of the sultan, would have been a clear indicator of the victorious past of the empire.

The continuation of Timurid artistic traditions was pronounced in the early Ottoman Empire until the early sixteenth century and would assume a new meaning and purpose within this context of imperial self-fashioning. The objects produced during the Timurid period would continue to hold onto their princely significance and signify wealth and power for their later owners. The amassing of such objects

⁴⁰ Mustafa bin Ibrahim Safi, *Zübde'tü't-tevarih*, 2 vols. (1304), fols. 138v–39v; Cited in Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, 141.

⁴¹ While the manuscript collection has seen significant interest by scholars, the weaponry section of the Topkapı Palace treasury has not been so fortunate. Most of the material has yet to be thoroughly studied or catalogued, Zeren Tanındı, "Topkapı Palace," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2008, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/topkapi-palace>.

⁴² For more on the symbolism of the sword in Ottoman accession ceremonies, see Douglas S. Brookes, "Of Swords and Tombs: Symbolism in the Ottoman Accession Ritual," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 17/2 (1993): 1–22.

originating from the celebrated Persianate artistic tradition as a representation of the victors of previous generations would have symbolized a type of cultural superiority over their Safavid rivals to the east.⁴³ The jade objects in particular indicate the dual significance in not only communicating the refinement of the Persianate artistic mode that developed during the fifteenth century Timurid Empire, but the superiority that the Ottomans hoped to portray in relation to their Safavid rivals. The jade dragon sword within this context thus represents not only the glory of the Timurid artistic legacy, but the new meaning it would take on in different contexts as an object indicating imperial strength.

The Mughal Empire (1526–1857)

Unlike the Safavids and the Ottomans, the Mughal emperors considered themselves to be the direct descendants of the Timurids, and their desire to continue Timur's legacy and his lineage was evident. At the fall of the Timurid Empire, Babur (1483–1530), born Zahir al-Din Muhammad, the eldest son of Umar Sheikh Mirza, the great-great-grandson of Timur, established the Mughal Empire in India in 1526 after a series of losses at Samarkand.⁴⁴ Because of their direct ties through the Mughal Empire's founder having been born under the Timurids' reign, the Timurid cultural idiom would serve as an obvious model. The Mughal imperial culture that would develop, peaking during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–56), can be traced back to the impact

⁴³ The tensions between the Safavids and Ottomans are well documented. In relation to the items of the treasury, the political and cultural rivalry between the two empires is further emphasized in the history of gift-giving. For more on this and the nuances of diplomatic gift-giving during the Ottoman period, see Sinem Arcak, *Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501–1618* (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012); Linda Komaroff (ed.), *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of the Gift at the Islamic Courts* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011); and Sinem A. Casale, "Iconography of the Gift: Diplomacy and Imperial Self-Fashioning at the Ottoman Court," *The Art Bulletin* 100/1 (2018): 97–123.

⁴⁴ Roemer, "The Successors," 119–20, 127.

of Babur.⁴⁵ The Mughal Empire's treatment of the Timurid legacy was much more explicit and their desire to continue the traditions of their predecessors was manifest in the artistic production of the empire. Of the three major empires to follow the collapse of the Timurids, jade also held the most prominent position within the artistic production of the Mughals and their developments of the practice indicate a continuation of Ulugh Beg's artistic contributions to Islamic art. While similarities exist with the Safavids and Ottomans, the cultural identification of the Mughals allowed for pronounced differences in their utilization of their predecessor's history.

In establishing the Mughal Empire, Babur made clear his ties to Timur and the lineage that he hoped to continue.⁴⁶ In a letter of petition, a Timurid refugee describes Babur as a leading force in continuing the Timurid legacy: "Babur is now, by the grace of god, senior most among the progeny of Timur, and it is only becoming that he should so extend his patronage to all living Timurids, one of whom is the writer himself, that the lamp of the Timurid family may once again shine forth."⁴⁷ In the *Baburnama*, an autobiographical history written by Babur, he recounts that in his battles against the Uzbeks near Samarkand: "It was for this [Timurid] dynasty's sake that I had thus fought and striven with the alien foe."⁴⁸ The later emperor Shah Jahan would even go as far as proclaiming himself as the second Timur, through using the title "Sahib-e Qiran-i Sani," seen on the coins he minted at Tabriz.⁴⁹ In addition to these claims, the Mughal rulers

⁴⁵ Stephen P. Blake, "Courtly Culture Under Babur and the Early Mughals," in *Journal of Asian History* 20/2 (1986): 193.

⁴⁶ For a more extensive study on the various factors at play in the foundation of the Mughal Indian Empire, see Muzaffar Alam, "State Building under the Mughals: Religion, Culture and Politics," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 3/4 (1997): 105–28.

⁴⁷ Riazul Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations (1500–1700)*, 2 vols. (Tehran; Karachi: Iranian Culture Foundation and Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1979), 2: 203.

⁴⁸ Babur, *The Babur-nama in English (Memoirs of Babur)*, trans. A. Beveridge (London: Luzac & Co., 1922), 299.

⁴⁹ Meaning: "The Second Lord of Auspicious Conjunction." For more on this title and its usage by the Mughal rulers, see Naindeep Singh Chann, "Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the Şāhib-Qirān," *Iran & the Caucasus* 13/1 (2009): 93–110, particularly, 102–107.

enforced their connection to both the Mongol and Timurid legacy by referring to themselves as *gurkhaniyya*, after Timur's and later Ulugh Beg's title of *guregen*—similar to the tactics of the Timurids in emphasizing their relation to their Mongol ancestors.⁵⁰ While Timur first assumed the title in an effort to create a personal tie to the Chinggisid line, Ulugh Beg utilized it to further emphasize his relationship to his grandfather. The Mughals' usage of the title indicates their own efforts to emphasize their Timurid lineage as one that could legitimize their claims as the rightful rulers through their relation to Timur, as well as to Genghis Khan. The need to claim this tie to Timur is further evidenced by Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1628–58) who approved the work of his court historian, Abu'l Fazl Allami, to trace the ruler's lineage even beyond the Timurid Empire, linking him to Alan Qo'a of Mongol mythology.⁵¹

The Mughal emphasis of their Timurid lineage and in utilizing it to enforce legitimacy is further evidenced by their artistic and cultural production. In the mid-sixteenth century, Babur's son, Humayun (r. 1530–40; 1555–56) commissioned a painting entitled, "Princes of the House of Timur," now in the British Museum (fig. 48). Depicting a feast in a garden pavilion, Humayun is shown seated in the center surrounded by other Timurid rulers, the depictions of whom would be added by Mughal artists of later generations. This painting illustrated the Timurid genealogy of the Mughal rulers and established a precedent of the emperors to continuously reiterate their dynastic ties to the Timurids.⁵² Humayun's son, Akbar, would also have his seal designed in such a way as to emphasize his Timurid descent, a tradition that would

⁵⁰ Dale, "The Legacy," 46.

⁵¹ Abu'l Fazl, *The Akbar Nama of Abu-l-Fazl*, trans. H. Beveridge, 2 vols. (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1897–1921), 2: 178–80.

⁵² Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 323; and Stuart Carey Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300–1900* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 143–44.

continue until the last great Mughal ruler, Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707).⁵³ Akbar's son, Jahangir would further continue emphasizing his claims to the Timurid lineage through seeking symbols of his ancestry, such as having rubies sent from Iran that were inscribed with the names of his ancestors.⁵⁴

The usage of jade and the popularity of it within Mughal artistic production, beyond what was taken from previous empires, seems to have risen around the seventeenth century after the reign of Akbar. This is likely due to an event that occurred at the beginning of the ruler's reign. Recorded in the *Akbarnama*, Abu'l Fazl recounts that Khwaja Mu'in, an official at the court of the Sultan of Kashgar, who had control over the Khotan jade exported to China, presented Akbar with gifts of rare objects from China and Kashgar upon hearing that his son, who was an officer at Akbar's court, was high in his favor. It is likely that jade was included among the many gifts that were brought to the Mughal emperor with the intention of opening further trade relations with India.⁵⁵ After gaining access to a supply of jade as a result of this event, it is imaginable that his successors would have found greater interest in jade-carving than was previously seen in the empire.⁵⁶ Four years after the end of Akbar's reign, the English traveler William Hawkins notes that the treasury was believed to have contained around twenty-five kilograms of jade with fifty of Jahangir's cups being made of single stones.⁵⁷

⁵³ Nicollao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, trans. and ed. W. Irvine, 4 vols. (Calcutta: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1960), 2: 364. For more on the seals of Mughal emperors, see Annabel Tel Gallop, "The Genealogical Seal of the Mughal Emperors of India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series 9/1 (1999): 77–140.

⁵⁴ Islam, *A Calendar*, 178–80; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 321.

⁵⁵ Abu'l Fazl, *The Akbar Nama of Abu-l-Fazl*, 300–303.

⁵⁶ Rogers, *The Topkapi Saray Museum*, 53.

⁵⁷ Sir William Foster, *Early Travels in India, 1583–1619* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 102–103.

The jade production that arose out of seventeenth-century Mughal India was one of the most significant developments of the usage of the precious stone within the Islamic world.⁵⁸ While many the origins of early Mughal jades have been disputed, believed to have been a product of the late Timurid period, the known Mughal objects are extensive and show the creation of a distinct tradition within the Indian subcontinent. The significance of Mughal jade production can be seen particularly in some later objects, such as a jade cup, currently housed in the Brooklyn Museum, with Chinese inscriptions (fig. 49). Made in Mughal India, the cup showcases the mark of the Chinese Qianlong reign (1711–1799) and its globular shape and wide mouth is indicative of the Timurid influence that impacted Mughal jade production, with just a few modifications to the handle. Another Mughal pale-green jade vase with Chinese inscriptions from the same period indicates the particular interest of the Qianlong Emperor in these Indian jades. As mentioned previously, he is even said to have directly praised these objects, claiming that, “all the best carvings are from Hindustan,” and at least twenty-five extant Mughal jades that made it to China during this period display engravings from imperial artisans.⁵⁹

The semiprecious stone within Mughal Indian artistic production is particularly distinctive in its incorporation into the period’s production of arms. With its frequent usage in swords and daggers, it is most prominently featured in the handles of the daggers known as *khanjar* and used for the lockets and chapes of the scabbard⁶⁰ Similar

⁵⁸ While Mughal India had relations with China, especially considering the closer geographic proximity than the early Timurids, Robert Skelton argues that Mughal jade production is a development that progressed rather naturally from the Timurid artistic traditions. He notes: “The mere existence of a longstanding Chinese tradition is not in itself sufficient to warrant the assumption that Chinese workers carried out this craft at the Mughal court when all the evidence is decisively against it.” Skelton, “The Relations,” 98. For a further study on Mughal Indian jades, see Idem, “Islamic and Mughal,” 281–89.

⁵⁹ Mai Chih-ch'eng and Teng Shu-p'ing, *Catalogue of a Special Exhibition of Hindustan Jade in the National Palace Museum* (Taipei: Heian International Publishing, 1983), 90; Skelton, “Islamic and Mughal,” 291.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 289.

to the Timurid jade dragon saber, these objects also incorporate zoomorphic forms, such as the heads of horses, camels, goats and rams (see figs. 50, 51). While the usage of jade in weaponry stemmed from the medieval Turkic traditions, as discussed in relation to al-Biruni's treatise in Chapter IV, the refinement of this practice was most clearly seen during the Mughal Empire. The surviving examples from this period are numerous and mark a clear difference from the usage of jade within the Ottoman and Safavid realms.

The extant objects also clearly indicate the princely connotations attached to the material, similar to the discussion of the Timurid objects in Chapter III. This is evidenced by a phoenix-handled cup, similar to the dragon handle of the Timurid vessel-type, which is dated to 1613 and inscribed with the name of Jahangir (fig. 52).⁶¹ The inscription reads:

By the World-Seizing [=Jahāngīr] Emperor the world found order;
 From the radiance of his justice the age was filled with light;
 From the reflection of the spinel-coloured wine, may
 The jasper-wine-cup be—forever—like a ruby!⁶²

Another gray jade wine cup also produced for Jahangir in 1607–1608, now in the Al-Thani Collection, is inscribed:

By order of His-Presence-Most-High, the Great Khāqān, Master of the Kings of
 the World, Manifestation of Divine Favours, Pearl-on-the-Stairway of Caliphal
 Succession and Emperorship, Sun-in-the-Firmament of Sultanate and World-
 Government, Moon-in-the-Heavens of Justice and Felicity, Abū-l-Muẓaffar, the

⁶¹ Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal," 282–83.

⁶² Transcribed by Melikian-Chirvani, "Sa'īda-ye Gīlānī and the Iranian Style Jades of Hindustan," in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 13 (1999): 96; Amended version in Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 68.

Shāh, son of Akbar, the Shāh, Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr Muḥammad, the Emperor, Muslim-Warrior.⁶³

The inscriptions indicate the nature of jade cups as princely objects, proclaiming the greatness of the ruler for which they were created. The declaration of the ruler's power through the writing on the objects provides evidence of the importance of jade objects within the Mughal royal court and a more concrete link between the material and the image of the ruler himself, recalling the understanding of the material that was established and seen during the fifteenth-century Timurid Empire. The self-reference on the phoenix-handled cup further strengthens the importance of the vessel-type in particular; the significance of the object going beyond the costliness of the material or even as a carrier of the inscribed praises.

A white jade jug, now in the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection in Lisbon, Portugal also features similar inscriptions praising Jahangir (fig. 9). Created in the royal workshop of Ulugh Beg according to inscriptions featuring the ruler's name and titles, the jug features the distinctive globular body, wide neck and carved dragon handle of the Timurid type. The possession of this object by the Mughals is indicated by inscriptions on the rim and area below the handle reading:⁶⁴

God is Most Great [Allāhu Akbar!] The King of the Seven Lands! The Emperor of Emperors who spreads Justice! The Knower of the Signs, Real and Metaphorical! Abū-l-Muẓaffar Nūr-ud-Dīn Jahāngīr, the King, son of Akbar, the King! Righteous-Warrior!⁶⁵

⁶³ Transcribed by Melikian-Chirvani, "Sa'īda-ye Gīlānī," 92; Amended version in Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 68.

⁶⁴ Robert Skelton, "Islamic and Mughal Jades," in *Jade*, ed. R. Keverne (New York: Annex Publishing Limited, 1991), 277.

⁶⁵ Transcribed by Melikian-Chirvani, "Sa'īda-ye Gīlānī," 107; Amended version in Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 68.

The existence of another white jug is indicated by a passage found in Jahangir's memoirs. He notes that on June 19, 1608:

Munis Khan, son of Mihtar Khan, presented me with a jug of jasper [jade], which had been made in the reign of Mirza Ulugh Beg Gurgan, in the honoured name of that prince. It was a very delicate rarity of a beautiful shape. Its stone was exceedingly white and pure. Around the neck of the jar they had carved the auspicious name of the Mirza and the hejira year in rika' characters. I ordered them to inscribe my name and the auspicious name of Akbar on the edge of the lip of the jar.⁶⁶

While the description of the jug is similar to the extant object in the Gulbekian collection, the differences in inscriptions indicate that Jahangir was describing another jug. This would indicate that multiple similar jade objects would have passed down into Mughal hands and modified with the inscriptions of these rulers' names.

The inscriptions clearly emphasize the legitimacy of Jahangir as ruler. The utilization of a Timurid jug as a sort of heirloom, passed down into the hands of the Mughals—similar to the later lives of the Timurid objects in Safavid and Ottoman lands—communicates the usage of their predecessors' artistic legacy in constructing their own imperial image. The princely connotations given to the jug are further understood through the other declarations of praise given to him as the sovereign in the inscriptions. In addition to legitimating his reign through his connections to his predecessors, Jahangir strategically associated his imperial image with the Muslim faith. This is evident through the usage of the fundamental Islamic saying, "*Allahu Akbar*." Shahab Ahmed argues that the objects accomplish this through the specific

⁶⁶ Jahangir, *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir*, tr. A. Rogers, ed. H. Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 1: 146.

acknowledgment of Jahangir as a Muslim ruler, and by declaring himself as such, the Mughal ruler would be further legitimating himself through an image of his religious piety.⁶⁷ Communicating the various facets of the Mughal ruler's claims to power, the object reveals the different identities that are at play—strategically utilized to strengthen his imperial image through the artistic production of his court. The inscriptions also clearly articulate the nature of the objects themselves as representations of legitimacy with their declarations of sovereignty. The princely connotations with jade and the content of the inscriptions call to mind how jade was used by the Timurids and may have signified the memory of their predecessors' past. It can be understood that these jade objects were likely tools to communicate power, sovereignty and legitimacy through the artistic production of the royal court, just as it was for the other empires discussed here.

With the treatment of Timurid objects in the earlier period of the Mughal Empire and the later production of jade starting from the seventeenth century, the influence of the Timurids is evident in the artistic identity created from the empire's formation. As the direct descendants of Timur, setting themselves apart from the other subsumers of the Persianate artistic tradition, the Mughals utilized the image of Timur, associating themselves with the legacy of the medieval warlord to further legitimize their own sovereignty. Their possession and later additions to jade Timurid objects would be one element contributing to their desired image as the new military and cultural force of the region. By incorporating distinct Timurid characteristics into their courtly culture and the refined artistic aesthetic of the fifteenth century Timurids into their own imperial image, the Mughal Empire would be able further glorify their past

⁶⁷ Ahmed, 69.

and legitimate their own rule through the various developments within their own artistic production.

Conclusion

The Timurid Empire's lasting artistic legacy is clear with the adoption of the tradition's elements into the artistic production of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires. While the Safavids did not see themselves as the successor of Timur, their claims to the Persianate artistic and cultural traditions would lead to the Timurid legacy continuing to persist in the region of Iran. For the Ottomans, their claims to anything regarding the Persianate history or the Timurid Empire were farther detached, with the Timurids even being considered one of the greater threats to the Ottoman Empire during the early periods of their rule in Anatolia. However, because of the nature of the dominant cultural traditions that were crucial in building an imperial image, the Timurid legacy persisted in the lands farther west of his domains.⁶⁸ The Safavid and Ottoman rivalry would further put strains in which elements each empire would utilize in creating their own unique cultural identity, yet the Timurid artistic and cultural tradition would be continued to be revered by both.

For the Mughals, their understanding of the Timurid Empire was much different than that of their neighbors to the west. As the descendants of the Timurid lineage, the Mughals would establish their empire under the notion as being the direct successor state of the Timurid Empire. The impact that this had on their cultural heritage and their

⁶⁸ This is particularly seen in Mehmed II's understanding of the past—of both Eastern and Western traditions—in positioning the Ottoman Empire within the greater context of history, along with his motivations to surpass all others after his conquest of Constantinople. See Robert Ousterhout, "The East, the West, and the Appropriation of the Past in Early Ottoman Architecture," *Gesta* 43/2 (2004): 165–76.

artistic production is evident. The rich tradition of jade carving during this period further leads to an understanding of the impact that the Timurid artistic mode had and the ways in which they aimed to continue their predecessor's legacy. The image of Timur, the grandeur of his empire and the empire's achievements during its short reign was all the more felt and absorbed by the Mughal emperors.

Throughout these three empires, the Timurid legacy was utilized in varying ways, manifested in different forms. However, it is undeniable that the Persianate traditions that were developed and refined during the fifteenth century had a long-lasting impact on the artistic production throughout the expanse of the region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent. Of the various characteristically Timurid elements that were developed, the elevation of jade in the production of imperial objects, including the passing down of older jades between the royal courts of the Islamic empires, proved to be one of the most revealing. While the enduring nature of the jade Timurid jugs is likely thanks to the durability yet rareness of the material, the significance that the objects held within the imperial context throughout the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires is evident.⁶⁹ The jade jug in particular, with its globular form and dragon handle, would be further cemented as a princely object, and those that were produced under the reign of Ulugh Beg would continue to be prized and valued by the later empires. The widespread nature of the Timurid jug discussed here likely indicates that the object, both in terms of its shape and material, would have been established as one of imperial significance and prestige.

While the later life of the Timurid jade dragon sword is not fully known, an investigation of the inheritors of the Timurid artistic legacy provide evidence as to how

⁶⁹ Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 52.

the objects at the heart of this study would have been received and how such jade objects would have been utilized by the successive empires. The jade sabers arose out of the rich artistic environment that was being cultivated by Ulugh Beg in Samarkand during the fifteenth century and would take on new connotations, contributing to different showcases of power and legitimacy, in the various lives the objects would continue to live after the fall and dissolution of the Timurid Empire.



CONCLUSION

In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman historian Mustafa ‘Ali (d. 1600) would describe Timur as the universal Muslim monarch and would refer to the court of Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506), the last major Timurid ruler in Khorasan, as one of cultural greatness.¹ The impact of the Timurid Empire within the Islamic lands was unmistakable and the notion of Timur as a great ruler, going beyond the influence of local emperors and rulers, would prevail for several generations following the empire’s demise. The dissemination of the Timurid artistic aesthetic through the movement of artists, objects and ideas led to a significant visual impact, evident in a wide range of media within the artistic production of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal Empires. The greatness of the Timurid Empire and its cultural and artistic legacy—especially due to the systematic nature of the *kitabkhana* which allowed for the establishment of a uniform imperial aesthetic—would solidify its place within Islamic visual culture as one representing sovereignty, imperialism and political legitimacy.

With the fifteenth century jade dragon saber, much is revealed about the nature of the Timurid artistic agenda and the various elements that would be introduced and established in the visual mode of the empire. The innovations and refinement to previous traditions that came under the reign of Shahrukh, particularly through Ulugh Beg’s endeavors as governor of Samarkand and later as the successor to the throne, are especially significant. In his understanding of the impact of art and architecture in establishing notions of sovereignty and the usage of various traditions in shaping the

¹ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 276–86.

visual mode of his reign, Ulugh Beg was able to amalgamate different dynastic and religious means of establishing legitimacy as a ruler. The investigation of the usage of jade and the dragon motif in particular leads to a greater understanding of not only the longer history of these elements within the Islamic world, but how they were utilized as representations of power. Their presence on a piece of weaponry further combine these various significances on an object that itself would have communicated military strength and imperial authority. The later life of these objects and their shifting meanings in different contexts further attest to the significance of their symbolism and of the Timurid legacy beyond the empire's domain and reign.

The study presented here on these select objects thus provides a greater discussion into what was occurring on a greater scale within the Timurid Empire and the artistic production of the fifteenth century. The policies of certain leaders and their attempts to establish an image of the empire according to their individual political agendas had clear implications on the developments in artistic production that would lead to the production of these objects. An investigation of not only the cultural and political climate and the developments within the royal workshops, but of an object of weaponry produced during this time provide an additional layer to the study of Timurid art that has not been previously covered. The discussion of the Timurid impact on the later empires further provides greater insight into the various lives of a singular object and how contextualization is needed to more comprehensively understand what meanings were added or sustained over time—an aspect of art objects that is significantly lacking within art historical literature.

While the discussions opened in the present study allow for a more extensive understanding of the Timurid sword, the field of Islamic arms and armor still has much room for further study. More research that consolidates the significances of these

objects in terms of their symbolism within the religious, artistic, political and military contexts, along with greater insight into their practical usages, is still needed. It is my hope that this study has not only allowed for greater light to be shed only on one more facet of Timurid artistic production, but that it has also opened the door further into a more dynamic understanding of pieces categorized under the umbrella term “Islamic arms and armor,” as they exist within the field of art history and as art objects.



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FIGURES



Figure 1. Sabre with dragon-headed quillon, Iran or Central Asia, 15th century, watered steel and white jade inlaid with gold, 77.5 x 10.5 cm (30.5 x 4.1 in.). Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1/220.



Figure 1.1. Detail of dragon-headed quillon.



Figure 2. Quillon block, jade (nephrite), Iran or Central Asia, ca. 1400–50, Nephrite; carved, 5.1 x 10.2 x 3.2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 02.18.765.



Figure 3. Registan Square, Samarkand, 15th–18th century, Photo: Aga Khan Trust for Culture.



Figure 4. Interior view of the cruciform-shaped funerary chamber showing Timur's cenotaph, Gur-i Amir, Samarkand, 15th century. Photo: Pankratyev, G.A. ca. 1890. Album of historical monuments of the city of Samarkand by the amateur photographer G. A. Pankratyev.



Figure 5. Ulugh Beg Madrasa, exterior portal, Samarkand, 1417–20. Photo: Image and original data provided by Walter B. Denny, 1982. https://library-artstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/asset/ISLAMIC_DB_10310754690.



Figure 6. Qur'an stand for the *masjid-i jamii* of Timur, Samarkand, c. 1405–49, stone, 230 x 200 cm. Photo: Image courtesy of Walter B. Denny. https://library-artstor-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/asset/ISLAMIC_DB_10310754805.



Figure 7. "Rustam Slays the White Div in His Cave," from a *Collection of Epics*, Copied in 2 volumes by Muhammad Sa'id Hafiz al-Qari, Shiraz(?), dated A.H. 800/1397–98, Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 25.8 x 16.8 cm. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, MS.114, f. 50a.

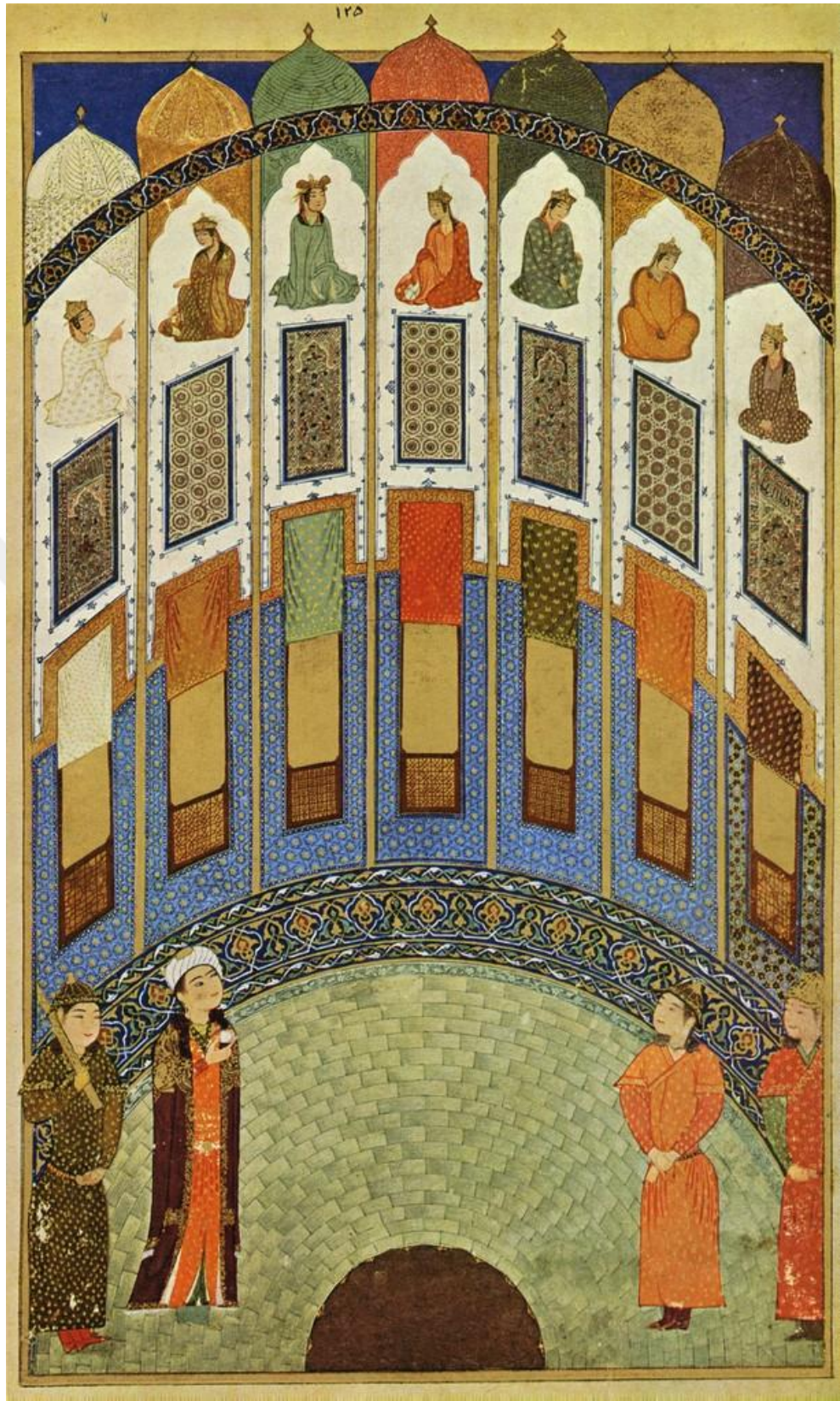


Figure 8. "Bahram Gur introduced into the Hall of the Seven Portraits," from an *Anthology*, Copied by Muhammad al-Halwa'i and Nasir al-Katib for Iskandar-Sultan ibn Umar-Shaykh, f. 66v, Shiraz, dated A.H. 813–14/1410–11, Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, 27.4 x 17.2 cm. Lisbon, Gulbenkian Museum, Acc. No. 21149.



Figure 9. Jug, Central Asia, Samarkand, Timurid period, ca. 1417–49, white jade (nephrite), height 14.5 cm; diam. 16 cm. Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Inv. No. 328.



Figure 10. Blue-and-white jug, Northeast Iran or Samarkand, Timurid period, ca. 15th century, ceramic, height 8.7 cm; diam. 8 cm. Rome, Eleonora Spinnelein Collection. Photograph by Tony Vatielli. "A Blue-and-white Timurid Jug with Two Confronting Dragons." *Oriente Moderno* 15, no. 2 (1996): Figure 1.



Figure 11. Seal of Miranshah ibn Timur, Iran, before 1408, Chrysolite, 1.8 x 2.1 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, SA-8481.



Figure 12. Seal of Gawharshad bint Ghiyathuddin Tarkhan, Herat (?), before 1457, jade (nephrite), 2.7 x 2.1 cm. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, SA-13650.

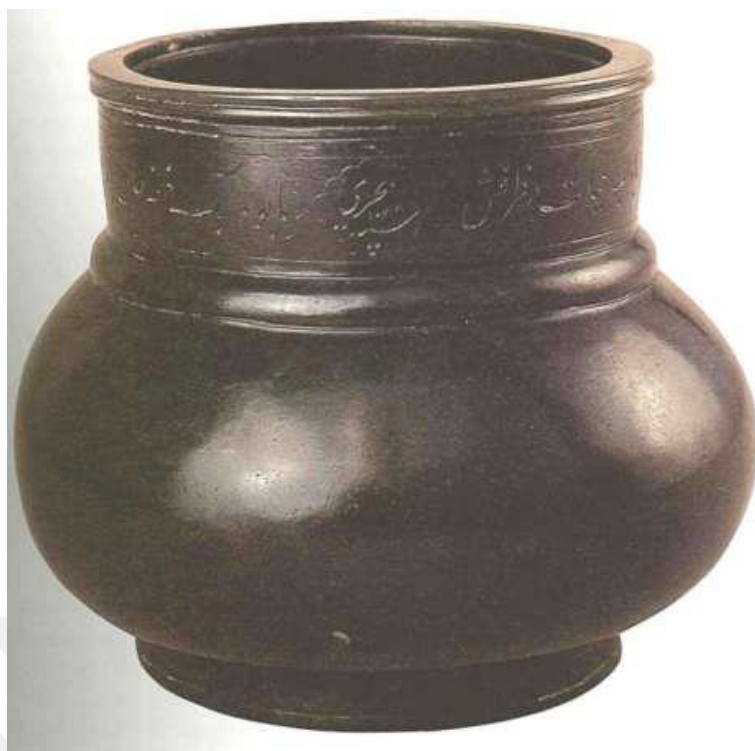


Figure 13. Jug, Iran or Central Asia, 15th century, jade (nephrite), 10 x 9.6 cm. London, British Museum, Inv. No. 1945-10-17-257. In *Timur and the Princely Vision*, by Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989, page 354, cat. no. 126.



Figure 14. Ewer, Khorasan, probably Herat, dated 871/1466; signed Ḥosayn Šams-al-Din Šehāb-al-Din Birjandi, brass, cast, inlaid with gold and silver, height 16.5 cm. Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Inv. No. 2/2150. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/metalwork>



Figure 15. Jug, made by Muhammad ibn Shamsuddin al-Ghuri for Sultan-Husayn Mirza, Herat (?), dated A.H. middle of Sha'ban 903/11 April 1498, brass inlaid with gold and silver, height 14.2 cm. London, British Museum, Acc. No. 1962,0718.1.



Figure 16. Jug, signed by Abdul-Khalil Qutbuddin, Herat (?), dated A.H. 901/1495, brass inlaid with silver and gold, 13 x 7.6 cm. London, Keir Collection, Inv. No. 145.



Figure 17. Bowl, Iran or Central Asia, c. 1450–1500, jade (nephrite), 6.5 x 14.5 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. No. MR199.



Figure 18. Cup with calligraphic inscriptions, probably Samarkand, 1440–1460, jade (nephrite), h. 3.5 cm x diam. 3.2 cm. San Francisco, CA, Asian Art Museum, Inv. No. B60J619.



Figure 19. Cup, Iran or Central Asia, ca. 1400–1450, jade (nephrite), 6.5 x 12.3 cm. London, British Museum, Acc. No. 1961,0213.1.



Figure 20. Elliptical cup, Iran or Central Asia, 1400–1450, jade (nephrite), 6.4 x 9.8 x 11.7 cm. San Francisco, CA, Asian Art Museum, Inv. No. B60J160.



Figure 21. Cup, Samarkand (?), ca. 1420–1449, jade (nephrite), 7.3 x 19.5 x 12.4 cm. London, British Museum, Acc. No. 1959,1120.1.



Figure 22. Frieze tile, Takht-i Sulayman, ca. 1275, moulded fritware with color in and luster over the glaze, 35.7 x 36.5 x 3 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Inv. No. 541-1900.

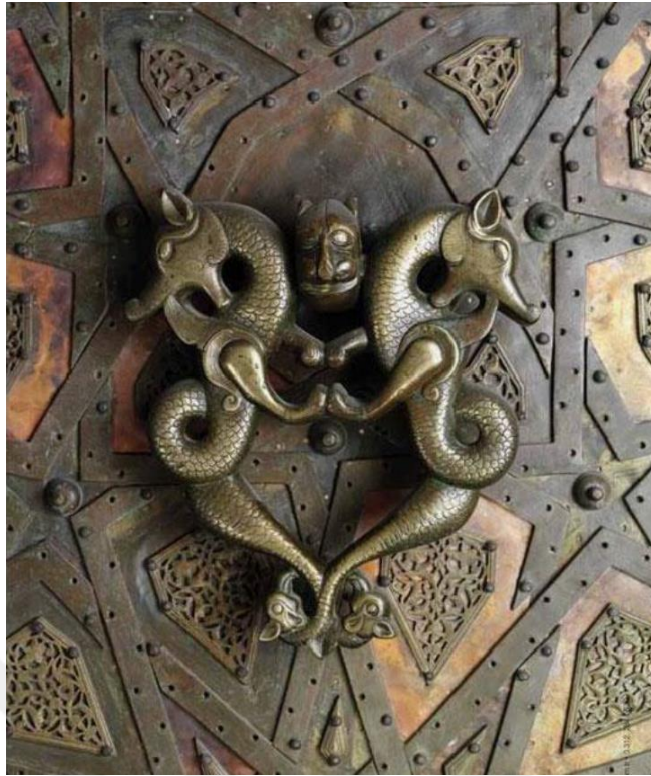


Figure 23. Door handle, Ulu Jami, Cizre, beginning of the 13th century, cast and engraved bronze, 27.5 x 24.5 cm. Istanbul, Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, Inv. No. 3749.

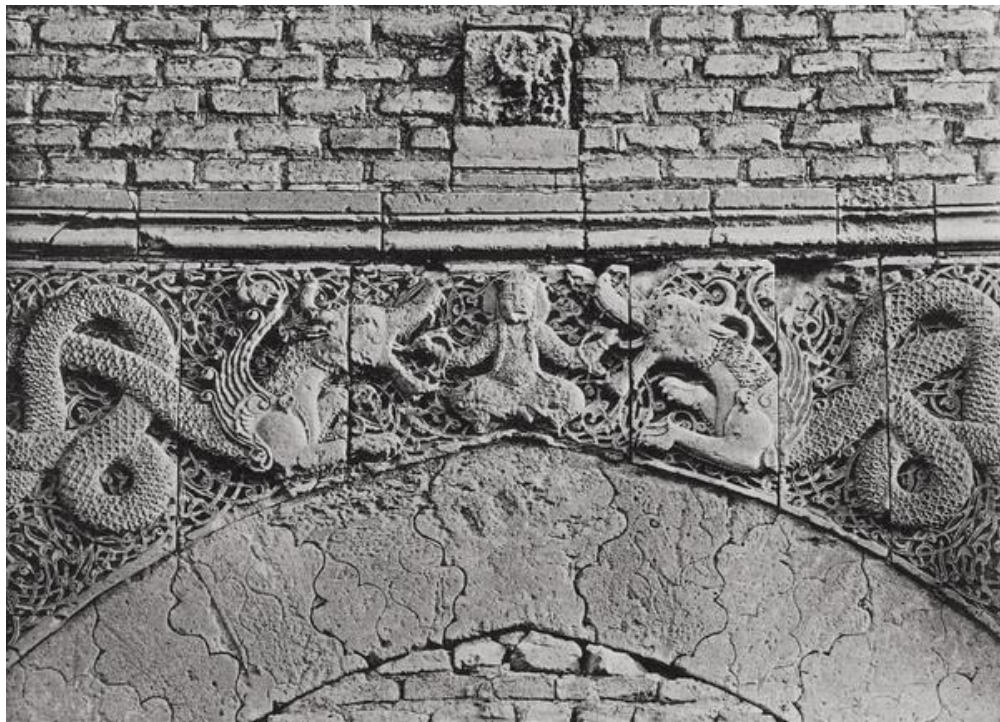


Figure 24. Talisman Gate (*Bab al-Tilasm*), Baghdad, Iraq, built in 1222, Photo: Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Emile Herzfeld, *Archeologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1911).



Figure 25. Rashid al-Din, The nobles of Kashmir enthrone a *fakir* as King Yashaskara (r. 939–948), painting in the Compendium of Chronicles (Jami' al-tawarikh), Ilkhanid, Tabriz, 1305–14. London, Khalili Collection, MSS. 727, folio 28b.



Figure 25.1. Detail of a *fakir* on a dragon-throne.



Figure 26. A ruler on a dragon-throne, painting from a dispersed manuscript known as the "Saray album paintings," c. 1300, opaque pigment and ink on paper, 37 x 26.2 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, H. 2152, fol. 60b.



Figure 27. Sword, ring-pommel in shape of two dragons facing a (now lost) flaming pearl, excavated in 1929 at the Imperial Tomb, Pei-Chueu-Shan, Honan Province, ca. 600 AD, iron with silver and gilt bronze mountings. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. No. 30.65.2. Photo: "Two Chinese Swords Dating about A.D. 600," in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 25, no. 9 (Sept. 1930): figure 3.



Figure 27.1. Detail of ring-pommel.



Figure 28. Dragons Chasing Flaming Pearls, Central Asia, 13th century, silk, metallic thread, 46.4 x 32.4 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 1987.8.



Figure 29. Carved wooden box of Ulugh-Beg ibn Shahrukh, Central Asia, c. 1420–49, Sandalwood inlaid with polychrome marquetry, gold fittings and silk lining, 19.5 x 17 x 31.2 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Treasury, Inv. No. 2/1846.



Figure 29.1. Detail of lid with dragon figure.



Figure 30. Candlestick, Central Asia, Afghanistan or Iran, 15th century, cast and engraved bronze, height 25.5 cm; diam. 17 cm. Copenhagen, The David Collection, Inv. No. 38/1982.



Figure 31. Flint-striker, Iran, Safavid period, 17th century, steel, Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums, Inv. No. 1973.2.
<https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/216612?position=0>



Figure 32. Miquelet (Spanish style) flintlock gun, Ottoman period, 18th century, wood, brass, silver, mother of pearl, length: 136 cm. Nicholas Wells Antiques, *Islamic Arms & Armour*. London: Nicholas Wells Antiques Ltd, 2019. Auction catalog.



Figure 33. Matchlock gun, India, possibly Gwalior, late 18th–19th century, steel, iron, wood, ivory, gold, silver, copper alloy, polychromy, length: 151.3 cm; barrel: 106 cm; caliber 17 mm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 33.28.2.



Figure 33.1. Detail of barrel end



Figure 34a. Standard (‘alam), Safavid period, Iran, 16th–17th century, 67.5 x 18 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1/651.

Figure 34b. Standard (‘alam), Safavid period, Iran, 16th–17th century, height: 89 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1/655.

Figure 34c. Standard (‘alam), Safavid period, Iran, 1641–42 (?), 120.5 x 27 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, 1/654.

Photo: *Onbin Yıllık İran Medeniyeti: İki bin Yıllık Ortak Miras* (Istanbul: Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Yayınları, 2009), 231, cat. nos. 230–32.



Figure 35. Sheath for a dagger with dragon-headed tip, Ottoman period, Turkey, late 16th or early 17th century, wood, covered with silver sheet worked in repoussé with chased and engraved detail, set with a coral, length: 22.5 cm. London, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection, Inv. No. MTW 894.



Figure 36. Battle axe, Inscription: From the Koran, in praise of God, and 'Master Assud Ullah', Iran, 2nd half of 18th century, steel, brass and gold, chiseled and damascened (Koftgari), width 8.2 cm. London, The Wallace Collection, Inv. No. OA1616.



Figure 36.1. Detail of axe head.

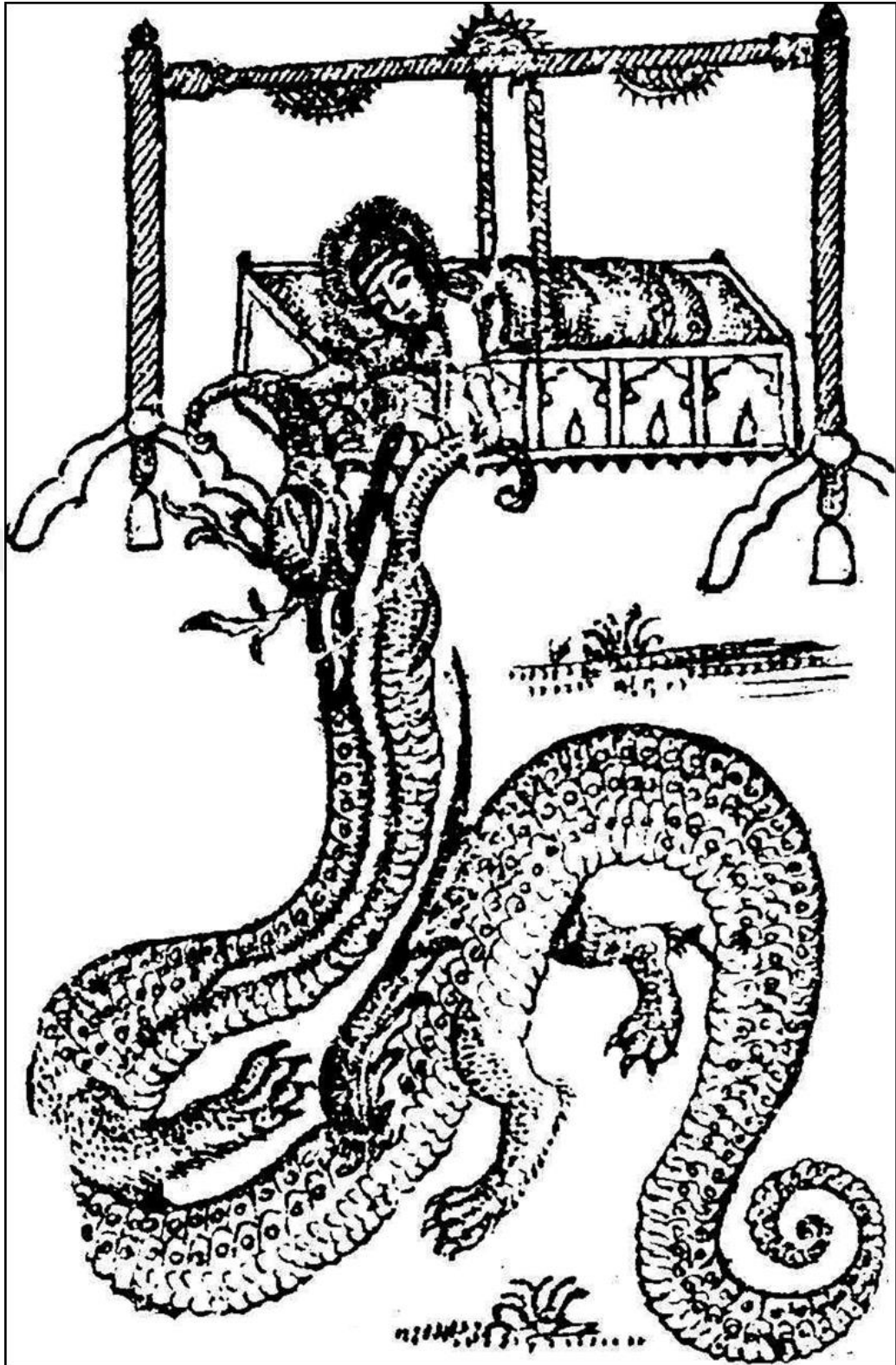


Figure 37. "The infant Ali fighting a dragon," *Daftar* (untitled booklet), Qajar period, 1263. Photo: Ulrich Marzolph, "The Pictorial Representation of Shi'i Themes in Lithographed Books of the Qajar Periods," in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011, page 87, figure 23.



Figure 38. “Ali Slaying the Dragon,” page from *Khavarannama* by Ibn Husam (d. 1470), Iran, Shiraz, c. 1480. Tehran, Museum of Decorative Arts, No. 110. In: *Alexandre Papadopoulo, L'Islam et l'art Musulman* (Paris, Editions d'art Lucien Mazenod, 1976), 147, 149, cat. no. 48.



Figure 39. Miniature depicting Ali dismembering a dragon's head, page from *Siretü'n-nebi*, prepared by the author Mustafa Darîr, Ottoman period, 14th century. *Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Hazine*, nr. 1223, vr. 70^b.



Figure 40. Miniature depicting Ali fighting a dragon, pages from the *Kitâb-ı Fahnâme*, prepared by the artist Kalender Paşa and given to Ahmet I, Ottoman period, 17th century. Istanbul, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi*, Hazine, nr. 1703, vr. 1^b, 38^b.



Figure 41. So-called “Sword of the Prophet Muhammad,” blade: 7th century; fittings: Ottoman, 1603–17, total length: 99 cm; length of scabbard: 83 cm. Istanbul, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi*, Treasury of the Prophet.



Figure 42. Sword and scabbard, Iran and India, 18th century, wood, leather, cabochon stones, gold, gilded. London, Wallace Collection, Inv. No. OA143A.



Figure 42.1 Detail of quillon.

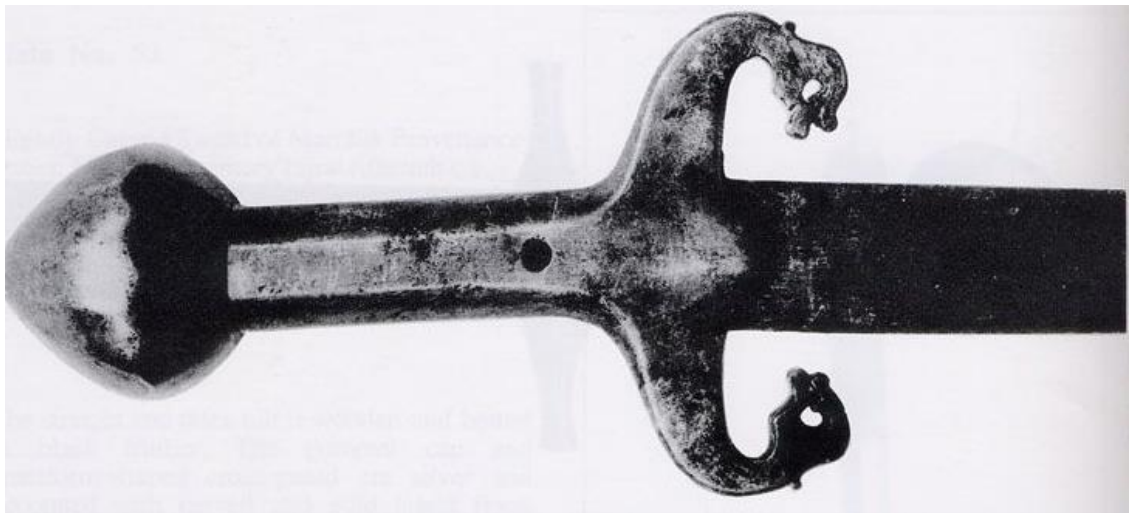


Figure 43. Sword with quillon culminating in stylized dragon heads, Mamluk period, mid-9th century hijra/mid-15th century AD, length: 94.5 cm; blade length: 80 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Inv. No. 1/212.



Figure 44. So-called “Sword of Osman”; Ottoman sword of investiture, blade: 14th century(?); fittings: Ottoman, late 16th century. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, *Hazine*, no. H 3775.



Figure 45. Central panel of a banner (sancak), Ottoman period, Turkey, probably Istanbul, 17th century, silk, tabby weave, enriched with metal thread, 189 x 59.5 cm. London, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, Acc. No. TXT36. In D. Alexander, *The Arts of War. Arms and Armour of the 7th to 19th Centuries*, volume XXI, London: The Nour Foundation, 1992, cat. no. 59, 112–113.



Figure 46. Banner (sancak), Turkey, probably Istanbul, dated A.H. 1235/1819–20, Silk, metal wrapped thread; lampas, brocaded, 294 x 217.2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 1976.312.

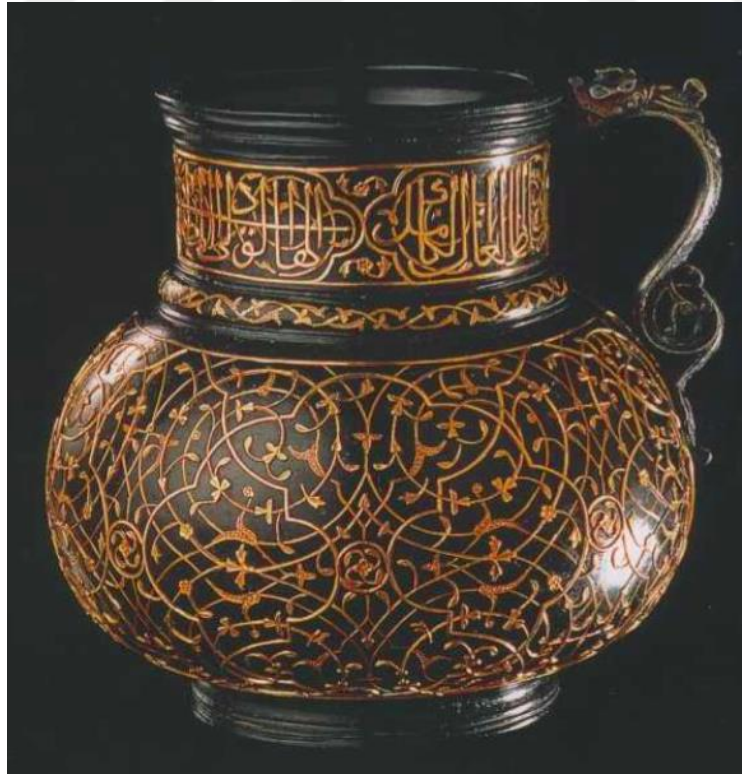


Figure 47. Jug decorated for Shah Isma'il Safavi, Tabriz, ca. 1501–24, jade (nephrite) inlaid with gold, height 14 cm. Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Inv. No. 1844.



Figure 48. Mir Sayyid 'Ali, *The Princes of the House of Timur*, Mughal period, India, ca. 1550–1555, cotton, 108.05 x 108 cm. London, British Museum, Inv. No. 1913,0208,0.1.



Figure 49. Cup, Inscription of 4 characters in center of base, reading "Qianlongnian zhi" (Made in the Qianlong Era), India, mid-17th century, carved jade, 8.3 x 5.4 cm. New York, Brooklyn Museum, Inv. No. 78.7.



Figure 50. Dagger, India, Mughal period, 17th century, Steel, nephrite, length 37.9 cm; blade 24.9 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985.58a.



Figure 51. A dagger hilt in the form of a camel head, Mughal period, India, 17th century, carved jade, length 13.5 cm. Sotheby's London, *The Sven Gahlin Collection*. London: Sotheby's, 2015. Auction catalog.



Figure 52. Wine cup of Jahangir, Mughal period, India, dated 1022 AH/1613–14, jade (nephrite), height 3.8 cm; diam. 8.8 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Inv. No. IM.152-1924.