

# Timur Malik: Hero of Khojend

Felinah Memo Hazara Khan-ad-Din

## I

Timur Malik, bold Khwarázm, ruled  
Khójend, gem of fair Fergána vale.  
Peaceful days of spring that breezes cooled,  
Mongols shattered, howling forth a gale.

Overwhelmed by endless Eastern hordes,  
Timur's thousand held an island fort.  
Khójend fell beneath dread Mongol swords,  
Captives died or lived for Mongol sport.

Hailed with stones and arrows through the day,  
Malik's men in well-roofed rafts by night,  
Rowed across to find their foes and slay.  
Eastern numbers won and forced their flight.

Three score boats and ten, with men and horse,  
Fled toward Jend along Syr Darya's course.

## II

Timur Malik with his men sailed free,  
Down Syr Darya's flood, from Mongol might.  
Malik swore he'd reach the Aral Sea,  
Find Jalal-ad-Din, rejoin his fight.

Past the river's bend at Banakath,  
Mongols stretched a chain 'cross Darya's flood.  
Bold Khwarázm cleared it from their path,  
Dark'ning Darya's gleam with Mongol blood.

Mongol warriors trotting on the banks,  
Lacking means to reach their foes in force,  
Saw Khwarázm sail between their ranks,  
Saved from hostile shafts by river's course.

Many days did each descend to night  
Over Timur's endless, floating flight.

## III

Juchi, Chingez' son, when he heard tell,  
Built a dam at Jend composed of rafts.  
Blocking shore to shore, it would impel  
Timur Malik's force to face their shafts.

Timur saw this, chose the western bank,  
Landing boats, he charged with desp'rate might.  
Only Malik broke the Mongol flank;  
All but he died bravely in the fight.

Timur Malik raced from Mongols three,  
Shouting back, "One arrow each, I hold".  
Killed the first: "Two left to shoot, you see!"  
Mongols stopped in awe of warrior bold.

Forty days, four hundred miles, they tell,  
He alone survived when Khójend fell.

This poem is a sonnet series as might have been written in late 16<sup>th</sup> century England by a member of the aristocracy familiar with theater and entranced by tales of exotic Persian heroes brought back from that land to England by Elizabethan traders.

### **Sonnets and sonnet series:**

Although sonnets probably originated in 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy<sup>1</sup>, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1518-1547) introduced the form into England. Both of these poets modified the original Petrarchan sonnet form, between them creating the English sonnet<sup>2</sup>. The English or Shakespearean sonnet contains three quatrains and a couplet, with the rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg<sup>3</sup>. The three quatrains usually evolve the main point in logical progression, or a narrative in chronological order, or they provide different examples to illustrate the same image, as in Shakespeare's sonnet LXIV. The final couplet provides a summary of the three quatrains, or in some cases, an ironic view, as in the final lines of "My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun." The Elizabethan poet and courtier Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) extended the sonnet into a (long<sup>4</sup>) sonnet series with *Astrophel and Stella*. Although this work was published in quarto in 1591 after Sidney's death, and again in an improved edition by his sister in 1598, it was probably written before his marriage in 1583<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Timur Malik Sonnet Series:**

#### **The Form:**

Each of the three sonnets comprising this series uses the English sonnet form described above. The sonnets were written in trocheic pentameter, since the trocheic foot provides a more martial feel than iambic or other less common feet. Within each sonnet, the three quatrains provide elements of the narrative in chronological order, and the final couplet creates an overview of the preceding quatrains. The three sonnets in the series proceed chronologically, as well, with the final couplet of the third sonnet summing up the full story.

#### **The Story:**

Timur Malik (Tím-ur Má-lik) was the governor of the city of Khojend (Khó-jend) on the outskirts of the Persian empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, Persia and the surrounding lands created an empire ruled by the Khwarazm (Khor-á-zum) Shah, Ali-ad-Din Mohammed, and Timur was a member of this ruling elite. Khojend lies in the Fergana (Fer-gáh-nah) valley along the Syr Darya (Seer Dár-ya) river, about 500 miles from the Aral Sea. During Chingez Khan's invasion of Persia in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, Mongol troops attacked Khojend. Timur's personal heroism and superb archery skills during his dogged defense of Khojend, his 400-mile flight down the Syr Darya to Jend and his successful escape into the red desert sands of the Kizil Kum became Persian legend. Timur eventually rejoined Shah Mohammed's son, Jalal-ad-Din (Ja-lál-ad-Dín), and fought with Jalal-ad-Din's army against the Mongols<sup>67</sup>.

### The Elizabethan connection:

Elizabethan adventurers explored much of the world, carrying tales of exotic lands back to England. Anthony Jenkinson, a factor of the Muscovy company departed from Moscow in April of 1558 to travel the lands of southern Russia and Persia ruled by the Khwarazm Shah in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Jenkinson traveled down the Volga with two other men and a Tatar translator, crossed the Caspian Sea and traveled by caravan through the homeland of Timur Malik. He visited with several local governors and rulers on his journey, speaking with several of them at length about their lands and peoples. He was received by Timur, Sultan of Khwarazm, and “spoke familiarly” with the king of Bukara before obtaining a trade agreement from the Shah of Persia. This gave Jenkinson and his men ample opportunity to hear stories of legendary heroes of Khwarazm and tell those tales to colleagues back in England. Jenkinson recorded many of his impressions of his journey through Khwarazm in a report to the Muscovy company written in 1560 in Russia while he waited to sail back to England. It was published by Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616) in his book, “Voyages and Discoveries. The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation.”<sup>8</sup>

Elizabethan English interest in Persian heroes is demonstrated by the play, “Cambyses, King of Persia,” written by Thomas Preston (1537-1598) and imprinted in 1569. Although most attribute the play to the Latin scholar of this name, some doubts have been raised over exactly which Thomas Preston wrote the play and exactly when between 1552 and 1569 it was written<sup>9</sup>. The play concerns a king of ancient Persia, whose reign was described by Herodotus<sup>10</sup>, although Preston appears to have used a contemporary short history of the world by Carion as his source for the play.

So it is not unreasonable to expect that Jenkinson and his fellow travelers spread tales of other legendary heroes and villains of Khwarazm, which could have inspired an Elizabethan aristocrat to pen a narrative poem such as the one presented here.

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<sup>1</sup>Bermann, SL. *The Sonnet Over Time*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Brewer, W. *Sonnets and Sestinas*. (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Company, 1937), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>Allison, AW; Barrows, H; Blake, CR; Carr, AJ; Eastman, AM; English, HM. *Norton Anthology of Poetry, Revised Shorter Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., p. 642.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.uoregon.edu/~rbear/stella.html>. This site provides the entire 108 sonnets in the series, plus two more that may have been intended for inclusion, but were not present in the earliest editions.

<sup>5</sup><http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poem1924.html>. This site provides selected sonnets from the series, and provides some background on Sir Sidney with the first sonnet.

<sup>6</sup>Chambers, J. *The Devil's Horsemen*. New York: Atheneum, 1985, p. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup>Barthold, W. *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1992, p. 417-418.

<sup>8</sup><http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/silkroad/texts/jenkinson/bukhara.html>. Edited by Lance Jennott, 2001. Includes Jenkinson's map and the text selection is taken from Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow, 1903-1905), vol. II, pp. 449-479. See especially p. 459-65 and 469-72.

<sup>9</sup>Linthicum, MC. The Date of Cambyses. *PMLA* 1934, 49(3):959-61.

<sup>10</sup>Allen, DC. A Source for Cambyses. *Modern Language Notes* 1934, 49(6):384-7, p. 385-6.