

**ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL SOURCES ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE  
TIMURID DYNASTY AND THE MING DYNASTY****Nodira B. Izatova**

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When studying the relations between Amir Temur and the Timurid dynasty with China, Chinese written sources are of great importance. Among them is the «Ming shi»<sup>1</sup> (明史) history of the Ming dynasty, «Ming hui yao »<sup>2</sup> (明会要) a collection of important information about the Ming Dynasty, «Ming shilu » (明实录)<sup>3</sup> the authentic records of the Ming dynasty, as well as « "Siyu fangozhi »<sup>4</sup> (西域番国志) it includes records about the western regions and foreign countries.

Relying solely on written sources is not sufficient to fully and comprehensively analyze these relations. At the same time, it is also of great importance to involve material sources — works of art, archaeological finds, and other tangible evidence. Studying them allows for supplementing the information contained in written sources and reconstructing a complete and more objective picture of the diplomatic, cultural, and artistic connections between the dynasties.

« **The scene of leading a horse** »<sup>5</sup> (牵马图) This visual work is directly related to the diplomatic relations between the Ming Dynasty and the Timurids. According to the Persian work Matla' al-Sa'dayn wa Majma' al-Bahrayn, the Timurid ruler Shahrukh Mirza presented a valuable white horse as a gift to the Ming Emperor Zhu Di. In 1417, in response, Zhu Di sent envoys and presented Shahrukh Mirza with a special artistic work depicting the image of this horse.

This event is considered the only known case in history where the depiction of a live horse, presented as a gift, became an independent work of art serving as a diplomatic present. Although the Chinese annals (Ming Shilu) confirm that envoys were sent in 1416 under the leadership of Chen Chen, they do not provide specific information about this particular painting. Therefore, Persian sources hold special significance for studying this event. The horse in the painting stands out due to its large body and powerful build. Its almost right-angled posture between the head and back is a feature not typical of the traditional Arab horses (Arhumoks) in Timurid territories. This artwork serves as an important material evidence for a comparative study of Persian and Chinese written sources.

<sup>1</sup> Ming Shi (明史) — an annal consisting of 332 volumes that provides information on the history of the dynasty that ruled from 1368 to 1644.

<sup>2</sup> Ming Huiyao (明会要) — a work written by Long Wang Bin. It contains information about foreign countries, including details on the history of Turan in the 15th–16th centuries.

<sup>3</sup> Ming Shilu (明实录) indicates that a total of more than 78 diplomatic missions were sent from Turan and its adjacent regions to China, including trade delegations that were officially presented in the form of tribute (dān). This suggests that, on average, nearly two visits were made per year. In turn, the Ming Dynasty sent at least 20 diplomatic missions to the Timurids. These relations held an important place in the history of Turan's international relations.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Cheng was an envoy and traveler of the Ming Dynasty who visited Turan in 1414 and recorded his observations in a diary. During his journey, he passed through the cities of Tashkent, Shahrukhyya, Samarkand, and Herat.

<sup>5</sup> 马顺平. 绘画所见永乐时期明朝与帖木儿帝国的文化交流. Palace Museum Journal. 页 97–112.

**Depiction of a Qayroqi (eagle) <sup>6</sup>** (海东青图) This artwork carries significant political meaning and was presented as a gift to Shahrukh Mirza by Emperor Zhu Di. This event represents a historical example of the presentation of a rare and valuable Qayroqi (eagle) species by the Timurids. Through this visual art piece, the diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges between the two great dynasties are vividly manifested. The gift also reflects Emperor Zhu Di's high respect for Shahrukh Mirza and indicates the great value placed on this hunting bird in China. The depiction of the Qayroqi is not merely an artistic image, but served as a symbol of power and a representation of inter-dynastic cooperation.

**A white jade vessel with dragon-shaped handles <sup>7</sup>** (玉龙耳罐) This object is a vivid and distinctive example of Timurid-era jade vessels. During the reigns of Shahrukh Mirza and Mirza Ulugh Beg, jade was highly valued, and owning it indicated a person's high status in society. For merchants traveling from Iran and Turan to China, failing to purchase jade on their return was considered culturally and socially inappropriate. The raised inscription of Ulugh Beg's name on the neck of the vessel confirms the high respect shown to him by the Ming dynasty nobility. The dragon motifs on the handles indicate that the piece was crafted by Chinese artisans. Later additions of the names of Jahangir (1605–1627) and Shah Jahan (1628–1658) demonstrate that the traditions of Timurid art retained their prestige in subsequent centuries. The inclusion of this item in royal collections reflects both mutual respect and stable diplomatic relations. This vessel embodies a union of art and diplomacy, serving as a symbol of supreme authority and high rank within the dynasty.

**Dragon-shaped handles <sup>8</sup>** The vessel named Biyu Chi-er Cup (碧玉螭耳杯) is made of white jade and features handles in the 'chi' style. Carved from jade, this cup is one of the unique and rare examples of Timurid-era applied arts. The presence of Ulugh Beg's name on the 'dragon-shaped handles' reflects his high status in society and the respect accorded to him.

The cup's uniqueness is particularly evident in its 'chi'-style dragon handles. This form differs from the traditional dragon motifs widely used in Timurid art and aligns more closely with the artistic styles of the Yuan and Ming dynasties. The piece was likely made in the Turan region or by Chinese artisans working there, highlighting the strength of cultural and artistic connections between Central Asia and China. Research suggests that Ulugh Beg received this cup in 1417 (the 15th year of Emperor Yongle's reign) during a diplomatic visit organized to the Ming court. The decorations and craftsmanship of the cup demonstrate a fusion of Timurid artistic traditions with Chinese artistic mastery. As such, it serves as an important historical evidence of cultural exchange and mutual influence. Through this artifact, the close relationship between artistic creativity and diplomacy is revealed: objects like this were not merely vessels but also symbols of a ruler's prestige, authority, and inter-dynastic relations

**"Mongol landscapes <sup>9</sup>** (丝路山水地图) This work covers a vast area, spanning from the Xiaoyuguan Fortress in the east to the city of Mecca in the west. On the map, the southern part of

<sup>6</sup> 马顺平. 绘画所见永乐时期明朝与帖木儿帝国的文化交流. *Palace Museum Journal*. 2024. 页 97–112.

<sup>7</sup> 许晓东. 帖木儿王朝玉器. *The Museum of Cultural Heritage, The Chinese University of Hong Kong*. 页 11-27.

<sup>8</sup> 许晓东. 帖木儿王朝玉器. *The Museum of Cultural Heritage, The Chinese University of Hong Kong*. 页 11-27.

<sup>9</sup> 艾比布拉 图尔荪. 兀鲁伯对中国与撒马尔罕文化交流的贡献. *International scientific and practical conference Uzbekistan-China: development of historical cultural, scientific and economic relations*. 2024. 页 366.

Samarkand features the 'Observatory of Stars.' According to historical accounts, this structure was an observatory established by Ulugh Beg, serving as an astronomical observation site. It is believed to have been the only well-known and prominent observatory in the region at that time.

The map provides not only geographical and astronomical information but also allows for the study of cultural exchanges between dynasties. This work offers valuable insights into the cultural and scientific relations between the Ming Dynasty and the Timurids. It confirms that Chinese scholars and travelers were aware of scientific developments in Samarkand, particularly the activities of the observatory, and that they viewed local scientific knowledge with great interest. This visual source is not merely an artistic representation but also serves as an important historical document illuminating the progress of science in the medieval period.

**Map of the land and population of the western regions** <sup>10</sup> (西域土地人物图) This map reflects important information about the natural geography of the Turan region and the composition of its population, including the distribution of ethnic groups. The structure depicted on the southern outskirts of Samarkand is labeled on the map as the 'Observatory of the Sun.' This building was intended for astronomical observations and is very likely directly associated with the observatory established by Ulugh Beg. The map allows for the analysis not only of regional geographical data but also of the scope of international scientific and cultural connections of the period. The distinct marking of the observatory indicates that the scientific achievements of the Timurid era were widely recognized among the peoples and rulers of East Asia.

Miniature depicting Ulugh Beg among his ladies and attendants <sup>11</sup> This miniature depicts Ulugh Beg surrounded by members of his household and palace attendants. In the upper right corner of the image, Chinese envoys and hunting birds presented as gifts by them are shown. These elements confirm the diplomatic and cultural relations established with China during the Timurid period, particularly under Ulugh Beg's reign. The artwork clearly demonstrates the stable relations between the two countries and the traditional exchange of gifts. This miniature materially corroborates information previously noted in the Depiction of a Qayroqi (eagle). It serves as an important source proving that Chinese envoys actually participated in royal receptions and diplomatic ceremonies. This visual example is not only of artistic value but also functions as a primary document for studying the history of international relations in the 15th century.

In the garden scene, the central part of the image depicts a prince and his consort seated under a canopy, surrounded by guests and palace attendants. The attendants are shown serving food and performing music. On the left side of the painting, three envoys dressed in official attire of the Ming Dynasty are depicted. They were part of a diplomatic mission visiting Shiraz. The miniature also highlights the Chinese porcelains brought by the envoys. This artwork serves as an important material evidence of diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations between the Timurids and China during the 14th–15th centuries. It confirms the participation of Chinese envoys in court ceremonies, the exchange of gifts, and the influence of Chinese artistic culture—particularly porcelain craftsmanship—on the Timurid miniature painting tradition. The piece was

<sup>10</sup> 艾比布拉 图尔荪. 兀鲁伯对中国与撒马尔罕文化交流的贡献. International scientific and practical conference Uzbekistan-China: development of historical cultural, scientific and economic relations. 2024. 页 367.

<sup>11</sup> [https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg\\_F1946.26/](https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F1946.26/)

created during the reign of Ibrahim Sultan in Shiraz, a period when Persian calligraphy and the art of miniature painting reached a high stage of development.<sup>12</sup>

The depictions and execution techniques in Baysonghor's works *Dragons and Simurgh* from the *Shahnameh* show a remarkable degree of harmony with the techniques and methods of Chinese painting.<sup>13</sup>

«**Bencao Gangmu**»<sup>14</sup> (Compendium of Materia Medica), written by Li Shizhen, became a fundamental source of medicine in the later Ming period. This extensive pharmacopoeia contains information on the origins of herbs, minerals, and medicinal substances, as well as methods for their preparation. The work was completed in 1593 as the culmination of Li Shizhen's lifelong efforts. A total of 46 traditional Chinese medicines documented in the *Bencao Gangmu* are explicitly noted to have origins connected with Turan.

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<sup>12</sup> 马顺平. 绘画所见永乐时期明朝与帖木儿帝国的文化交流. *Palace Museum Journal*. 2024. 页 104.

<sup>13</sup> 熊伟. 帖木儿王朝波斯细密画中的中国绘画影响. *Chaoxing raqamli kitobxonasi*. 页 24-27.

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