The Sufi Ṭariqa as an Exchange Network: The Ahrāris in Timūrid Central Asia

Thesis

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Abstract

The existence of an empire is not necessary for trans-regional exchange. Though empires may be framed as systems of exchange, control over a trans-regional exchange network is only one aspect of an imperial system. An imperial system exists when a state possesses both formal executive power and agency in controlling trans-regional exchange. In the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth century Central Asia, the Timūrid Empire continued the Mongol legacy of maintaining an imperial exchange network. Though the empire fragmented into smaller states following the Timūrid ruler Ulugh Bey’s death in 1449, commercial and demographic exchange continued between the regions of Transoxania and Khurāsān. The disintegration of the empire into smaller Timūrid polities and the inability of Timūrid rulers to extend their power beyond the borders of their states should have adversely affected exchange process in the region. Trans-regional exchange, however, survived with the help of the Aḥrārī Naqshbandī Sufi network. The creation of the Sufi network was a reaction to the increasingly decentralized Central Asian political environment. The Aḥrārī network represented a body of traders and craftsmen and had a strong presence in urban Central Asia. Though the Aḥrārī network lacked formal political power, it used its trans-regional presence to diplomatically integrate the courts of rival Timūrid rulers into a greater exchange network. Thus, despite the existence of a decentralized political environment, the Aḥrārī network and the Timūrid states successfully ensured the survival of exchange processes in a post-imperial Central Asia.
به نام خدا
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Figure 1. Central Asia and Iran in the Second Half of the 15th Century.

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Glossary

*Amīr*- A title denoting military command. Refers to a Turco-Mongolian noble in Tīmūrid society.

*Awqāf*- Plural of *waqf*. Pious endowments.

*Bāgh-Shumār*- A pre-Islamic Persian tax.

*Dehyazdeh*- A tax on one tenth of agricultural produce.

*Dhikr*- The invocation of supplications or the Names of God.

*Dīwān*- Fiscal administrative office.

*Dīwāni*- State-owned land.

*Ghāzi*- A holy warrior.

*Guregen*- “Royal son-in-law.” A non-Chinggisid married to a Chinggisid princess.

*Ḥimāyat*- Support or protection given by a Sufi.

*Karāmāt*- Miraculous powers. Plural of *karāmat*.

*Khalīfa*- A deputy of a *shaykh*.
**Khalvat Dar Anjuman**- “Seclusion in Society.” The Naqshbandī doctrine that allows its Sufis to have social, political and economic roles.

**Khānqāh**- A Sufi lodge.

**Kharāj.** An Islamic tax on converts to Islam.

**Khassa**- Royal Land.

**Milk**- Privately owned land.

**Muafī**- A form of tax immunity.

**Murīd**- A Sufi disciple.

**Musallamī.** A form of tax immunity.

**Mutawalli**- An administrator of a waqf.

**Padishāh i Islām**- “King of Islam.” A title that publicly underscores the allegiance of the ruler to Islamic ideals.

**Pīr**- The leader of a Sufi group. Same as shaykh.

**Qalmāq.** A derogatory term used to either refer to steppe nomads or their culture in general.

**Rabita**- A practice that requires murīds to accompany the Pīr with the aim of developing a personal bond with the Sufi master.
Raqs- Dance.

Sama- A specific kind of dhikr.

Sharī'ah- The Islamic legal code.

Shaykh- The leader of a Sufi group. A Sufi master.

Shaykhzādeh- The son of a shaykh.

Silsila- A chain of spiritual lineage that links each successive shaykh to his master.

Soyūrghāl- A land grant that gave fiscal autonomy to the grantee.

Suhbat- Lectures given by a Sufi shaykh to his murīds.

Ṭā'īfa- A group formed to protect a common interest against a common threat.

Tamgha- A Mongolian tax on trade.

Tanga- A coin that was in circulation in Tīmūrid Central Asia.

Ṭariqa- A Sufi group with a distinct identity.

Tarkhānī- A form of fiscal and legal immunity.

‘Ushr- An Islamic tax equal to one-tenth of agricultural produce.

Waqf- A pious endowment.
Introduction

The role of empire in determining trans-regional exchange is an intriguing one. Trans-regional exchanges include commercial, cultural and demographic interaction between two or more distinct regions. An empire forces these regions into a relationship of exchange by removing the boundaries created by the existence of borders. In the case where exchange between two regions existed before the creation of an empire, an imperial system catalyzed existing exchange by improving such factors as security and transportation infrastructure. An empire thus plays the role of overseer for exchange processes that exist within its borders. This role is especially relevant to Central Asia, which has numerous times throughout history been incorporated into large land-based empires that ruled over distant and culturally diverse populations.

Literature points toward the role of imperial institutions in structuring this exchange. The process of exchange, however, does not end with the dissolution of an empire. This survival of exchange processes could be attributed to the presence of non-imperial networks. These non-imperial networks included trans-regional socio-religious networks which possessed the ability to bridge the gap between commercial agents and the courts of regional states. The Ahrari Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood was an example of such a network as it was based in the several regional Timurid states that were formed after the fracturing of the greater Timurid Empire. While the enforcement of territorial limits and
belligerent diplomatic attitudes by these states threatened trade and exchange in the region, the Ahrārī network was able to function trans-regionally and continue the process of exchange that had existed under a unified empire.

The purpose of this research is to gauge the extent of institutionalization within the Ahrārī Naqshbandī network, to frame the Sufi tariqa as an exchange network, and to identify the network as a vital component of the cohesive framework that existed within a divided Timūrid Central Asia. While much has been written on exchange networks working in imperial capacities and the centralized nature of the Ahrārī network, little has been written on the role of the centralized Ahrārī network in overcoming issues of exchange in a decentralized political environment. Various aspects of the Central Asian political environment of the fifteenth century and of the Ahrārī network in particular, have been analyzed in scholarly literature. The waning powers of the central government, ties of kinship between the Timūrid states, the reactionary nature of the Khwājagān Sufi movement and the increased involvement of Tajik notables in politics are all topics of interest where studies on the Timūrids are concerned.

This study aims to help create a more comprehensive understanding of the Timūrid socio-political environment by placing the Ahrārī network within an institutional role in a post-imperial system. The Ahrārī network will be analyzed as an institution working locally in different post-imperial polities and promoting co-operation between these states by way of its own trans-regional nature. Though the Ahrārī network worked with the state, it was not formally a part of the regional power structure. It was a non-state institution that allowed for exchange in the absence of a corresponding state institution. It
is a central premise of this study that the roles of these non-state networks and organizations must be studied alongside official imperial institutions. This study will analyze the integration of local exchange networks in Khurāsān and Transoxania within a larger Āḥrārī exchange network which can be identified by the links that exist between the various agents involved. The agents are individuals that work under the larger umbrella of the organization, helping it to achieve its goals. Also important then are analyses of agents’ activities at the local micro-historical level, as these allow the network to be seen in more localized contexts and this helps avoid a generalization of the network’s character.

In this study, a decentralized political environment is framed as the space that allows for non-state networks to intervene politically. The paper thus uses the Āḥrārī ṭarīqa as one particular example of such a relationship and examines the ways in which the Āḥrārī network fostered exchange across a politically divided Timūrid realm without the formal assumption of political power. Though Timūr (r. 1370-1405) had carved out a massive empire stretching from Anatolia to Northern India, the greater part of this territory consisted of vassal states. The actual core of Timūr’s empire consisted of Iran and Central Asia. The empire fragmented after Timūr’s death in 1405 only to be reunited by his son Shāhrukh (r 1405-1447). The empire was divided into the territories of Transoxania and Khurāsān following the death of the ruler Ulugh Bey (r. 1447-1449). Transoxania was ruled by the progeny of Sultan Abū Sa‘īd while Khurāsān was effectively ruled by Sultan Husayn Bayqara and his line.

Being born in 1404 C.E, Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Āḥrār spent his life in a post-imperial Central Asia. Born in the house of a religious scholar known for his commercial success,
Khwāja Aḥrār spent his youth studying under Naqshbandī Sufī masters and started a business upon completion of his studies. Living till the age of 86, Khwāja Aḥrār was able to witness the gradual decentralization of Central Asian politics. Sufī orders, that represented urban merchant communities grew economically and politically stronger in this period and were in a better position to defend their commercial interests. As decentralization increased the threat to trade by local political players, Khwāja Aḥrār was able to use his increased political power to unite scattered Naqshbandī Sufī groups into a single centralized body. The Khwāja thus centralized the Naqshbandīyya to counter the decentralization of Central Asia. Following his appointment as adviser to Sultan Abū Saʿīd in 1451, he was able to use his political influence in Transoxania and Khurāsān to diplomatically integrate the courts of rival Timūrid rulers into a greater exchange network.

The first chapter of this study first explores the idea of exchange in an imperial setting and then frames the Sufī ṭarīqa as a network that can conduct exchange in a decentralized post-imperial setting. Analyzing the period from the Mongol invasions to the fragmentation of the Timūrid Empire, the second chapter traces the corresponding political and social changes observed in Central Asia. The third chapter draws heavily from primary sources and uses instances of Khwāja Aḥrār’s political interventions to present the Aḥrārī ṭarīqa as an exchange network. In its entirety, this study frames the Aḥrārī Naqshbandī ṭarīqa’s political intervention as a non-state network as a factor that promoted and protected exchange in fifteenth century Timūrid Central Asia.
Chapter 1

EXCHANGE

As the Aḥrārī network functioned in a post-imperial space, it is necessary to analyze the dynamics of exchange in an imperial system. This approach will aid in determining the nature of exchange in the region before Timūr’s death in 1405. As the Aḥrārī network was created as a response to post-imperial decentralization, it is implied that the network sought to recreate a trade dynamic that had existed in imperial times. The centralized nature of the Timūrid Empire was valued by the traders and craftsmen of Central Asia and the absence of centralized rule prompted Khwāja Aḥrār to create his own centralized Sufi network.

Though they were represented by Sufi orders in the fourteenth century, the traders and craftsmen of Central Asia did not possess a centralized Sufi network that would aid their commercial interests till the mid-fifteenth century. A reason for this may lie with the paradigm that the Timūrid Empire, owing to its centralized nature, was able to catalyze exchange processes within Central Asia. Exchange is central to the idea of an imperial system. In a highly influential essay on the subject, Stephen Kotkin argues that certain empires can be defined though the exchange processes they created. Basing his claim on the example of the Mongol empire, he explains that exchange was not a “byproduct of
interaction” or an “occasional phenomenon” but the basic imperial principle that defined an empire. In the framework for this study, exchange is not a minor part of imperial policy but rather, it is a major characteristic that defines a polity as an empire. An imperial system is thus ratified by the presence of demographic heterogeneity and institutionalized exchange within the borders of a state.

While the presence of the Timūrid Empire aided trans-regional exchange in Central Asia, the absence of empire did not necessitate the truncation of exchange relationships in the region. Using Kotkin’s definitions, empires can be understood to be either “formal political entities” or examples of “loose association over sprawling territories.” For the latter, Kotkin, assumes the existence of empire in the absence of formal imperial institutions. Empire, in both definitions, is identified with the presence of exchange and little else contributes to this wider definition of empire. Tony Ballantyne presents a similar paradigm, arguing that historians “make a greater effort to understand empires as assemblages of networks, complex threads of correspondence and exchange that linked distant components together and ensured a steady, but largely overlooked, cultural traffic.” Ballantyne’s view of imperial exchange, however, differs from Kotkin’s model. Ballantyne gives space to non-state agents to operate within an imperial space. Looking at the period spanning the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, he sees empires as


2. For the former, Kotkin gives the example of Imperial Russia and China. He uses the case of the USSR as an example of the “loose association” type of empire. See Kotkin, Mongol Commonwealth, 491.

“powerful agents of globalization, appropriating new lands and significant sources of revenue, while moving people, commodities, technologies and ideas from colony to colony, as well as between the imperial center and colonies in the periphery.”4 For Ballantyne, empire exists beyond the imperial state and he views non-state actors as a vital part of an imperial exchange system. He writes that “exchanges enacted by East India Companies, missionary organizations and migrants were often beyond the control of metropolitan governments.”5 Therefore in his opinion, imperial exchange also took place without active involvement by the state. In his view, a state may be responsible for creating an empire but it may or may not be in control of the resulting exchange. Though Ballantyne’s argument concerns an imperial system, networks were even more important for exchange in a post-imperial environment. Extending Ballantyne’s paradigm to fifteenth century Central Asia, it can be said that the Aḥrārī network was responsible for maintaining exchange in a decentralized environment. Though the Aḥrārī network lobbied local Timūrid rulers to allow merchants and travelers entry into their kingdoms, the state was not directly involved in the trade. While the existence of an empire aided exchange, the presence of such networks prevented the demise of exchange processes in a post-imperial environment.

The Early Timūrid Empire (1370-1405) was defined by its highly centralized political system and while Kotkin’s and Ballantyne’s definitions have their merits, exchange alone cannot be the sole basis for defining the Timūrid imperial System. For the purposes of research on the Aḥrārī network and the later Timūrids, the existence of

5. Ibid.
empire must be defined based on the presence of both formal political power and exchange. Formal power over the entirety of a region is a vital component of imperial rule and it is fallacious to assume that an empire could exist without such a claim to power. In the absence of formal power, the definition of empire can get confused with that of an exchange network. If exchange networks with no coercive political power can be defined as empires, then every Sufi brotherhood and merchant community should be defined as an empire. Clearly, doing so would create paradigmatic issues and would not be useful when the difference between an empire and a post-imperial network is to be highlighted. Existing in such a post-imperial environment, the Aḥrārī network functioned in the space created by the inability of any one Later Timūrid ruler to extend his power over all of Central Asia.

Measures of formal power and influence over networks of exchange can be used as yardsticks to gauge the extent of empire. These same features can similarly be used to measure the functions of the Aḥrārī Network in a post-imperial environment. While formal institutions of political power did exist in the later Timūrid period, the region was divided amongst a number of Timūrid states that had existed since the mid-fifteenth century.6 This study places the Aḥrārī network within this politically fragmented and increasingly decentralized space. Though the dissolution of the Timūrid Empire and the subsequent decentralization of the political structure had reduced the powers of central governments in these states, it is incorrect to assume that the rulers of such states had lost all executive power. Timūrid rulers were still supreme within the borders of their own states. The executive powers of individual Timūrid rulers, however, did not extend to the

6. Depending on the year in question, the number of Timūrid states that existed simultaneously varied from two to three.
whole region that had formed the core of Timūr’s empire and were thus curtailed by territorial borders. The inability of any one Timūrid state to extend its influence across the whole of Transoxania and Khurāsān prevented it from creating exchange between the two regions with the use of state institutions alone. While the Aḥrārī network possessed no coercive power, it had an organized presence in each one of the Timūrid states. The Aḥrārī network was thus instrumental in using its own trans-regional presence to ensure the existence of exchange between the Timūrid states. Timūrid rulers therefore relied on the Aḥrārī network to maintain exchange with other Timūrid states. The Aḥrārī network relied on the executive powers of rulers to engage in commercial, demographic and academic exchange without any hindrance. The roots of this relationship lay in a mutual dependency on both state power and an influence over networks of exchange. The Aḥrārī-Timūrid complex can therefore be classified as a post-imperial exchange system.

The Mongol Empire as an Empire of Exchange

The Timūrid Empire was not the first empire in Central Asia to promote exchange as a part of imperial policy and it was following an example set by earlier empires in Central Asia. The Early Timūrid state was deeply influenced by earlier empires. The role of the Mongol Empire is especially important as the Timūrid Empire grew out of a region that was still under nominal Mongol rule. The Mongol Empire had already set several institutional precedents for the Timūrid Empire. These included notions of political legitimacy, and systems of taxation and land distribution. One such precedent was

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exchange garnered through commercial interaction. Kotkin stresses that trans-regional trade continued at an elevated rate during the Mongol Empire largely because the Mongols “vigorously promoted commerce.”\(^8\) Within the framework provided by Kotkin, it is possible to envisage the Mongol Empire as a large exchange network that allowed for the spread of commodities, ideas, knowledge and people within the physical boundaries of that empire.

The Timūrid Empire as a Legacy of the Mongol Empire

Though Timūrid Empire catalyzed exchange between the regions of Transoxania and Khurāsān by placing both within the boundaries of larger polity, it did not create the exchange process between the two regions. Since Transoxania and Khurāsān were geographically contiguous, their relationship of mutual exchange had existed well before the creation of the Timūrid Empire. Following an existing precedent the Timūrid Empire catalyzed this exchange process by creating peace and stability through a centralized system of rule. While the existence of a centralized Timūrid state aided exchange, the existence of exchange did not depend on the Timūrid Empire. Therefore, even though it was threatened by the decentralization of the state, exchange still survived after the fragmentation of the empire.

The Timūrid Empire, as a successor to an older Mongolian imperial model, emulated many imperial processes that were a hallmark of the Mongol Empire. One of these legacies was the Timūrid willingness to maintain the peace and stability required to

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promote exchange. In this regard, Kotkin argues that the Mongol Empire existed through the exchange that it orchestrated. He writes that exchange for the Mongols “was not a byproduct of interaction, not an occasional phenomenon, but the raison d’être of their empire: empire as exchange – essentially without barriers of religion, tribe, or language, thanks to realpolitik.” ⁹ His work implies the existence of an institutional inertia as he argues that Mongol imperial culture survived through its institutions that continued to function in states after the dissolution of the Mongol Empire.

The Timūrid Empire was an example of such a state as its institutions had survived from the Mongol Empire. The origins of the Timūrid Empire in the Mongol Empire are well established in both primary sources and secondary literature. For our present purposes, the realizations that the Mongol Empire was an empire of exchange and that Mongol imperial institutions outlived the Mongol Empire lead to the syllogism that the Timūrid Empire, which grew out of the Ulus Chaghatāy, carried on this legacy of exchange. Beatrice Manz corroborates this argument, writing that “despite his involvement with the settled regions he ruled, Temur began and ended his life as a leader of nomads – it was the tribes of Transoxania who formed his political style, and it was the heritage of the Mongol Empire which molded his administrative system.”¹⁰

A unified Timūrid state continued the Mongol legacy of promoting exchange. The Timūrid Empire was a patron of industry and commerce and Manz writes that the Timūrid state was “more of an advantage than a burden” to traders and craftsmen where

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stability and security were concerned.¹¹ The Timūrids boosted travel and commercial exchange with the development of infrastructure and the use of local elites. Like the Mongols, the Timūrids considered the promotion of exchange to be an imperial duty.

Exchange within the two empires was, however, dissimilar in terms of scale. Drawing rigid parallels between the Mongol Empire and the Timūrid Empire is an exercise in futility as the demographic dynamics and the geographical extents of both empires differed greatly. The Mongol Empire stretched from East Asia to Eastern Europe and included in its fold all manners of people and cultures. By creating an empire, the Mongol Empire placed groups of people from different places and varying cultures within a greater exchange network. By contrast, the Timūrid Empire covered a much smaller region. Though it extended from Anatolia to Northern India, a considerable part of the Timūrid Empire consisted of vassal states and the actual Timūrid state was limited to Central Asia and Iran. Therefore most of the Timūrid Empire’s subjects were either Tajik or Turkic and almost all were Muslim. In Transoxania and Khurāsān, the Turkic and Tajik population was heterogeneously scattered on both sides of the Oxus River. It does not require much effort to imagine that these two ethnic groups did not need the Timūrid Empire to put them into an exchange based relationship with each other. Neither were Transoxania and Khurāsān separated by topographical boundaries. Exchange was present even before the creation of the Timūrid Empire. This may be attributed to Mongol rule in the region but commercial and cultural exchange between Turk and Tajik

in the region predates even the Mongol empire.\textsuperscript{12} What the Timūrid Empire did to
Transoxania and Khurāsān was that it included both regions in a larger exchange network
and placed them within the limits of single polity. It thus served to catalyze existing
exchange relationships between both regions.

Ignoring the minute details of the post-Timūr succession struggle, the history of the
Timūrid Empire may be summarized by stating that it had fragmented into the domains of
Transoxania and Khurāsān following Ulugh Beys death in 1449.\textsuperscript{13} From that point on, the
Timūrid polity existed in the form of two states that were separate polities but which
were still referred to collectively as the Later Timūrīds. Though the hostility between
these states should have negatively affected exchange processes in the region, such an
effect was mitigated by the creation of trans-regional exchange networks.

**The Sufi Brotherhood as an Exchange Network**

This study views a Sufi brotherhood as a structured network that can be used to
create an exchange process between regions. The Aḥrārī \textit{tarīqa} drew its success in
promoting exchange in Timūrid Central Asia from the extension of its network into the
courts of local rulers. A \textit{tarīqa} is essentially a network of Sufi \textit{shaykhs} and their \textit{murīds}

\textsuperscript{12} Peter Golden uses a medieval Turkic saying to explain this relationship: “A Turk is never without
a Persian, just as a cap is never without a head.” See Peter B. Golden, \textit{Central Asia in World History} (New

\textsuperscript{13} Clifford E. Bosworth, \textit{The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual}
and the precedent for a ṭarīqa to intervene politically interventions had existed before Khwāja Ahrār’s centralization of the Naqshbandī ṭarīqa.

The basis of a Sufi network exists within the distinct corporate structure possessed by each of the Sufi ṭarīqas. While this was not true for the earlier Khwājahagān, who lacked a formal structure, the Naqshbandīyya after Khwāja Ahrār (1404-1490) were an organized and centralized order. Annabelle Bottcher uses the example of the Haqqānīyya Naqshbandī network to explain the structure of a transnational Sufi network. The structure of a Sufi network is based on the belief that only a shaykh has a privileged access to God. The network develops as the murīds or followers of the shaykh form linkages with him in order to gain spiritual access to God. This pīr-murīd relationship is reinforced by the practices of rabita and suhbat that create a personal bond between a pīr and each of his murīds.

The method employed to create a spiritual link with God is known as the ṭarīqa or “path.” A ṭarīqa may thus be understood to embody all the qualities of a network that is

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14. Ṭarīqa generally refers to a Sufi order. See Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ṭariğa.”


16. Ibid., 241.

17. An alternate term for a shaykh. Pīr is a Persian term, while shaykh is Arabic.

Weismann defines rabita as a “technique of keeping the image of the perfect master in the disciple’s heart, whether he is present or absent.” Suhbat is described as “accompanying the master” as “through companionship the master could not only teach his disciples but also convey to them directly his spiritual qualities and attributes.” See Itzchak Weismann, The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition (London: Routledge, 2007), 29.
centered around the authority of a pīr and bound by common beliefs and rituals. As Jürgen Paul points out, groups like the Naqshbandīyya sought to set themselves apart from other Sufi orders with these distinct sets of beliefs and practices. These distinct sets of practices are what made them a distinct ṭarīqa. This implies that Sufi orders were aware of the distinctness of their networks and that this distinctness was governed by a set of rules. The creation of a distinct identity for a ṭarīqa involved the creation of distinct spiritual affiliations, conditions for initiation into the order, and specific devotional practices. This self-identification of the Naqshbandīyya as a distinct group allows it to be seen as a distinct network. It also prevents the functions and operations of the network from being confused with those of other Sufi ṭarīqas.

A Sufi network branches out and adopts a trans-regional structure when a pīr delegates his authority by authorizing khalīfas to manage the ṭarīqa in other regions. The creation of pīr-murīd relationships and the sending out of khalīfas are methods of establishing the links that define a network. In this context, Itzchak Weismann writes that the institutionalization of the pīr-murīd bond was vital for the formation of brotherhoods. Weismann’s argument can be coupled with Bottcher’s example of the Haqqānīyya Naqshbandīs to imply that a Sufi network is an institutional extension of the pīr-murīd relationship. A Sufi network expands trans-regionally as each khalīfa creates

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bonds with his \textit{murîds}. While a Sufi brotherhood may not necessarily be trans-regional, the Ahrarî Naqshbandî network was. It was this feature of the Ahrarî Network that makes it vital to our understanding of exchange between Timurid Khurasan and Transoxania. The trans-regional nature of the network allowed the \textit{pîr} of the network to oversee this exchange through his \textit{murîds}.

The extension of the network into the political circles of various states allowed a Sufi brotherhood to successfully negotiate the transfer of goods and people across a border. Thus a Sufi \textit{tarîqa} like that of Khwaja Ahrar, besides being active in the commercial and spiritual sphere, functioned within political spaces. Isenbike Togan provides an analogy to the political character of the Ahrarî network. The concept of a religious group functioning in a political capacity is illustrated by her description of how the Khojas of Turkestan maintained the process of exchange in the absence of long-lasting state-power.\textsuperscript{22} Though the Khoja network is relevant as an analogy to the Ahrarî Naqshbandî network, the methods used by both to foster exchange are not identical. The Turkestani Khojas staged rebellions against Qing colonial rule and were thus, unlike the Ahrarîs, directly involved in state formation.\textsuperscript{23} The Khoja Network is important for understanding the manner in which a religious movement performs functions that are vital to an imperial system. One of these functions is political centralization. Togan views the Khoja network

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“KhW Adjas, Khodjas, the designation of two lineages of spiritual and political leaders in Eastern Turkestan, the later Sinkiang [q.v.,] and, more specifically, in the Altishahr (“six towns”), now in the western and southwestern parts of Sinkiang, where they played a decisive role from the late 10th/16th century to the last quarter of the 19th century.” See \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam}, 2nd ed., s.v. "Khodjas."
\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{23} Togan, “Islam in a Changing Society,” 135.
\end{quotation}
as a balance between the secular Begs and the religious Khojas on the basis of the centralizing force that the Khojas were able to exert on an otherwise decentralized power structure. This network, built on a partnership between the Khojas and the Begs, displayed “centralizing tendencies” that were also observed in the Aḥrārī network. These Khojas provided the “centripetal force that worked to counter the centrifugal force of the Begs” and ensured that there was no hindrance to the process of trade and exchange that was seen in the Tarim basin. The Khojas of Turkestan were descended spiritually from the Aḥrārī Naqshbandīs and therefore displayed many of the political characteristics that were found in Khwāja Aḥrār’s network. These included maintaining mediatory roles at a diplomatic level and harboring ties with the merchant classes of the Tarim Basin. If the assumption of formal political power is not taken into consideration, then the Aḥrārī brotherhood can be considered analogous to the Khojas and can therefore be defined as a network.

Though the centralized nature of the Aḥrārī network was similar to that of the Turkestanī Khoja network, the method of political mediation followed by the Aḥrārī network was closer to that followed by the Shaykhs of Jam. While the Shaykhs of Jam were limited to Khurāsān and a study on them does not aid our understanding of a trans-regional network, their political influence involved proximity to the Herati court and not

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 136.
27. They were in fact a part of the greater Ahrari Naqshbandi network. Weismann writes, “Finally, by the second half of the (sixteenth) century the Naqshbandiyya had acquired a paramount position in Eastern Turkistan as the progeny of Ahmed Kasani, the Makhdumzade Khojas established themselves in the Tarim basin.” See Weismann, The Naqshbandiyya, 44.
the direct assumption of power. Lawrence Potter’s research deals with the Jāmī Shaykhs of Herat and he illustrates the strong political links that Sufi orders can maintain with ruling dynasties. Potter describes the Jāmī order in Herat as being defined by its closeness to the state. Herat in post-Mongol and pre-Timūrid times was ruled by the Kart dynasty, which was Tajik. The Jāmīs, after establishing themselves in Herat, behaved like an urban elite by their association with the Kartid dynasty. Potter, describing the political role played by the Jāmī Shaykhs, writes that they were vital to the Herati political mechanism in their roles as negotiators and mediators. Potter’s work thus establishes that Sufis had distinct political roles and that they could also use these roles to consolidate their political and economic positions.

The case of the Jāmī Shaykhs reveals that a precedent for the political roles of Sufis existed well before the creation of the Aḥrārī ṭarīqa. There was, however, a crucial difference between the Jāmī and Aḥrārī political models. While the Aḥrārīs were known for their close attachment to the Timūrid line, the Jāmī Shaykhs were typified by the distance they deliberately kept between the state and themselves. The Shaykhs of Jam followed a policy of not being too closely attached to any dynasty. This principle was meant to insure against the possibility of a dynastic collapse in the face of the rise of


30. The Ahrārīs suffered because of their affinity to the Timūrid line when the Timūrid states fell to the Uzbek Shaybānī Khan. Sāfī writes that “Shah Bakht (Shaybānī) Khan seized Samarqand in the year 906 and he was bent on persecuting the venerable Khwāja Muhammad Yahya (Khwāja Ahrār’s son).”Khwāja Yahya was soon killed by Uzbek horsemen. See ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn Kāshifī Ṣaḥī, Beads of Dew: From the Source of Life : Histories of the Khwāja gān, the Masters of Wisdom = Raṣhāḥāt ‘Ain al-Ḥayāt, trans. Muhtar Holland (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Al-Baz Publishing, 2001), 355.
another regional power. In the case of Herat, the fall of the Kartid dynasty was brought about by the Jāmī Sufis once they realized that their interests were not safeguarded by the Kartids.

A ṭarīqa thus formed a network on the basis of strong personal links between a shaykh and his disciples and took on a trans-regional character when khalīfas were deputed to other regions. This basic structure of a Sufi ṭarīqa allowed Khwāja Ahrār to centralize his control over his network. The trans-regional nature of the Ahrārī network allowed Khwāja Ahrār access to the courts of local Timūrid rulers. The Khwāja’s political power, however, was a result of the changes that Central Asia had been experiencing since the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.

Chapter 2

A REGION IN A STATE OF FLUX

Following the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, Central Asia had been in a state of political and cultural flux. The dominance of a Chinggisid elite had altered existing notions of political legitimacy and rulers had to use both Turco-Mongol and Perso-Islamic symbolism in their bids for power. By the fourteenth century, this Perso-Islamic-Turco-Mongol cultural milieu gave birth to a tribal confederation known as the Ulus Chaghatāy. The Timūrid Empire grew out of the Ulus Chaghatāy and was forced to appeal to both nomadic and Islamic traditions for legitimacy. As the empire fragmented, each Timūrid prince sought more legitimacy for himself by giving economic and fiscal favors to religious personalities and Turco-Mongolian amīrs alike. Though these favors eventually decentralized the Timūrid political system, they also added to the economic and political powers of Sufi ṭarīqas.

Considering that the Timūrid Empire grew out of the Ulus Chaghatāy, the history of the Timūrid Empire starts well before the elevation of Timūr to the rank of amīr.32 As the

elite that governed this newer iteration of an older state was also Chaghatāyid, the political culture and traditions of legitimacy in the early Timūrid state were based on older Chaghatāyid traditions. Manz writes that the Chaghatāyid identity was “at once linguistic, political and cultural, and was built on common traditions and common historical experience.”33 The Timūrid Empire had a Chaghatāyid elite and was an incarnation of the older Chaghatāyid state. However, the Chaghatāyid state in Timūr’s time had evolved beyond the Chinggisid-style khanate it was earlier. As a consequence of its rule over non-Mongolian peoples, the fourteenth century Chaghatāy Khanate had given birth to the Ulus Chaghatāy.34 The Ulus Chaghatāy was a fusion of Turkic people and their Mongol rulers. The result of this fusion was a hybrid Turco-Mongol culture that influenced notions of religious belief and political legitimacy.

Manz explains that the Ulus Chaghatāy grew, not out of the Chaghatāyid Khanate as a whole but rather from the eastern half of the state after it was split in two after the death of Tarmashirin Khan (r. 1326-1334).35 Manz describes this as a two stage process where the first stage was the “separation of acculturated” nomads from the eastern nomads following the split in the khanate.36 The second was the attraction that the isolated Turco-


34. Ulus is a word in both the Turkic and Mongolian languages and one of its meanings refers to the ethnic fusion of the Mongols and their subject nations. See Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ulus.”


36. Ibid.
Mongolian population had towards the Chaghatai khanate.\(^{37}\) Both of these stages were politically significant for the Ulus Chaghatai. Manz points out that “the Ulus Chaghatai was a voluntary confederation, based on its common interest and common culture of those who made it up – Turco-Mongolian tribes who, while maintaining their loyalty to the Mongol tradition, were willing to coexist with a Muslim settled population.”\(^{38}\) The dual Chinggisid-Islamic identity of the Ulus Chaghatai was thus defined well before Timur would use the same to create his own state.

This relationship between nomadic culture and Islamic tradition became stronger with the incubation that the Ulus received from the more nomadic Eastern Chaghataiid realms. Manz describes the first forty years of the Western Chaghataiid state as having several effects on the Chaghataiid ruling elite.\(^{39}\) It was during this period that they ruled over a population that was both nomadic and urban. The nomads of Transoxania, though holding on to some inherited Mongolian customs, were unlike their counterparts in the Eastern Chaghataiid State as they were Muslims and were closer to both urban and sedentary culture.\(^{40}\) The Ulus was thus born in a socio-political environment that nurtured a loyalty to both Chinggisid ideals and Islam.\(^{41}\)


\(^{39}\) Manz, “Chaghatai Identity,” 29.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 31.
It was through the creation of the Ulus that the Turco-Mongol synthesis had cultural implications for Transoxania. The Mongols, in this ethno-cultural exchange, were representative of a nomadic steppe tradition. The Turks, while partially nomadic, had embraced a sedentary lifestyle. Paul Buell opines that this synthesis brought urban culture to the Mongols. He explains the gradual nature of the synthesis by pointing out that Transoxania was geographically close to Mongolia. The close proximity of both regions prevented the Mongols from being too dependent on the local population and hence being too exposed to local culture. Though the process was slow, it was in place by the time Timūr rose to power. Manz reinforces this view by stating that the Ulus Chaghatāy was well defined as a separate group by the time Timūr rose to power. It may be added that this synthesis also had the converse effect of bringing the steppe and its culture to the cities of Transoxania. Though Naqshbandī primary sources use it to attack Turco-Mongolian culture, they do mention the effects of this synthesis. Espousing a symbolically purer Perso-Islamic culture, Naqshbandīs made repeated claims about the threat from Turco-Mongolian culture. If these primary sources are to be believed, this synthesis spilled over into the domain of religious beliefs and established Perso-Islamic traditions were adulterated by Turco-Mongol forms of belief that would be disparagingly referred to as “Qalmāq” customs.


43. Manz, “Chaghatay Identity,” 43.

44. The Khwaja describes them as the “enemies of religion and the community, who are exerting great effort to corrupt the affairs of the Muslims.” See Jo-Ann Gross and Asom Urunbaev, The Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Ahrār and His Associates (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 176. Note that Majmū‘a-yi Murāslāt, being an archival source, was published only as a part of Gross and Urunbaev’s book.
Despite these changes, the Ulus Chaghatāy during the pre-Timūrid period did not represent a complete fusion of Turkic and Mongol cultures. Using evidence from primary sources, Manz points out that the writers of the period were careful to distinguish the Chaghatāyids from other Turco-Mongolian people.⁴⁵ Manz points out that the lands of the Ulus Chaghatāy were thus characterized by the rule of a Turco-Mongolian elite over a non-Chaghatāyid populace which included both Turks and Tajiks.⁴⁶ The Ulus Chaghatāy was resultantly defined by a dual leaning towards Chinggisid ideals and Islam and by its hybrid Turco-Mongol identity.

The Timūrid Empire grew out of this cultural and political milieu and, as Manz corroborates, was governed by a Turco-Mongol elite.⁴⁷ She also argues that this existing political environment forced Timūr to “operate under” both Turco-Mongolian and Islamic traditions.⁴⁸ Timūr therefore appealed to both Chinggisid tradition and to religious symbolism to create the legitimacy his amīrate required. He did not hold titles like khan or sultan that symbolized absolute power but rather titles like amīr and guregen that tied him to the Chaghatāyid house in both servitude and familial affinity. Manz justifies the creation these titles by underscoring the importance the symbolism these

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Manz points out that the term “Chaghatay” has implications of “self-identification and pride” in the Zafarnama. The author of the Zafarnama, Nizam ad-Din Shami relates an allegorical tale of an Uzbek and a Chaghatay in the desert to illustrate this sense of Chaghatay pride. See Manz, “Chaghatay Identity,” 36-37.


titles had for Timūr’s legitimacy to rule. He was a commander of the puppet Chaghatāy khan, whom he installed on the throne. He was also a royal son-in-law or guregen of the Chinggisids as he had married a Chaghatāyid princess. Timūr was aware of his position amongst the political hierarchy of the Ulus Chaghatāy and he knew how to use the various forms of legitimacy for political gain. He was successful in becoming a de facto ruler and was protected by his de jure position as an amīr who was subservient to the khan. He was also a guregen who was part of the Chinggisid family, a ghāzi who made holy war, and a patron of Sufis and shrines. He relied on these various sources of legitimacy to augment his legitimacy. Timūr thus justified both his rule and his conquests by claiming that he was doing so to both protect the Chaghatāyid line and to bring glory to Islam.

While a limited Turco-Mongol synthesis did indeed take place, there was little in the way of a Perso-Turkic synthesis or, in the specific case of the Chaghatāyid Khanate, a Perso-Mongol synthesis. Primary sources present Perso-Islamic culture as antithetical to the steppe culture of the Turkic nomads by making derogatory references to Turco-Mongolian customs. Khwāja Aḥrār, in his letters which have been compiled in the Majmūʿa-yi Murāslāt, refers to a group he calls the Qalmāqs. This is more than a mere reference to the Turco-Mongol people of Transoxania. The label “Qalmāq” is symbolic of the precedence given by the Turco-Mongol elite, in Khwāja Aḥrār’s view, to the


50. Ibid., 111.

51. This does not mean that a Perso-Mongol cultural synthesis was impossible. The Ilkhanids had already set a precedent for such a synthesis.

culture of the steppe. It can be therefore argued that the Tajik populace of Central Asia had an identity rooted in a more orthodox strain of Islam. It is for this reason that any Chinggisid claims to rule would have had little effect on the Tajik population. The addition of Islam to Chinggisid symbolism, which Timūr used effectively, legitimized a ruler in the eyes of both the Turks and the Tajiks.

**Timūr and Sufism**

Though Sufis possessed an increased political role following the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, their symbolic significance increased greatly during Timūr’s rule. Timūr supported the Sufis as he needed their support to legitimize his rule in the eyes of the Tajik population. By setting a precedent for his successors, Timūr contributed to the increasing political influence of fifteenth century Sufi orders. This increased influence allowed the Ahrari network to intervene politically in the courts of Later Timūrid rulers.

The socio-political situation after the Mongol invasions proved to be ideal for the spread of Sufism. Referencing Said Arjomand, Potter stipulates that the Mongol invasions created this environment by bringing about political decentralization. According to Arjomand, the invasion had two effects. The first was that a decentralized environment made a Sufi brotherhood an ideal platform for political action especially

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where the masses felt the need for political representation. The second was that a Sufi order was headed by a *shaykh* who was viewed as a leader by a populace desirous of leadership. An analogy for a *shaykh* as a leader can be found in Warren Fusfeld’s work, despite the latter’s focus on nineteenth century British India. A comparison can be drawn between British India, and Mongol Iran and Central Asia as regions ruled by outsiders who were not part of the pre-existing cultural milieu. Fusfeld argues that “the capacity of the sheikh to link the individual to the tradition provided a framework for leadership which functioned at the individual level while at the same time providing a meaningful connection between individual and the wider context of his own sense of his ultimate and religious identity.”

A *shaykh* projected the self-identification of the ṭariqa onto everyone who was associated with it and thus created a communal identity. The *shaykh* thus gave individuals access to a greater communal identity by providing a system of common religious beliefs and practices. This communal identity provided individual people the platform they needed to reach out to foreign rulers like the Mongols or the British.

The decentralized political environment that existed after the Mongol invasions of Persia was coupled with an official patronage of Sufism by the Mongol elite. Potter believes that official patronage of Sufi orders had begun as early as the Ilkhānid period. He also argues that shrines replaced mosques as centers of religious activity in the period following the collapse of Mongol rule. An increased reverence towards Sufism by both

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the rulers and the populace resulted in a rapid proliferation of shrine complexes across Ilkhānid Iran. This expansion of shrine networks was supported, both economically and administratively by the Ilkhānid court.⁵⁶ Citing the example of the Ilkhan Abū Sa‘īd, Potter explains that it was a custom for rulers to financially support Sufi orders and to also appoint the heads of khāṅqāhs.⁵⁷

Timūr, being born in the Ulus Chaghatāy, was raised in a culture that had a developed tradition of reverence towards Sufi shaykhs. Timūr, in his role as a ruler and empire builder, sought to give favor to and benefit from Sufi orders. While Timūr chose to favor individual shaykhs he had little preference for a particular order as he extended favors to various Sufi groups. Giving the examples of the Hurufi shaykh ʿAlī Hamadānī and the Nimatullāhī shaykh Sayyid Niʿmat Allāh Walī Kirmanī, Manz argues that despite a generally amicable attitude towards Sufis, Timūr took punitive action against any Sufi who emerged as a political threat.⁵⁸ Both Hamadānī and Kirmanī, for example, were exiled as a result of their opposition to Timūr’s rule.

Timūr used his ties to Sufis to increase his own legitimacy to rule. Manz observes that biographical literature about Timūr would attribute his success in battle to the Sufis that would accompany his armies, with the Sufi Sayyid Barakāh being a notable

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⁵⁷. Ibid., 80.
⁵⁸. Manz, Timurid Iran, 243.
example. She also notes that Timūr took counsel from the Shaykhs of Tayabād and the other Jāmī Shaykhs of Herat before starting his military campaign in Khurāsān.

Given his political and military aims, Timūr needed this support from the Sufis. By presenting himself as the true defender of Islam, Timūr justified his aggression against existing Islamic dynasties. By associating himself with reputable religious figures, Timūr sought to lay a stronger claim to Islam than his Muslim rivals possibly could. This association had to be publicly observable for it to add to Timūr’s public appeal. Being a public spectacle, the importance of this interaction for the creation of a popular image for Timūr may be gauged by the fact that accounts of these visits have been recorded in primary literature.

There is, however, some doubt concerning the balance of power between Timūr and the Sufi shaykhs. While it is understood that Sufi shaykhs did depend on official patronage for their economic survival, they did not necessarily need to receive it from a particular state. Shaykhs switched loyalties when doing so was advantageous. Ties to the ruling elite helped protect the economic status of Sufis. The possibility that a ruler would confiscate waqf property always existed and it is this light that McChesney writes that mutawallis or waqf administrators had to prepare themselves for conflicts and build contacts with higher authorities. Political connections acted as a safeguard against the

60. Ibid., 112.
61. Ibid., 114.
confiscation of Sufi-owned property. Patrons were abandoned when they threatened the economic status of Sufis or when a stronger regional power emerged. An example of a switching of patronage may be observed in the incident where the Jāmī Shaykhs of Herat saw their interests dwindle with the Kartid Dynasty and invited the Chaghatāyids to attack and take Herat.\(^{63}\) Therefore, while Sufis were powerless without state support, they had the option of switching their loyalty to another ruler. Conversely, while rulers like Timūr relied on Sufis for political legitimacy, they could choose to punish those Sufis who threatened their political standing. This resulted in an ambiguous balance of power between Sufis. Examples of this ambiguity are reflected in the analysis of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Tayabādī in secondary sources. Manz states that Shaykh Tāyabādī’s support for Timūr is doubtful, but Devin DeWeese argues that the Shaykh made Timūr revere him.\(^{64}\) It is therefore not possible to broadly gauge the balance of power between the Timūrid state and the Sufis, but it is clear that any interaction between them was spurred by economic and political motives.

**Shāhrukh and Islamization**

The reign of Shāhrukh, Timūr’s son, was marked by a greater reliance on the Perso-Islamic tradition for political legitimacy. Shāhrukh’s policies can be regarded as having

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an Islamizing effect on the existing political culture. These policies gave Sufis greater representation at the Timūrid court and thus helped pave the way for the creation of Khwāja Aḥrār’s politically influential network.

Timūr’s administrative system prevented political power from being concentrated in any one of his sons’ hands. Consequently, his death in 1405 led to a succession struggle amongst the various Timūrid princes. While Timūr’s grandson, Pīr Muḥammad ibn Jahāṅgīr was designated as an official successor to Timūr, other princes waged war against each other in an internecine succession conflict that was characteristic of post-Mongol Central Asia. Shāhrukh, one of Timūr’s sons, bided his time as the governor of Khurāsān and supported Pīr Muḥammad.65 He consolidated his hold on Khurāsān before he moved on Samarqand in 1407 to depose Khalil Sultan.

Samarqand had been established as the center of the Timūrid Empire in Timūr’s reign and therefore held symbolic value for the dynasty. Shāhrukh, however, did not use the conquest of Transoxania to symbolize his new role as the Timūrid ruler. By doing so, he would be laying claim to the Turkic Transoxanian centered symbolism of the Timūrid Empire. He chose to retain Herat as his capital and thus initiated a new phase in the cultural development of the empire. Herat lay in Khurāsān which was a known center of Perso-Islamic culture. By being centered around Khurāsān, the Timūrid state grew closer to Perso-Islamic culture. Though the reasons behind Shāhrukh’s decision are not clear, it may be assumed that his choice of Islamic symbolism for political legitimacy may have prompted this shift. Describing his actions after his capture of Samarqand, Manz argues

that Shāhrukh’s actions revealed his desire to be seen as an Islamic ruler.\textsuperscript{66} To achieve this end, Shāhrukh removed weapons from Timūr’s tomb, announced that the Yasa had been abrogated, formally reinstated the Sharīʿah and destroyed taverns.\textsuperscript{67}

Before he became the Sultan of the Timūrid Empire, Shāhrukh had held the governorship of Khurāsān. Khurāsān had been under the influence of Sufis and had a strong Perso-Islamic cultural heritage. By ruling over a city that was a regional center of Islamic culture, Shāhrukh grew closer to the Perso-Islamic cultural sphere. Shāhrukh therefore developed a strong sense of reverence towards Sufis. Potter points out Shāhrukh’s links to the Jāmī Sufis, by mentioning that he was a disciple of Khwāja Shahāb al-Dīn Mukarram, the custodian of the Shrine at Jam.\textsuperscript{68}

Anas Khalidov and Maria Subtelny frame Shāhrukh’s actions as part of his “Sunni revival” policy.\textsuperscript{69} This “Sunni revival” was intended to counter opposition from extremist Shia and reactionary Sufi groups. As part of this revival, Shāhrukh reintroduced Sharīʿah law and officially abrogated Turco-Mongolian laws.\textsuperscript{70} He also used his patronage of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Manz, \textit{Timurid Iran}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Manz includes the weapons in a category “non-Islamic accoutrements.” She does not mention what the other items were but it can be assumed that they were symbols of Turco-Mongolian culture. See Manz, \textit{Timurid Iran}, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Potter, “Sufis and Sultans,” 100.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Khalidov and Subtelny, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning,” 211.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\end{itemize}

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Abdullah Ansārī cult to publicly display his adherence to the Sunna.71 Khwāja Abdullah Ansari was a Hanbalite shaykh of the eleventh century who was also the patron saint of Herat.72 Shāhrukh used this reintroduction of Sunna to not only deal with religious opposition, but to also increase his political legitimacy.73 Manz argues that by casting himself as a Padishāh i Islām, Shāhrukh was following a precedent set by the Ilkhān Ghazan.74 To appeal to a Khurāsānian population that was culturally Perso-Islamic, Shāhrukh needed to draw his symbolic legitimacy from Islam.

Shāhrukh’s Islamization policies had several long-term effects on the Timūrid state. Firstly, these policies gave Islamic symbolism a permanent place in Timūrid politics. Shāhrukh’s successful use of Shari‘ah and Islam to push his political agenda served as a political model for future Timūrid sultans. Sultan Husayn Bayqara attempted to use Islamization to centralize power in his decentralized state.75 While Sultan Husayn’s objectives were purely political, he justified his actions in the name of Islam. The cult of Abdullah Ansari that was resuscitated by Shāhrukh was also used by every Timūrid ruler of Herat to legitimize his rule in Khurāsān.76 Shāhrukh thus took a legitimacy mechanism

72. Ibid.
73. Khalidov and Subtelny quote contemporary sources from Shahrūkh’s reign that extoll his virtues as a “huma-bird guarding the egg of the Sharī‘ah” The reference to both a mythical pre-Islamic Persian bird and to the Sharī‘ah indicate the various sources of charisma that Shahrūkh drew upon. See Khalidov and Subtelny, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning,” 212.
74. Manz, Timurid Iran, 34.

It also shifted influence away from the Jāmīs to the Ansārīs. See Potter, “Sufis and Sultans,” 100.
that had existed before his reign and made it a more prominent part of the political milieu.\textsuperscript{77}

Secondly, the policies proved effective in dealing with reactionary Sufi 
\textit{shaykhs}, like Qāsim al-Anwār or Ni’matullah Walī, who were opposed to Shāhrukh’s rule.\textsuperscript{78} Shāhrukh justified his punitive actions against such rebellious Sufis by equating political opposition with heresy. He thus set a precedent for the later Timūrids to view the defense of orthodox Islam as a kingly duty. This would increase the influence that more orthodox Sufis would have at the Timūrid court.

It must be noted that reactionary Sufis opposed Shāhrukh’s rule by targeting his adherence to Turco-Mongol customary law. Shāhrukh countered this opposition by using orthodox Islam to brand his critics as heretics. Shāhrukh’s Islamization policies were a manifestation of this orthodox stance. In order to enforce his Islamization policies, Shāhrukh had to publicly abrogate Turco-Mongolian law. An enforcement of both the \textit{Yasa} and the \textit{Sharīʿah} in the Timūrid Empire would have put Shāhrukh’s perceived sincerity towards either in doubt. By publicly abrogating the \textit{Yasa}, Shāhrukh ensured that his opposition to the Hurūfī and Nimatullahī Sufis would be taken seriously. By doing so, Shāhrukh set another precedent for subsequent Timūrid rulers. Though an orthodox strain of Islam was represented at court, more “\textit{Qalmāq}” beliefs and customs still existed.

\textsuperscript{77} Shahrukh administered this Islamization policy using his madrasah complex that he constructed in 1410-1411. Designed as a bulwark against growing Ismaili Shiism, it propagated the Hanafi and the Shafii schools. While this madrasah never served as the sole madrasah in Herat, it was very influential at a political level. The office of Shaykh ul Islam was re instituted by Shahrukh as part of his Islamization policy. Consequently every Shaykh ul Islam in the history of Timurid Herat belonged to the al Taftazānī family that was connected with Shahrukh’s madrasah. See Khalidov and Subtelny, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning,” 212-14.

\textsuperscript{78} Khalidov and Subtelny, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning,” 212.
outside the official sphere. This dualistic religious policy worked in tandem with Shāhrukh’s political policies which served to decentralize the Timūrid Empire. While there was an official stance that favored orthodox beliefs, Turco-Mongolian amīrs were free to enforce Turco-Mongolian laws on their own land.

**Soyūrghāl, Waqf and Decentralization**

The shift from Transoxania to Khurāsān was not the only major change that the Timūrid Empire experienced in Shāhrukh’s reign. Shāhrukh’s reign was also marked by the distribution of soyūrghāl land grants to political personalities. The term “soyūrghāl” is of Mongolian origin and literally means “favor.” The exact definition of soyūrghāl varied with time but the term can be broadly defined as a personal grant of land. These land grants diminished the amount of fiscal and administrative control the central government had over the state and thus contributed to the decentralization of Timūrid Central Asia.

Soyūrghāl grants generally granted tax immunity to grantees. This tax immunity was coupled with a promise of non-interference from the central government. Soyūrghāl holders were thus not answerable to the central government for any affairs that took place on their land. Describing the soyūrghāl in detail, Ann Lambton adds that the

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80. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
provincial government was also not allowed to tax soyūrghāl land.83 The peasantry and the nomadic population that lived on soyūrghāl land were treated as part of the grant. They were therefore bound to the land and could not leave service without the soyūrghāl owner’s consent. Additionally, both the administration and tax collection rights for the soyūrghāl lay with the soyūrghāl holder.

Soyūrghāl distribution was not novel to Shāhrukh’s reign but existed at least as far back as the Ilkhānate.84 Describing the “feudalization” of the state, Udo Barkmann argues that the precedent for such land grants may have been set in Chinggis Khan’s reign.85 Barkmann, writes about “a new type of nobleman in the service of the khan,” who “received his feoff exempt from tax and duty to the Khan.”86 Though he does not mention the term, Barkmann effectively describes a precursor to the soyūrghāl.

This custom was prevalent in Timūr’s time, though the grants had to be renewed annually. The existence of this renewal policy highlights the control that Timūr preferred to exercise over these land grants. Timūr could thus use the soyūrghāl to not only command the loyalties of his amīrs but also to keep their powers under check. The only kind of soyūrghāl grant that did not need to be renewed by Timūr’s dīwān was the hūdabari soyūrghāl as this was a permanent grant.


84. Ibid.


86. Barkmann, “Decline of the Mongol Empire,” 274.
Timur’s death was followed by succession battles between the various Timurid princes. According to Turco-Mongol custom each male member of the ruling clan had an equal claim to rule. These claimants to the throne were helped by amirs in their succession struggle. Land grants were used by claimants to the throne to buy support amongst the tribal elite. Timurid princes used the soyurghal as a political tool, but were in no position to retain the degree of control that Timur held over such land grants. Timur held all political power in his own hands and used the soyurghal to limit the powers of his amirs. Political conditions for the princes were however very different. Since Timur’s political model prevented any of the princes from becoming too powerful in his lifetime, they were forced to rely on the amirs for their political power. The princes did not possess the power to use the soyurghal to keep the amirs in check and the soyurghal resultanty became a tool for granting political power to amirs.

Shahrukh is known for having distributed vast tracts of soyurghal land in his reign. Subtelny contends that these soyurghal grants were made not only to Turks but also to representatives of the Tajik population who also included members of the religious elite. Thus the process of making the religious elite a part of a decentralized power structure commenced in Shahrukh’s reign. Subtelny states that this process of

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88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

decentralization continued till Sultan Husayn Bayqara’s accession to the Herati throne.91 The distribution of soyūrghāl land thus increased steadily during the reigns of Shāhrukh’s successors. Abul Qāsim Bābur gave out soyūrghāl as did his cousin Abū Saʿīd.92 Husayn Bayqara, besides granting land to amīrs, Sufis and the ‘ulamā, also handed out soyūrghāl to poets and literati.93

Besides the soyūrghāl, which was generally exempted from taxation by the central government, tax immunity for other kinds of land could also be obtained. According to Gross, soyūrghāl land was only one type of the five types of land that were found in the Timūrid Empire after Shāhrukh.94 There was also khassa or royal land, dīwani or state owned land, milk or privately owned land and awqāf or religious endowments. Milk and awqāf could be exempted from taxation if a personal tax exemption was granted by the state. Muaffī and musallamī were the terms used to describe this personal exemption from paying taxes.95

Another form of tax immunity was the tarkhānī.96 This dated back to Mongol rule and involved the conferment of the title “tarkhān” upon those who were granted tax immunity. Tax immunity was just one of the perquisites associated with the title.

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93. Ibid., 482.
96. Ibid.
Tarkhāns were also exempted from a maximum of nine counts of illegal behavior.\(^97\)

Though tarkhānī registered an overall decline during the reigns of Timūr’s successors, the number of tarkhāns who were Sufis or ‘ulamā increased.\(^98\)

The trend of giving out land grants and tax immunities continued throughout the fifteenth century. Subtelny gives the example of Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī as a person who benefitted from these changes.\(^99\) Being a prominent member of the Naqshbandī Sufis of Herat, he was a tarkhān, held soyūrghāl and had muafīs for immunity against the ‘ushr and kharāj taxes. These economic favors were not without lasting consequence for the Timūrid state. Subtelny points out that the policy of granting soyūrghāl and tax immunity had a two-fold impact on the Empire.\(^100\) Firstly, the empire suffered a loss of revenue as both taxation rights and tax immunities were handed out. This ensured that fiscal revenues would accrue to private individuals rather than to the state. Secondly, the distribution of soyūrghāl decreased the control that the central government had over the empire and created a group of very powerful local leaders. The autonomy enjoyed by soyūrghāl holders allowed them to behave like local rulers without any interference by the state. With their powers left unchecked, soyūrghāl holders grew rich on tax revenues from their land.\(^101\) Lambton contends that the burden of taxation fell on the peasantry.\(^102\)


\(^98\) Ibid.

\(^99\) Ibid., 484.

\(^100\) Ibid., 483.

\(^101\) Ibid., 486.

\(^102\) Lambton, Landlord and Peasant, 103.
Though the soyūrghāl itself was exempt from state taxation, the peasants on that land were taxed by the owner.\textsuperscript{103} Soyūrghāl holders, taking advantage of their autonomy, thus taxed the peasantry heavily.\textsuperscript{104} These taxes also included pre-Islamic and Turco Mongol taxes such as bāgh-shumār and the tamgha.\textsuperscript{105} This oppressive system of taxation was aided by the ethnic divide that existed between the peasantry and soyūrghāl holders as the majority of soyūrghāl holders were Turkic and the peasantry was mostly Tajik.

The creation of a decentralized political environment was catalyzed by other political factors. Manz points to the administrative crisis brought about by the reliance of Shāhrukh on his subordinates. Following Turco-Mongolian custom, administrative offices in the Timūrid state were staffed by means of hereditary succession. During Shāhrukh’s reign, a large portion of the central dīwān passed away owing to old age and these administrators were succeeded by their sons. A sustained period of peace prevented the new cadre of amīrs from gaining any experience in either warfare or administrative practices.\textsuperscript{106} The hold of the central dīwān over provinces thus weakened. Consequently, the weakened hold of the central government over its provinces and the increased powers of local amīrs created a decentralized political environment.

\textsuperscript{103} Lambton, \textit{Landlord and Peasant}, 103.

\textsuperscript{104} Subtelny, “Socioeconomic Bases,” 486.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Manz, \textit{Timurid Iran}, 48.
Sufis and Decentralization

Using the example of Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, Subtelny argues that like amīrs, Sufis too benefited from the distribution of soyūrghāl land and tax immunities. Jāmī was a Naqshbandī Sufi and had several different categories of land in his portfolio. It is likely that Jāmī’s case was not an exception but rather indicative of prevalent trend. The Timūrid state distributed vast tracts of land to politically influential personalities and Sufis also benefitted from this policy. As part of Timūrid policy, Sufis received gifts of waqf property from the state.

The waqf had several advantages over the soyūrghāl. Firstly, the creation of awqāf was sanctioned by religious law. The institution of the waqf was specifically legal in the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law. Following Shāhrukh’s Islamization policy, the Ḥanafī and Shāfī`ī schools were officially supported by the Timūrid state. Secondly, unlike soyūrghāl, awqāf included both moveable and immovable property. This made the waqf more attractive than the soyūrghāl, which only applied to immovable land grants. A third advantage that the waqf had over the soyūrghāl was that the founder of the waqf was free to lay down whatever terms and conditions he desired in the waqf deed.

Subsequent administrators of awqāf also held these discretionary powers at their command. In this regard, Robert McChesney points out that the mutawalli or the

108. Ibid., 482.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
guardian of the waqf could change the clauses of the original waqf deed in the name of ensuring the “general good” of society. “General good” was a very abstract concept and could be used to justify any action carried out by the mutawalli. Mutawallis were either related to or were descended from the original founder of the waqf and this ensured that control of the waqf would remain with the family that founded it.

Like soyūrghāl land, awqāf too were distributed, though unlike the former these were granted almost exclusively to religious personalities. Viewing the religious elite as political stakeholders, Subtelny argues that the waqf, unlike the soyūrghāl, helped stabilize a volatile political environment. By default, waqf distribution did not harm the state’s fiscal strength as the waqf was a taxable asset. However, a waqf retained its importance for the state even if it was exempt from taxation. By pointing out that the creation of awqāf gave religious classes a stake in an existing political system, Subtelny argues that this policy ensured that the religious elite would value the stability of the state. Political instability could lead to regime change and a possible confiscation of waqf land by the new ruler. Therefore, waqf distribution ensured continued support for a ruler by the religious elite. Besides contributing to economic and political stability, awqāf were instruments of Timūrid cultural policy. Awqāf supported mosques, khānqāhs and other centers of religious scholasticism. Subtelny argues that the proliferation of the awqāf, especially under Husayn Bayqara’s rule contributed to his “Timūrid Renaissance”

114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
as awqāf served as cultural centers.\textsuperscript{116} The waqf thus possessed clear economic, political and cultural functions and the granting of awqāf was an important part of state policy.

Though tax immunities could be obtained from the provincial or the central governments for waqf land, it was not uncommon for waqf land to be taxed. Lambton argues that peasants on waqf land, like their counterparts on soyūrghāl land were also taxed quite heavily.\textsuperscript{117} However, unlike soyūrghāl, waqf property was taxed by the state. Awqāf were an ideal source of tax revenue for the state as Subtelny states that these awqāf generated revenue well beyond the levels that were needed to maintain the property.\textsuperscript{118}

The waqf thus served as an economic base for the expansion of Sufi orders. Giving the example of a waqf of Khwāja Aḩrār in Kabul, Stephen Dale and Alam Payind frame the existence of this property as a “base” to “train their own cadre of students and not so incidentally, make patronage appointments for family members and Naqshbandī pīrs and disciples.”\textsuperscript{119} The waqf thus formed the economic backbone of a Sufi ṭarīqa and the influence of the ṭarīqa can be gauged by mapping out the presence of awqāf in a given region.


\textsuperscript{117} Lambton, \textit{Landlord and Peasant in Persia}, 103-104.

\textsuperscript{118} Subtelny, “Socioeconomic Bases,” 482.


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The revenue generated by *awqāf* for their administrators had definite political implications. Subtelny contends that these revenues were then diverted to a “slush fund” that was used to influence politics.\(^{120}\) The existence of a “slush fund” is evidence of the increased economic and political powers of the religious elite in the wake of the Timūrid land distribution policy. The *waqf* was thus used by the Sufis and ‘*ulamā* to convert economic gain into political influence.

Given the advantages that *awqāf* had over *soyūrghāl*, it is not surprising that economic actors chose to exploit this advantage to their favor. In many cases *awqāf* were used to safeguard *soyūrghāl* land, which Lambton alleges was not always a permanent grant.\(^{121}\) As is observable in the case of Khwāja Aḥrār, other types of property were also converted to *waqf*.\(^{122}\) It was the “inalienable nature” of the *waqf* that protected it against confiscation by the ruler.\(^{123}\) A correlation can therefore be observed between the increased conversion of other types of land to a *waqf* status and an increase in political instability when property was prone to state confiscation.\(^{124}\)

The fifteenth century saw the large-scale distribution of *waqf* amongst Sufis and the religious elite. This was part of greater cultural change where the Turco-Mongolian elite gave Tajiks a greater political and economic role. This increased economic and political

\(^{120}\) Subtelny, “Socioeconomic Bases,” 482.

\(^{121}\) Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, 102.

\(^{122}\) Subtelny, “Socioeconomic Bases,” 483.

\(^{123}\) Ibid.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.
power increased the influence of Sufi orders but also incorporated them into the Timūrid political system.

The Khwājagān and the Naqshbandīs

Though the Aḥrārī Naqshbandīyya ʿtarīqa centralized itself in reaction to a decentralization of Timūrid political culture, it was not the first reactionary Sufi group. It followed an established precedent set by trade-based Sufi communities in the ninth century. The history of the Naqshbandīyya precedes Khwāja Aḥrār’s life and consists of several evolutionary phases. Khwāja Aḥrār’s centralization of the order was but one of these phases.

The history of the Naqshbandīyya can be traced to a group known as the Khwājagān. Paul argues that though the Naqshbandīs can be traced back to the Khwājagān, the Khwājagān were not a formally organized order like the Naqshbandīs. He sees the Khwājagān as more of “a movement” than a brotherhood. A brotherhood, in Paul’s framework is a corporate body with a defined hierarchy and membership structure. Later Naqshbandī literature, however, portrays the Khwājagān as organized group. This may be a Naqshbandī attempt to derive legitimacy from the Khwājagān. A sīlsila, or chain of spiritual descent, is important for a ʿtarīqa as it links an order with and older established Sufi tradition. Using the term “invented tradition,” Weismann argues that the

125. Paul, Doctrine and Organization, 2.
126. Ibid.
Naqshbandīs relied on invented silsilas to claim legitimacy and that they needed to present themselves as the successors to the Khwājagān. Historically, the Naqshbandīs broke away from Khwājagānī tradition when they gave themselves a corporate structure. This may have been viewed as an act of rebelliousness by the general public. By claiming that they followed an organizational pattern established by the Khwājagān, the Naqshbandīs may have sought to counter popular opposition to their movement.

Despite these claims by the later Naqshbandīs, the Khwājagān were a set of different Sufi orders with a diverse set of beliefs and rituals. It was the lack of an organizational structure that set them apart from more the other Sufi orders of that age. The first step towards the formation of the Naqshbandiyya starts with Khwāja Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, who led one of the Khwājagān groups. The adoption of the practice of silent dhikr by Naqshband in opposition to the vocal dhikr practiced by his teacher, Amīr Kulāl, marks the creation of the Naqshbandiyya. Paul contends that the practice of silent dhikr sets the Naqshbandīs apart from other Sufi groups. Practice, besides belief and organization is seen by Paul as a defining feature of the various orders. DeWeese corroborates this argument by also viewing the adoption of silent dhikr as the basis for the Naqshbandī identity.

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128. Ibid., 14.
129. Ibid.
The Naqshbandī order spread to Khurāsān from Transoxania under Timūr’s rule where it grew popular among Tajik artisans. By gaining mass appeal amongst Tajiks, the order took on an urban identity and was particularly strong in the cities of Balkh and Herat. Commenting on the urban Perso-Islamic identity of the order, Hamid Algar describes the Khwājagān as a “crystallization” of Khurāsānian Sufism that was influenced deeply by the Malāmatiyya tradition. The Malāmatiyya tradition referred to an earlier mystic movement that had originated in ninth century Nishapur. The Malāmatiyya tradition was characterized by its involvement in social and commercial life and its followers were usually members of craft guilds.

The second major phase in Naqshbandī history commences with Khwāja ʻUbayd Allāh Aḥrār. Jürgen Paul differentiates between the leaderships of Khwāja Naqshband and Khwāja Aḥrār by pointing out that while the era under Khwāja Naqshband was defining for the beliefs and practices of the Naqshbandī order, the period under Khwāja Aḥrār was defining for its organization. Khwāja Aḥrār broke away with tradition to give the Naqshbandiyya an organized structure. Paul traces the creation of an organized Sufi ṭarīqa to the creation of a distinct identity based on ritual belief and practice and he therefore credits Khwāja Naqshband’s insistence on silent dhikr as the reason for Khwāja Aḥrār to pursue this direction.


134. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

Aḥrār’s success.\(^{137}\) Khwāja Aḥrār was therefore able to create a centralized organizational structure for the Naqshbandīyya only because a distinct identity for the group had already existed. This identity stemmed from adherence to silent dhikr. While Khwāja Naqshband created a group identity out of ritual practice, Khwāja Aḥrār transformed that group identity into a formal corporate structure.

By tracing the history of the order, secondary literature presents the Khwājagān/Naqshbandīyya as a reactionary movement. Classifying the Khwājagān as a “reformist current,” DeWeese depicts a pattern of Khwājagānī opposition against popular Sufī practices.\(^{138}\) This explains why it had all the elements of a movement before it was successively formalized under Khwāja Naqshband and Khwāja Aḥrār. DeWeese corroborates Paul’s view that organization in Sufi orders is based on difference in practice and belief and he traces a pattern of opposition that the Khwājagān had against practices like raqs, sama or vocal dhikr.\(^{139}\) The rise of the Naqshbandīyya coincides with Timūr’s reign and DeWeese implies that this rise was a reaction against a form of belief and practice that represented the Turco-Mongolian sphere.\(^{140}\) Weismann also views the evolution of the Khwājagān as a series of reactions to external socio-political shocks.\(^{141}\)

\(^{137}\) Paul, *Doctrine and Organization*, 77.


\(^{139}\) Ibid, 495-96.

\(^{140}\) DeWeese,“Khojagani Origins," 518.

\(^{141}\) Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 2.
He argues that Khwāja Ghijduvānī, the founder of the Khwājagān, initiated his movement in response to the effects the Mongol invasions had on the sedentary population of the Bukharan oasis.\textsuperscript{142} Naqshband revived the ideals of the Khwājagān in the post Mongol period and Aḥrār worked to adapt to the socio-political changes that followed the disintegration of the Timūrid Empire.\textsuperscript{143}

The Naqshbandīyya can therefore be viewed as traditionalist and reactionary. By taking on an urban Perso-Islamic character it was following an established tradition laid down by the earlier Malāmatiyya movement. At the same time, the Naqshbandī order represented a reaction to the changing political and cultural environment. Following the Mongol invasions, Central Asian state and society had been in a state of flux and the Naqshbandī order sought to represent Perso-Islamic culture in a Turco-Mongolian political environment.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{142} Weismann, \textit{The Naqshbandiyya}, 2.\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.}
Chapter 3

Khwāja Ahrār and his Network

In 1451 C.E., Khwāja Ahrār of Tashkent, chose to bless the Timūrid prince Abū Saʿīd. Abū Saʿīd held the Khwāja’s blessing responsible for his subsequent capture of Samarqand and asked the Khwāja to move to Samarqand with him. Jo-Ann Gross argues that the shift to Samarqand was very important for Khwāja Ahrār and the Ahrārī tariqa. By being physically present in Samarqand, the Khwāja was able to operate in three domains: his presence at the courts of rulers gave him access to the political domain, the acquisition of awqāf land around Samarqand contributed to his economic power and the establishment of a khānqāh, or Sufi lodge, gave him greater power to propagate his order in Central Asia.144 By moving to Samarqand, Khwāja Ahrār was able to use his contacts at the court of Abū Saʿīd to build an economic and political base to expand his network.

Khwāja Ahrār’s leadership was thus pivotal for the Naqshbandīyya. While primary biographical literature chooses to extoll the virtues and spiritual greatness of the Khwāja, Jürgen Paul argues that he was the first “Naqshbandī shaykh in Central Asia to establish

144. Gross and Urumbaev, Letters of Khwāja ʿUbayd Allāh Ahrār, 16.
a center where his disciples lived during their years of spiritual training.”

Paul points out that the creation of a khānqāh was a brave digression from the established norms of the Khwājahgan. The establishment of a khānqāh is pivotal for both the Aḥrārīs and the Khwājahgan in general as it marks a symbolic departure from the traditionally loosely structured and decentralized character of the Khwājahgan. The khānqāh thus symbolized the birth of an organized network. This is especially important when DeWeese’s view on the creation of the Khwājahgan is taken into account. DeWeese, by analyzing the criticism of institutionalized Sufism by the early Khwājahgan, stresses that the Khwājahgan were created in opposition to centralized khānqāh based orders. Therefore, by constructing a khānqāh, Khwāja Aḥrār redefined the identity of the Naqshbandī order by going against established Khwājahgānī tradition.

The justification for Khwāja Aḥrār’s initiative lay in Naqshbandī principles. One of the eight principles of the Khwājahgan tradition attributed to Khwāja Ghiyāthu’d-Dīnī was called Khalvat Dar Anjuman or “Seclusion in Society.” Khalvat Dar Anjuman attacked the notion that a Sufi must completely withdraw from society in his spiritual quest. While Sufis did not consider the material world as being equal to the spiritual, this principle justified the use of the economic, social and political world for the greater spiritual goals.

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146. Paul alleges that “it is probably out of respect for `Abdulkhaliq-i Ghiyāthu’d-Dīnī, the reported founder of the Khwajagan group, that the complex established by Khwaja Ahrar was not called a khanqah, although in fact it functioned very much in the same way.” See Paul, “Ḥimāyat System,” 542.


148. This later numbered eleven with the addition of three more by Khwāja Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband.
of a Sufi. It was in the light of this principle that political activism and economic gain did not carry any negative connotations for the Naqshbandīs. Jo-Ann Gross therefore describes Naqshbandī commercial and political activities as “basic needs” for spiritual gain and “not as distractions.”

Khwāja Aḥrār’s khānqāh, the Muḥawwata-yi Mullāyān, served as the “capital” of his spiritual empire. The location of the khānqāh in Samarqand does not appear to be a mere coincidence. By being located in Samarqand, the khānqāh not only kept the Khwāja in close proximity to his agricultural lands in Tashkent but also to the Timūrid court of Abū Saʿīd and his sons in Samarqand. Jürgen Paul notes that Khwāja Aḥrār aimed to turn the order into “an economically independent and powerful entity, politically engaged and influential, organizationally solid, and relatively centralized.” It was through this khānqāh that Khwāja Aḥrār attracted disciples into the network. Particular emphasis was placed on the pīr-murīd relationship at khānqāh through the practice of rabita and suhabat, which created a personal bond between the Khwāja and his disciples. It must be noted that not every member of Khwāja Aḥrār’s network was a Sufi. In this regard, Manz states that people would visit the shaykh for advice and that this was rooted in the esteemed place of a shaykh in Islamic society.

151. Ibid.
Using his base in Samarqand, Khwāja Aḥrār created an economic network that was based on the institution of the waqf. As previously mentioned, awqāf held several advantages over other forms of land holdings. Jo-Ann Gross correlates the increase in waqf holdings with Aḥrār’s shift to Samarqand and points out that “twelve known waqf documents were drafted during Khwāja Aḥrār’s lifetime.”\textsuperscript{153} She also notes that these plots of land were either purchased by the Khwāja or were donated to him.\textsuperscript{154} The fact that land was both sold and donated to him bears testament to the Khwāja’s wealth and widespread appeal. Gross writes that “individuals from all social strata donated endowments, gifts, and properties to Sufi shaykhs.”\textsuperscript{155} Giving evidence that the Khwāja purchased twelve shops in Samarqand, Gross argues that many of his property acquisitions were of a commercial nature.\textsuperscript{156} The Khwāja was thus able to increase his property holdings after his shift to Samarqand. In this regard, Gross states that financial documents attest to the Khwāja owning over 500 pieces of property.\textsuperscript{157}

Gross argues that the development of this economic base effectively created an administrative network for the Aḥrārī ṭarīqa.\textsuperscript{158} Though Khwāja Aḥrār was the waqf administrator, he maintained ties to people who lived and worked on those properties. The meaning of Khalvat Dar Anjuman can perhaps be realized in this context. Though the peasants, craftsmen and traders who worked for him were not necessarily part of the

\textsuperscript{153} Gross and Urunbaev, \textit{Letters of Khwāja ʻUbayd Allāh Ahrār}, 18.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{155} Gross, “Economic Status,” 84-85.
\textsuperscript{156} Gross and Urunbaev, \textit{Letters of Khwāja ʻUbayd Allāh Ahrār}, 20.
\textsuperscript{157} Gross, “Economic Status,” 94.
\textsuperscript{158} Gross and Urunbaev, \textit{Letters of Khwāja ʻUbayd Allāh Ahrār}, 20.
\textit{tarīqa}, they held him in respect and were vital for the economic prosperity of the order. Conversely, they depended on the \textit{tarīqa} for their livelihood and were, therefore, an extended part of the Aḥrārī network. Though \textit{awqāf} were vital for the growth of Sufi orders as they brought non Sufis closer to the \textit{tarīqa}, they were also symbols of piety and generosity. This was especially true in the case of Sufi-run public or \textit{khayrī awqāf} where the \textit{tarīqa} was seen in a charitable role.\footnote{159} Politically \textit{mutawallis} had a lot of power and this may have stemmed from this favorable public opinion of \textit{awqāf}.

The decentralized Timūrid policy towards \textit{awqāf}, unlike the Ottoman or the Mughal empires, made it easier for the \textit{waqf} to be used to increase political power.\footnote{160} Khwāja Aḥrār increased his political power using his \textit{waqf} network. Though he was a commercially successful landowner before his rise to prominence at Abū Saʻīd’s court, he was not from the favored Turco-Mongol class. The \textit{waqf} allowed him to circumvent the barriers that were a consequence of his Tajik ethnicity and augment his power and influence.

Though Timūrid policy did not interfere with the administrative affairs of \textit{awqāf}, \textit{waqf} deeds had to be approved by the state. Khwāja Aḥrār’s \textit{waqf} based economic system was therefore dependent on official support from the Timūrid court. The Khwāja garnered this support through ties to the Timūrid court at Samarqand. Sultan Abū Saʻīd held the Khwāja’s blessings responsible for his triumph over his enemies and held the Khwāja in great regard. After his move to Samarqand, the Khwāja was very politically

\footnote{159. McChesney, \textit{The Waqf in Central Asia}, 37.}

\footnote{160. Ibid., 46-47.}
active at Abū Saʿīd’s court. The Khwāja was thus revered not only by Sultan Abū Saʿīd but also by his sons, the Sultans Aḥmad and Maḥmūd.

Consolidation and Centralization

Khwāja Aḥrār was able to consolidate Khurāsān into the network that he administered from Samarqand. Several different factors made this possible. Firstly, the economic network was extended to Khurāsān as excess revenue from Transoxanian awqāf was used to purchase property there. Secondly, the existence of Naqshbandī groups in Herat allowed Khwāja Aḥrār to assimilate the existing Herati network into his larger Central Asian network. Thirdly, the Herati Naqshbandīs were influential at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat. The Khwāja was able to use these local contacts to lobby the Sultan to favor the commercial interests of the ṭarīqa.

Though Khwāja Aḥrār was based in Transoxania, he established formal connections with Khurāsān. Being a Naqshbandī Sufi, the Khwāja was aided by the presence of Khwājagān groups in Herat. Khwāja Aḥrār had known about the Herati Khwājagān as he had studied under Yāqūb Charkhī in Herat. The Khwāja was twenty four at that time and he stayed in Herat for five years “establishing fellowship with the Sufi shaykhs.”

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162. Safī, Rashahāt ʿAin al-Ḥayāt, 261.

163. Ibid., 254.
From its base in Transoxania, Khwāja Ahrār’s network eventually extended into Khurāsān. This included his economic network as the Khwāja owned property in Khurāsān and letters that he wrote to the Herati court are used by Gross to indicate that he had property interests in the region. Gross also hypothesizes that these property purchases in Herat were a method of reinvesting revenues acquired through other assets of the ṭarīqa. The Khwāja thus used his economic network in Transoxania to purchase more property in Herat.

Besides the purchase of land, Khwāja Ahrār was interested in conducting trade with Khurāsān. The Rashāhāt ‘Ain al-Ḥayāt mentions that Khwāja Ahrār was part of a trading enterprise when he was still based in Tashkent. Letters in the Majmū‘a-yi Murāsalāt mention Khwāja Ahrār’s involvement in the trade between Herat and Samarqand. One such letter states that “the holy Khwāja wrote a letter and sent it along with one of his followers, Mawlāna ‘Abd al-Karīm several loads of paper, sesame, rice, cotton and other goods.” Another letter mentions that the Khwāja wished to sell “some sheep and horses” on “that side of the river.”

Though the Khwāja was not always physically present in Herat, he was represented at the Herati court by members of his network. Letters sent by Khwāja Ahrār indicate


168. Ibid., 175.
three major personalities who worked with him to ease contacts between Khurāsān and Transoxania. The majority of these letters were addressed to Alī Shīr Navāī, who was a member of the Herati Naqshbandīyya. However, the most important contact for Khwāja Aḥrār at the Herati court was Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī. According to the Rashahāt ‘Ain al-Hayāt, Jāmī met the Khwāja four times in his lifetime. Two were of these meetings were in Samarqand, one in Herat and one in Merv.169 The spiritual chains or silsilas listed by Shaikh Hisham Kabbani in his book explain how Jāmī was part of the greater Khwājagān-Naqshbandī network.170 Jāmī was a disciple of Khwāja Sa’ad ad-Dīn Kāshgharī who in turn was a disciple of Mawlana Nizam ad-Dīn who in turn was a disciple of Khwāja Alā’ ad-Dīn Attār.171 One of Khwāja Attār’s disciples was Khwāja Yaqūb Charkhī, who was one of Khwāja Aḥrār’s shaykhs. Gross and Urunbaev point out that Khwāja Aḥrār studied under Khwāja Charkhī in Hisar.172 Beside this mention of early links between Khwāja Aḥrār and the Herati Naqshbandīs, the Rashahāt states that “in the early stage of his spiritual development, Mawlāna Sa’ad ad- Dīn Kāshgharī spent night and day in the company of the venerable Khwāja Ubaydullah.”173 Kāshgharī was also responsible for initiating Ali Shir Navāī, a Turk, into the order and was thus


Interestingly, Khwāja Aḥrār had met Jāmī when he was in Herat to appeal against the tamgha, a tax on trade. See Gross and Urunbaev, Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār, 21.


171. “Jāmī” was only a pen name and did not necessarily make him a member of the Jāmī order of shaykhs.

See Figure 3.


responsible for extending the influence of the Khwājagan into the Herati court.\textsuperscript{174}

Therefore, by using Naväi and Jāmī as his representatives at the Herati court, Khwāja Ahrār was taking advantage of the existing Herati Naqshbandī network.

Figure 3. The Naqshbandīs in Transoxania and Khurāsān.

In some cases Sultan Husayn Bayqara was addressed directly by Khwāja Ahrār. The Khwāja used his position as a respected Sufi to urge the Sultan to bestow favor in the name of Islam. The Khwāja, in his letters, appears as a religious adviser to the Sultan and reminds Bayqara of his duty to Islam. Though the Khwāja was represented at the Herati court by both Naväi and Jāmī, the realization of his economic interests in Herat were

\textsuperscript{174} Weismann, \textit{The Naqshbandiyu}, 33.
ultimately contingent on Bayqara’s will. Gross explains that despite his esteemed status, the Khwāja had to rely on the Herati sultan to convert non-\textit{waqf} land to \textit{waqf}.\(^{175}\)

Though Khwāja Aḥrār did send out \textit{khalifas} to different parts of the world, including Anatolia and Tabriz, there is no mention of one being dispatched to Herat.\(^{176}\) This may possibly be because he already had links with Jāmī, among others, and did not feel the need to delegate his authority in that region to a \textit{khalīfa} when he could have had direct correspondence with Jāmī, Navāī or Husayn Bayqara himself. Jāmī’s presence in Herat and his ties to Khwāja Aḥrār allowed for the growth of the inner-core of the Aḥrārī network to expand beyond Transoxania. Unlike other regions of the world, like Turkestan or Anatolia, where control of local networks was delegated to \textit{khalifas}, Herat never received a \textit{khalīfa}. It is known, from accounts of Khwāja Aḥrār’s life, that the Khwāja had spent a considerable part of his youth training as a Sufi in the tradition of the Herati Khwājagān. He had an affinity with the city well before his rise to political greatness at the court of Sultan Abū Saʿīd. The Herati Khwājagān were headed by Khwāja Kāshgharī and out of these Herati Khwājagān, the poet-mystic, Jāmī was the likely candidate for succession to the leadership of the Herati order.\(^{177}\) Jāmī, however, declined the prospect

\(^{175}\) Gross, “Naqshbandi appeals,” 127.

\(^{176}\) Algar mentions that one source claims that thirty-three such \textit{khalifas} were sent out. See Hamid Algar, “The Naqshbandī Order: A Preliminary Survey of Its History and Significance,” \textit{Studia Islamica} 44 (1976): 138-39.

\(^{177}\) Writing about Jāmī, Mirza Haidar Dughlat states that “He was far the greatest and most excellent and learned of all the saints and spiritual guides of the time of Mirza Sultan Husayn.” See Dughlát, Muhammad Haidar. \textit{A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia; Being the Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar, Dughlát; an English version}, trans. Ney Elias (London: Curzon Press, 1972), 194.
of leadership. The Herati order was thus passed onto Khwāja Aḥrār and came under his direct control.178

Alī Shīr Navāï stands out as a particularly important agent in the greater Aḥrārī exchange mechanism. Not only was Alī Shīr Navāï especially close to the Herati court but Subtelny argues that he was instrumental in bringing about the cultural renaissance that was to be found in Bayqara ’s reign.179 Though Navāï’s affinity to Aḥrār though the Naqshbandī ṭarīqa is important, so too are the ties that bound Navāï to the Herati court. Navāï belonged to an Uyghur bakhshī family.180 The bakhshīs were bureaucrats in the Mongol imperial administration and this trend continued well into the later Timūrid period.181 Alī Shīr Navāï’s prominence is indicative of a third socio-political change taking place in Central Asia after the creation of a hybrid Turco-Mongol Ulus Chaghatāy and the growing power of Tajik notables. This was the rise of non-Timūrid and non-Chaghatāyid Turks to positions of power. This may have stemmed from a need of the Timūrids to be reliant on classes like the bakhshīs who formed a specialized class suited for the bureaucratic needs of the empire. Besides being a part of the bureaucracy, the family of Alī Shīr Navāï was bound to the Timūrid house by a foster-brotherhood called kukaltashi.182 Kukaltashi was a way of elevating the social status of non-Timūrid Turks. The title was hereditary and the descendants of a kukaltash were respected in Timūrid


180. Ibid., 799.

181. Ibid.

182. Ibid., 800.
society. In Husayn Bayqara’s court, Navā’ī had a position that put him closer to the Sultan than any of the sultan’s own amīrs. Timūrid documents portray Navā’ī as a kukaltash to Bayqara and Babur considered this relationship akin to friendship.\textsuperscript{183} Navā’ī’s appointment as amīr in 1472 may have been a result of these ties.\textsuperscript{184} This appointment is representative of political changes in the Timūrid Empire as it acquired a more Perso-Islamic character. Husayn Bayqara’s court clearly operated within a transitional phase in Central Asian history and Navā’ī’s official position gave the Aḥrārī network the representation it needed at the Herati court. Navā’ī was also aided by the fact that he led the influential Turkic faction at Husayn Bayqara’s court. The extent of Navā’ī’s influence can be gauged by his role in the death of the Tajik vizier, Majd al-Dīn, who threatened the autonomous positions of Turkic amīrs with his centralizing reforms.\textsuperscript{185}

Khwāja Aḥrār’s links to Herati court were thus extremely dependent on the role of Navā’ī. Navā’ī’s own influence was a result of the changes that had been taking place in the Central Asian political climate. Khwāja Aḥrār’s power in Transoxania and Khurāsān was also dependent on all the changes that had been in motion since the creation of the Ulus Chaghatāy. This political power stemmed from the influence that Sufis had gained following Timūr’s and Shāhrukh’s reigns, and also from the improved status of non-noble Turks like Navā’ī. At the same time, the powers of Turkic amīrs had grown unchecked and this threatened Khwāja Aḥrār’s economic interests. Khwāja Aḥrār realized that issues like the excessive taxation of agrarian and commercial activity stemmed from the decentralized nature of the Later Timūrid states.

\textsuperscript{183} Subtelny, “Ali Shir Navai,” 801-802

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 802.

\textsuperscript{185} Subtelny., “Centralizing Reform,” 149.
Khwāja Aḥrār’s response to the decentralization of the state was to centralize his order. In doing so, Khwāja Aḥrār followed the reactionary precedent set by the Malāmatiyya and the Khwājagān. By centralizing the Naqshbandī ṭarīqa, he sought to recreate the trans-regional exchange that had existed in the Timūrid Empire. This exchange had existed due to Timūr’s centralized system of rule over his undivided empire. The Timūrid Empire, however, fragmented after Timūr’s death in 1405. Briefly reunited under Shāhrūkh, it fragmented again into the Transoxanian and Khurāsānian kingdoms following Ulugh Beg’s death in 1449. The Transoxanian kingdom faced further fragmentation as Abū Saʿīd’s sons divided it amongst themselves after his death.186

The integration of Herat into the greater Aḥrārī network can be seen as a part of the centralization and consolidation that Khwāja Aḥrār desired for the order. Gross contends that this consolidation was vital for exchange between Transoxania and Khurāsān.187 She describes Herat and Samarqand as a “conduit of goods” that functioned smoothly due to the “organization of the Samargand Naqshbandī community, the approval of Timūrid rulers, efficacy of trade routes and the impetus of Aḥrār.”188 Trans-regional exchange thus relied on the willingness and ability of Khwāja Aḥrār to mediate at the court level and to see that trade between Khurāsān and Transoxania was not interrupted.

188. Ibid.
The Ḥimayat Faction

The development of Khwāja Ahrār’s network and the resultant exchange did not represent the interests of Khwāja Ahrār or his murids alone. Paul’s work allows Khwāja Ahrār and the organization of his order to be viewed in a new light. He describes Khwāja Ahrār’s group as a ṭāʾīfa or a faction. Paul defines the ṭāʾīfa as a group that is formed around the defense of common interests and not around reverence of or loyalty to an individual.189 It is thus implied that Khwāja Ahrār and his followers, both Sufi and non-Sufi, faced a common threat. Said Arjomand argues that the Sufi brotherhood’s corporate structure made it an ideal platform for popular political representation in a politically decentralized Muslim society.190 By stating that Sufi orders possessed an acquired loyalty derived from an initiation process and a structured hierarchy, Paul contends that a ṭarīqa was capable of organizing itself against threats.191 Paul, therefore, frames the Ahrārī order as a ṭāʾīfa and argues that Khwāja Ahrār bound political and economic activities around the “nucleus” of his ṭarīqa or order.192 Explaining the difference between the inner and outer circles of Khwāja Ahrār’s network, Paul defines the inner circle as the ṭarīqa and the outer circle as the ṭāʾīfa.193 The ṭāʾīfa was a product of the economic and political links with non-Sufis that the ṭarīqa possessed, and consisted of peasants, traders and craftsmen who worked for the ṭarīqa.194 As previously mentioned, such economic

190. Arjomand, The Shadow of God, 82.
192. Ibid., 534.
193. Ibid.
194. Ibid.
ties were the result of the ṭarīqa hiring non-Sufis to work on waqf properties. Also included in the ṭāʾifa were ordinary people who inhabited Tashkent, which was the city where Khwāja Aḥrār was born. Paul states that this protection was extended to everyone who lived in Transoxania and wished to seek it.

Khwāja Aḥrār was a traditionalist and a reactionary in the sense that he used the tradition of upholding the Sharīʿah to oppose what were perceived injustices by the Turco-Mongol amīrs. Soyūrghāl holders were known to tax their lands heavily. In Herat, taxes on soyūrghāl were especially high as tax revenues supported the Timūrid renaissance. Weismann writes that Khwāja Aḥrār’s political policy had two objectives. The first was the abolition of Turco-Mongol taxes while the other was the prevention of infighting amongst Timūrid princes. Excessive taxation and war harmed the interests of craftsmen, traders and peasants alike. Khwāja Aḥrār was working to defend his own business and agricultural properties from these amīrs.

While Khwāja Aḥrār’s economic portfolio was threatened by amīrs, it was legitimized by his opposition to their excesses. The protection of the poor from the excesses of the amīrs added a spirit of selflessness to Khwāja Aḥrār’s commercial

196. Ibid.
197. Ibid.
200. Ibid., 35.
enterprise. Khwāja Ahrār faced criticism from other members of the religious elite over his “worldly” engagements. Biographies of the Khwāja are filled with accounts of him facing unjust criticism from envious rivals. These are normally stories of karāmāt or miraculous powers where the Khwāja successfully eliminates any threats to his being by the way of these powers.

The Khwāja had several advantages in his fight against threats to the economic well-being of the region. Firstly, he had an established network in Transoxania and the backing of the Transoxanian Timūrid court. This gave him a political and economic advantage that protected him from his rivals and enemies. One karāmat story, mentioned by Gross gives the example of Burhān al-Dīn, the Shaykh-ul-Islam of Samarqand who opposed Khwāja Ahrār’s commercial success. Burhān al-Dīn, according to the account mentioned, went insane and died an ignoble death. Though the Khwāja’s triumph over his rivals was attributed to his miraculous powers and not to his political connections, it is important to note that Burhān al-Dīn waited till Sultan Abū Sa‘īd’s death to oppose the Khwāja. The Khwāja was under Sultan Abū Sa‘īd’s protection and he used this advantage to oppose the amīrs.

Secondly, the Khwāja’s network extended to Khurāsān with the Naqshbandīs being represented by eminent figures like Navāī and Jāmī. The Khwāja therefore had power to not only help out members of his ṭā’īfa in his native Transoxania but to also solve their problems across the border in Khurāsān.

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Khwāja Ahrār represented common people because he had access to the courts of rulers. Safi writes in the Rashaḥāt ‘Ain al-Ḥayāt that “the venerable Khwāja’s influence over rulers was very obvious as was his power of dispensation over them.” The Khwāja is also quoted to have said (to Abū Saʿīd), “If your intention in conquest is to reinforce the Sacred Law and to show kindness to you subjects, victory is on your side.” The Rashaḥāt thus uses this quote to justify the links that Khwāja Ahrār had with the Timūrid court. Similarly, it is also written that “Allah (Exalted is He) has endowed me (Khwāja Ahrār) with such strength that, if I wished I could write a letter to the Emperor of China, who lays claim to divinity and charm him into forsaking his throne and running in rags and tatters to my doorstep. Yet even with such strength and power at my disposal I am waiting for Allah’s commandment in this regard. Proper conduct is incumbent on us in our spiritual station and proper conduct means that the servant must make himself obedient to the Divine Will.” Khwāja Ahrār’s links with Abū Saʿīd may have had definite political and economic motives but they were legitimimized by Ahrār’s representation of the interests of the common man and his upholding of the Sharīʿah.

As previously mentioned, the unchecked distribution of soyūrghāl land had led to amīrs becoming autonomous on their own land. They were not required to pay taxes to the central or provincial governments but had unregulated tax collection rights for their own lands. Peasants, craftsmen and traders alike bore the brunt of the oppressive taxation instituted by amīrs. The tāʿīfa in this context refers to people who banded around Khwāja

203. Ibid., 316.
204. Ibid., 324.
Aḥrār to free themselves from this tax burden and not because they were his murīds. Paul uses the term himāyat to refer to the support that Khwāja Aḥrār gave to his ṭāʾīfa members.205 Paul states that himāyat in any form was a duty for Sufis and this can be seen as an extension of the Naqshbandī doctrine of Khalwat Dar Anjuman.206

Paul argues that Khwāja Aḥrār was able to increase his economic holdings by extending himāyat, or tax protection, to those who needed it.207 Khwāja Aḥrār bought most of his land in Transoxania and Paul states that this land was bought from smaller landowners who sought to enter his ṭāʾīfa by being tenant farmers on his land.208 By buying a portion of their land, Khwāja Aḥrār extended his tax privileges to smaller landowners.209 In other cases, Khwāja Aḥrār paid off the taxes owed by the smaller landowners himself. Besides paying taxes on the behalf of others, the Khwāja also used his influence at the court to abolish taxes. In one such example, he was instrumental in the abolishment of the tamghā tax on trade. Though this was an example of himāyat, Paul argues that the Khwāja, being part of a trade enterprise, benefitted from the abolishment of the tamghā.210 This demonstrates that himāyat wasn’t always selfless but that it represented the collective interests of the ṭāʾīfa.

205. Paul, Forming a Faction, 534.
206. Ibid., 537.
207. Ibid., 537-38.
208. Ibid.
209. Ibid.
210. Ibid., 538.
Jürgen Paul uses the concept of himāyat to frame the network as a reactionary movement. He states that the ṭāʾifā was used by Khwāja Aḩrār to balance the growing powers of the Turkic amīrs. The centuries-long process of political evolution experienced by Central Asia had given Sufis increased political and economic powers. Khwāja Aḩrār made use of both his economic power and his contacts with the court to push for favors to be accorded to both his ṭarīqa and his ṭāʾifā. While the Shaykhs of Jam shunned dependence on worldly wealth or close attachment to ruling regimes, Khwāja Aḩrār considered these to be an extension of the Khalwat Dar Anjuman.

**Intervention by the Network**

Primary literature contains scattered references to Khwāja Aḩrār’s political and economic influence. As works of literature like the Rashaḥāt ‘Ain al-Ḥayāt and the Sīsilāt al-‘Ārifīn are considered to be works of religious and devotional literature, they tend to focus on the piety of Khwāja Aḩrār. These works avoid making explicit references to the Khwāja’s political influence or his economic holdings as describing the Khwāja as a powerful political player or an astute entrepreneur would harm the Khwāja’s reputation as a humble Sufi shaykh. Therefore the idea of the Khwaja’s ṭarīqa being a powerful network is absent from the relevant primary sources. Bits of information about the Khwāja’s political and economic life must be pieced together from these scattered accounts to visualize the extent of his political and economic power.

By describing the attitude of the early Khwājagān towards politics as “quietist,” Paul argues that the Khwājagān/Naqshbandīyya had never taken part in political activism.
before the mid-fifteenth century. 211 This period barely precedes Khwāja Aḥrār’s rise to the leadership of the Naqshbandīyya and political intervention was therefore not peculiar to his network. Political mediation and intervention had been practiced by Sufis since the advent of Mongol rule. As the Khwājagān of Herat were a diverse set of different Sufi groups, Paul argues that they practiced different kinds of political mediation. In the light of Paul’s work, it can be stressed that Khwāja Aḥrār’s style of political mediation was influenced by existing forms of political intervention. The inclusion of these various styles of intervention into Khwāja Aḥrār’s political model can be seen as a part of his consolidation of the Naqshbandīyya/ Khwājagān.

Writing about three particular styles of mediation, Paul argues that the first was a “notable” paradigm that was associated with the activities of Bahā al-Dīn ‘Umar and Zayn al-Din Khwāfī, both of whom were prominent Khwājagān from Herat.212 The notable paradigm referred to the Sufis’ intervention in elite politics, examples of which include negotiations with a besieging army or helping rulers make peace. The second kind of intervention was the “iḥtisāb” paradigm. Iḥtisāb refers to the idea of promoting good and preventing evil.213 Protesting against “Qalmaq” customs and taxes falls under this category. The third paradigm, which was peculiar to Khwāja Aḥrār, was the


213. Ibid., 241.
“himāyat” paradigm which involved the protection of the poor and the weak. Paul credits Khwāja Aḥrār with a successful combination of all three styles of Sufi intervention.214

Khwāja Aḥrār regularly helped broker peace between rival Timūrid princes. One of his letters addressed to Sultan Husayn Bayqara, states his opinions on a land distribution plan meant to appease belligerent princes.215 The Khwāja approves this scheme, giving the highest priority to peace in a kingdom. He writes, “What good will come from two Muslim factions who are related to one another being at war?”216

The Khwāja was known as a political mediator and this can be judged from biographical accounts of his life. An account that is present in both Rashahät ‘Ain al-Hayāt and the Silsilāt al-ʻĀrifīn attests to this popular image.217 The Khwāja was accompanying the forces of Sultan Aḥmad Mirza as the latter rode against the combined forces of Umar Shaykh Mirza and Sultan Maḥmūd Mirza. Once camped, The Khwāja asked the Sultan, “Mirza! Why did you bring me along? I am not a man of war! And if you desire peace, what then is the delay?” The Mirza replied, “What authority do I have? All affairs are subject to your will!” The Khwāja arranged for the three parties to meet each other. The Khwāja is reported to have said, “I have become weak from old age. I bear the burden of these negotiations so that you don’t entangle yourselves (with your


quarrelling).” In the end, all three parties made peace with each other. Referring to this event, Mirza Haidar Dughlat remarks, “No one could resist the entreaties of the blessed mind of the holiness.” This account shows that not only was the Khwāja close to the Timūrid princes, but that he also bore the responsibility of having the three Timūrid family members make peace with each other. This demonstrates the importance of peace and stability in the eyes of the Khwāja and how he reminded the Timūrids that they should maintain cohesion among themselves.

The Khwāja intervened regularly as part of the ihtisāb paradigm. He would write to Sultan Husayn Bayqara imploring him to put an end to un-Islamic customs. One letter requests that the “Sharīʿah be put into effect and the customs of strangers be overthrown.” In another he writes, “The infidel and iniquitous Qalmāqs be put to flight through the efforts of the rulers of Islam.” These letters were targeted against Turco-Mongolian culture and the amīrs who subscribed to it. The label “Qalmāq” is used in a derogatory manner that reduces the Turco-Mongols to the ranks of infidels. Though this anger may stem from excesses that the Turco-Mongolian amīrs would commit against the trading classes and peasants, Husayn Bayqara is implored to take punitive action against them because it was his duty as a Muslim king to uphold the Sharīʿah. Though the Khwāja is humble and refers to himself as either ḥaqīr or faqīr in letters concerning financial matters or travel authorization, he is quite forceful in letters concerning

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opposition to pagan customs.\textsuperscript{221} In such correspondence, the Sultan is reminded of his duty by the Khwāja. In one such letter, the Khwāja writes that “no worshipping is more complete and necessary for kings, after the performance of namaz, than the engagement in the repulse of these oppressive man-eating people.”\textsuperscript{222}

Examples of the Khwāja’s actions, that count as ḥimāyat intervention, may be found in Majmu`a-yi Murāsālāt. In one of his letters, addressed to Sultan Husayn Bayqara, he requests that the Sultan expedite the sale of property belonging to a certain Amīr ‘Abd al-Vahhab, who was part of the Khwāja’s ḥimāyat faction.\textsuperscript{223} Another letter requests that a resident of Samarqand, who owned property in Khurāsān, be allowed to reclaim that property if it was usurped by someone else.\textsuperscript{224} Though none of these cases concern any of the Khwāja’s own property, he still composed these letters to help out the concerned parties. The “neediness” of the bearers of the letter is underscored with the use of terms like faqīr and the Sultan is reminded of his duty towards his subject with terms like huqūq or tarham kardeh.\textsuperscript{225}

Some letters concern the payment of taxes. Two letters concern a case where the tax collection rights for the village of Javir, which lay with the central dīwān, were given to

\textsuperscript{221} Haqīr mean needy while faqīr means poor.

\textsuperscript{222} Gross and Urunbaev, Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Ahrār, 185-86.

Namaz is Persian for “prayer.”

\textsuperscript{223} Gross and Urunbaev, Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Ahrār, 106.

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid, 267.

\textsuperscript{225} Huqūq is Persian for “rights.”

Tarham kardeh, in Persian, means “Having pity.”
the district dīwān at Tabas. Certain dervishes in the village protested against this action and were expected to be brought to the court in Herat to be punished. Though the letters were written by Muḥammad Bin Amīn al-Dīn and not the Khwāja himself, it requests that the dervishes be forgiven. Similarly, taxes on trade seem to feature prominently in the Khwāja’s letters to the Herati court. In one case, in a letter penned, by Muḥammad Amin al-Din, the vārid tax on imports is described as “injustice and oppression.” In other cases, the Khwāja paid taxes himself on behalf of the poor. In one case mentioned in the Magāmāt-i Khwāja Ahrār, Mirza Sultan Aḥmad was troubled by fiscal issues and decided to impose a tax called dehyazdeh. He knew that if he did impose such a tax, the Khwāja would petition against it without realizing the dire fiscal situation at hand. Amīr Darvīsh was sent to the Khwāja to apprise him of the situation. Before he could leave, a servitor of the Khwāja arrived with 10,000 “white tangas” and said that the Khwāja thought that the Mirza might “need to cover his expenses.” Though this account is presented as a karāmat story or a story of the Khwāja’s miraculous powers, it reveals several things about the Khwāja’s monetary and fiscal interventions. Firstly, the Mirza expected the Khwāja to file a petition against this tax that would be seen as oppressive. Secondly, the Mirza was adamant that the tax would have to be repealed if the Khwāja opposed it. Thirdly, it showed that the Khwāja cared for both welfare of the

228. Dehyazdeh-literally “eleventh” but meaning “one tenth”
229. عرض اضطرار
230. میرزا کا بخرج احتیاج می بوده باند بده هزار تنگه سفید
people and the stability of the state. This was why he chose to pay the requisite amount out of his own coffers.

Part of Khwāja Aḥrār’s favors towards the members of his ṭā’īfa was the reunification of families across the Khurāsān/Transoxania border. Though several cases of such intervention exist, an interesting case may be that of the Khwāja interceding on behalf of Jan Maḥmūd Qipchaq, whose children were stuck in Khurāsān. Qipchaq, as his name tells us, was a Turk and this case demonstrates the Khwāja’s willingness to help people regardless of their ethnicity. Though he censured Turkic amīrs for their un-Islamic ways, this distinction between Turco-Mongolian and Perso-Islamic did not trickle down to the level of the ordinary person. The Khwāja thus helped everyone who was part of his faction without any discrimination.

The Khwāja also helped facilitate travel for students. One of the letters, written by ‘Abd al-Avval, demanded safe passage for a student who wished to travel to Khurāsān. The Khwāja had obtained his education in Herat when the Timūrid realm was unified. It is therefore understandable that he wished to see this exchange of knowledge continue unhindered.

Several of these himāyat actions were directed against rival Turco-Mongolian Sufis. In a case mentioned in the Maqāmāt i Khwāja Ahrār, an amīr known as Amīr Tarkhān, follows a Sufis advice and forces peasants to repair a fort. This Sufi was Shaykhzādeh

232. Ibid., 211-12.
Khalf who was a servitor of Ismail Ata. The author of the *Magāmāt* has used the term “Muslims” to describe the laborers, with the possible intention of juxtaposing the perceived *Qalmāq*-ness of the Yasavi Shaykhzādeh with the innocence of the Muslim peasants. According to the account, the peasants had approached the Khwāja and begged for his assistance. They said that their homes had been raided from this very castle and now they were being forced to reconstruct it. The Khwāja refused to ask the Shaykhzādeh and the Amīr for favors. In this account, the Khwāja’s ire is not directed against Amīr Tarkhān but against the Shaykhzādeh. While the Amīr refused to disrespect the Khwāja’s views that Muslims should not be forced into corvée labor, the Shaykhzādeh retorted, “I am not a disciple of the Khwāja!” The Shaykhzādeh later became grievously ill and only recovered when the Khwāja forgave him. The term “*shaykhzādeh*” is used deliberately to underscore that the villain in the account was not a Sufi *shaykh* but rather only a son of *shaykh*. “*Shaykhzādeh*” thus signifies both an inability to be a spiritual guide but also points towards notions of pretense of authority. For a *shaykh*, authority is given by God and is passed down through the *ṭarīqa* and cannot be inherited from family.

234. A Yasavi *shaykh*. The *Rashaḥāt 'Ain al-Ḥayāt* gives the suffix “*Ata*” to all Yasavi shaykhs after Ahmed Yasavi. It also states that “The people of Turkestan used to call him *Ata* Yasavi. *Ata* means father and the Turks have used this word to designate their greatest *shaykh*.” See Safi, *Rashaḥāt 'Ain al-Ḥayāt*, 4.

235. من مريد خواجه ليست! 236.
Conclusion

Fifteenth century Central Asia was a region in a state of political and cultural flux. It had been struggling with its multiple cultural identities since the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. Home to an older Perso-Islamic tradition, it tried to adapt to the creation of a hybrid Turco-Mongolian culture. The tussle between the Perso-Islamic and Turco-Mongolian worlds prevented the region from reaching a cultural equilibrium as it saw the successive rise and fall of empires.

Mongol polities in Central Asia and Iran, like the Chaghatāyids and the Ilkhānids, inadvertently played with the existing cultural status quo of the region. Loosely organized Sufi groups like the Khwājagān grew in importance as they filled the gap between Mongol rulers and their non-Mongol subjects. Mongol rulers eventually patronized these Sufi orders and allowed them to function as political intermediaries. The long-lasting Mongol presence in the region eventually produced a symbiosis between Central Asian Turks and Mongols. This ethno-cultural fusion was manifested in cultural groupings like the Ulus Chaghatāy.
The Timūrid Empire grew out the Ulus Chaghatāy. Though his empire was governed by a Turco-Mongolian elite, Timūr ruled his empire through a highly centralized political system. Lacking the Chinggisid descent he needed to rule legitimately, Timūr sought alternate bases of symbolic power. He was thus forced to look toward Islam as a source of political legitimacy. Timūr consequently bestowed favor upon Sufis in return for their support.

Timūr’s system of rule prevented any one of his sons from holding enough political power to succeed him. As a result, Timūrid princes were forced to rely on the support of Turco-Mongolian amīrs. To gain their favor, Timūrid rulers distributed land grants and tax exemptions. Not only did this policy sap the fiscal strength of the state, but it also created a decentralized political environment as land grants like the soyūrghāl granted administrative autonomy to their holders. The Timūrids were also forced to garner the support of Tajik notables and consequently granted land to Sufis. A sizeable part of land grants made to Sufis consisted of awqāf. The surplus revenue generated by awqāf augmented the Sufis’ political power. The unchecked grants of land by the Timūrid state thus created two powerful groups in the form of Sufis and the amīrs.

The Naqshbandī order experienced the first stage of its development in the fourteenth century. Though it emerged from an older Khwājagānī Sufi grouping, it distinguished itself from other Sufi groups on account of its distinct practices. This self-identification of the Naqshbandīyya allowed the order to enter the second stage of its development. Even though it had developed a distinct identity, the Naqshbandī order in the fourteenth century consisted of various different groups. In this second stage that
commenced in the mid-fifteenth century, Khwāja Aḥrār was able to centralize the order by assimilating the different Naqshbandī groups, which had maintained their distinctness from other Sufī groups, into his centralized network.

Khwāja Aḥrār and his network were a product of the decentralized environment that was created after Timūr’s death. Besides being the leader of a Sufi order, Khwāja Aḥrār was also a businessman of significance and he recognized that trade prospered under the stability offered by a centralized political system. Though the Khwāja’s business enterprises were successful commercially, his economic empire was threatened by the increasingly decentralized political environment. He also faced opposition from rival Sufis who questioned the rightfulness of a Sufi commanding a commercial empire. Khwāja Aḥrār countered both threats to his economic interests by creating a centralized network.

The Khwāja set about creating his network after his shift to the court of Sultan Abū Saʿīd at Samarqand in 1451. Owing to his ties to Abū Saʿīd, he was able to create a waqf-based economic network. This waqf network Khwāja’s secured the Khwāja’s economic position. Not only was the waqf a more secure form of a property asset but it also yielded a massive stream of revenue for its administrator. This surplus revenue added to political powers of waqf administrators as it could be used to influence other political players. This revenue also allowed the waqf network to expand into other regions. Khwāja Aḥrār, for example, was able to extend his waqf network into Khurāsān, by purchasing property with the revenue generated by his Transoxanian awqāf.
Though the Khwāja purchased property in Herat, he was only able to convert it to waqf using his Naqshbandī contacts at the Herati court as an asset could only be awarded a waqf status by the consent of the ruler. As a result of his consolidation of the Naqshbandī order, the Khwāja was represented at the Herati court by Herati Naqshbandīs. Jāmī and Navāī were instrumental in helping the Naqshbandī order realize its economic and political goals at Sultan Husayn Bayqara’s court. Both contacts owed their political influence to the political environment of fifteenth century Asia. Jāmī, being a Sufi, held influence and respect on the basis of his religious and cultural identity. He also held an impressive portfolio that consisted of various kinds of revenue generating assets and tax immunities. Similarly Navāī too held a position of power at the Herati court and was particularly close to Sultan Husayn Bayqara. Though he was also a Sufi, Navāī’s influence stemmed from his Turkic bakhsi roots. Being a non-Chaghatāyid and hence non-noble Turk, Navāī benefitted from the political nature of fifteenth century Timūrid Central Asia as Later Timūrid rulers had given non-noble Turks an increased role in the political affairs of their states.

Thus the Khwāja’s movement was a reaction to the process of change that Central Asia was experiencing at that point in time. He countered the decentralization of the state by centralizing his own ṭarīqa. It was by creating a centralized Sufi network that the Khwāja gained access to the courts of regional Timūrid states. By using his influence at these courts, the Khwāja could counter all the ills of the decentralized Timūrid state. He was thus instrumental in abolishing taxes on commerce and arranged for the transfer of people and goods across the Khurasanian-Transoxanian border. He also paid off taxes on the behalf of poor peasants and represented them politically when they were threatened.
by Turkic amīrs. These acts of political intermediation were depicted as acts of selflessness aimed at mitigating the suffering of the craftsmen, traders and peasants of Central Asia. As a Sufi, the Khwāja could justify his economic holdings by the proving that his wealth served the interests of the Muslim community.

Khwāja Aḥrār was instrumental in maintaining peace amongst the various Timūrid kingdoms. This created conditions favorable to trade and for people to travel across the region. The Khwāja was himself actively involved in trade. He belonged to a privileged family and was successfully in his business endeavors. Not only did the Khwāja’s intervention at the courtly level allow for his own trade caravans to cross the border between Khurāsān and Transoxania, but it also aided members of his ṭāʾīfa who relied on his help to prevent their commercial activities from being adversely affected.

The Khwāja also resisted efforts by the state and Turco-Mongolian amīrs to tax the populace beyond acceptable levels. Though primary sources present the Khwāja’s political intervention as an extension of his piety, it is important to note that he represented a reactionary form of Sufism that had been evolving for years before Abū Saʿīd’s conquest of Samarqand. The Khwāja’s response to the decentralization of the Timūrid political structure was to counter it by centralizing the otherwise scattered Naqshbandī/Khwājagān strain of Sufism. The interests of the Tajik urban commercial classes lay with a centralized state. By placing himself at the core of a centralized network that roughly operated within the Timūrid heartland and finding access to the courts of Timūrid rulers, the Khwāja mitigated the negative effects of decentralization on trade and commerce.
The Aḥrārī Naqshbandīs possessed a self-identification formula derived from their distinct practices, had an economic network that was based on *awqāf* to spur the growth of the order and even made “conquests” with the deputation of *khalīfas* to foreign lands. The Naqshbandīs, however, lacked a legitimate claim to formal political power. Being Sufis espousing humility, this was perhaps unthinkable for the order. Even the principle of *Khalwat Dar Anjuman* could only justify intervention in politics and not the assumption of formal political office by Sufis. The order was thus needed Timūrid support to ease trade, travel and commerce in the region. The stability of the Naqshbandī economic system depended on it as only a ruler could abolish commercial taxes, allow caravans to cross his borders or award *waqīf* status to property.

The Timūrids also relied on the Sufis for political support. Following a legitimacy formula used by Timūr, Timūrid rulers sought the favor of Sufi *shaykhs*. Association with a *shaykh* contributed to a favorable public opinion of the ruler. Additionally, the granting of *awqāf* to Sufis gave them a stake in maintaining political stability. Later Timūrid rulers therefore relied on Sufi *shaykhs* to prolong their reigns. Owing to the Khwāja’s efforts, this courtly role became the exclusive domain of Naqshbandī Sufis.

The relationship between the Aḥrārīs and Timūrids, being derived from mutual benefit, was thus symbiotic. Though the Aḥrārī network lacked formal coercive power, it used its trans-regional presence to diplomatically integrate the courts of rival Timūrid rulers into a greater exchange network. Thus the Timūrid Sultans provided formal political power while the Aḥrārī *tariqa* provided the exchange network. Together a combination of both elements created an exchange system in a post-imperial space. Though exchange was not dependent on the existence of an imperial system, it benefitted
from the stability provided by a centralized state. The central thesis of this study
maintains that the negative effects of political decentralization on exchange were
mitigated by the political interventions of the Aḥrārī network. The success of the Aḥrārī
network was based on several factors. Firstly, the Sufi tariqa is a network by nature.
Secondly, the political environment created after Timūr’s death made Sufis more political
influential. Khwāja Aḥrār was able to extend this political influence to the Timūrid court
in Herat from his base in Samarqand by means of the tariqa. His contacts at the Herati
court were able to translate his informal political influence into a more formal state by
persuading the sultan to pass legislation that would reflect the Khwāja’s wishes.
Resultantly taxes harming commerce were abolished and people were given permission
to travel between Transoxania and Khurāsān. The Ahrārī Naqshbandī tariqa thus worked
with the rulers of Timūrid Central Asia and exerted a centralizing force on a
decentralized political environment.
References

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