

V. V. BARTHOLD

FOUR STUDIES ON THE
HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA

VOLUME III

MIR 'ALI-SHIR

A HISTORY OF THE TURKMAN PEOPLE

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V. V. BARTHOLD

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FOUR STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY

V. AND T. MINORSKY

VOLUME III

MĪR 'ALĪ-SHĪR'

A HISTORY OF THE TURKMAN PEOPLE



LEIDEN
E. J. BRILL

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FROM THE TRANSLATOR

With the publication of the essay on Mīr ʿAlī Shīr the promise to present an English translation of "Four Studies" of Barthold is fulfilled, but after the publication of the first issue containing "A short history of Turkestan" and a "History of the Semirechye", and of the second issue on Ulugh-beg, it was discovered that *Mīr ʿAlī Shīr* would be somewhat short to form a separate volume in the series. It has been decided therefore to supplement it with some other study from Barthold's vast heritage.

"An Outline of the History of the Turkmans"¹, which the translators have chosen for this purpose, might in fact be considered as the fifth essay in the selection, but in order not to disturb the title of the series we present it here as a somewhat extensive Annex.

It was written at a difficult period in Barthold's life, when having lost his wife and being himself in precarious health, he had to work "as never before" (as he said in a private letter) to satisfy the requests of the new nations of Central Asia anxious to know more about their past. With his usual thoroughness the historian of Turkestan extracted from the vast range of sources a mass of facts which will form the starting point of any future research.

As regards the basic essay of the present issue², the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Mīr ʿAlī Shīr has produced a great number of publications in the lands of both Iranian and Turkic culture. To compile an adequate list of them would be no easy task but one can be sure that in that vast sea Barthold's essay still floats like Noah's Ark.

15 November 1960

V. MINORSKY

¹ Published in the joint effort volume *Turkmenia*, 1929, I, 3-69.

² Appeared in the joint effort volume *Mīr ʿAlī Shīr*, published by the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., 1928, pp. 100-164.



Mir 'Alī Shīr in his old age

Portrait by Mahmūd Mudbabbib

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MĪR ʿALĪ SHĪR

INTRODUCTORY

Mīr ʿAlī Shīr's career as a poet, and especially as a patron of art and science, is closely linked with the rule of the Timurids. It was a brilliant epoch in the cultural history of Persia and of the Turks — her masters in those days — and to it belong the finest monuments of Persian Muslim architecture. Quite naturally this period aroused much interest among European scholars, but no monograph, sufficiently comprehensive and founded on first hand sources, has been devoted either to the Timurid dominion as a whole, or to any of its protagonists in the cultural and political field. In this case what hampers the student is not the lack but the plethora of material contained in manuscripts scattered among many libraries and still awaiting critical examination and, above all, critical editing. In fact there exists no work giving a complete survey of the sources on the history of the Timurids, let alone a critical study of them.

In 1918 I published a monograph *Ulugh-beg and his times*¹ which does not exhaust, however, the material on the subject. One of the lacunae I later noticed and partly filled² was the absence of any mention of Ulugh-beg's coins which proved to be very interesting and characteristic. These coins show that Ulugh-beg, for all his cultural and scientific leanings, was even more of a Turk and of an upholder of Timur's political and military traditions than it had first seemed³. This helps to obtain a more complete picture of life in Samarqand under Ulugh-beg, essentially so different from what it became in the second half of the fifteenth century when "the forty years' reign of Ulugh-beg (1409-1449) was succeeded by the forty years' domination of KHOJA AḤRĀR of the Naqshbandi order"⁴. In the same

¹ [V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, v. II, Engl. transl. Leiden 1958.]

² The article "Ulugh-beg's coins" (in Russian), *Izvestiya Gos. Ak. Mat. Kul'turī*, II, pp. 190-192.

³ See above, p. 178, Annex A.

⁴ *Ulugh-beg*, p. 168

book¹ I referred to the flourishing state of Herat under the rule of another Timurid SULTĀN-ḤUSAYN (1473-1506), of whom Mīr ʿAlī Shīr was a friend and intimate.

In the present essay the life in Herat in the days of Sultān-Ḥusayn and Mīr ʿAlī Shīr is studied in more detail. It is not my purpose to give an exhaustive study of the pertinent literature, but with the aid of the sources accessible to me at the present moment² I shall try to make the image of Mīr ʿAlī Shīr more realistic than that created by the fantasy of Oriental, nay even of European panegyrists. In the same way I endeavoured to destroy the imaginary view of Ulugh-beg as a "scholarly idealist who from the first days of his reign abandoned politics and devoted all his time to mathematics and astronomy"³.

Mīr ʿAlī Shīr's activities formed the subject of the earliest M. A. thesis presented to the Faculty of Oriental Languages in the University of St. Petersburg. The task of its author, M. Nikitsky⁴, was to characterise Mīr ʿAlī Shīr's "public and literary importance". His enthusiastic encomium has long been forgotten, but another monograph on Mīr ʿAlī Shīr published five years later by A. Belin⁵ still enjoys some credit both in the East and West, although it is also much more of a panegyric than a historical study. Apart from other reasons, this is due to the rhetorics of the French style of the 1860-5, from which even the great Dozy was not exempt⁶. Belin's rhetoric goes far beyond that of his Persian sources. It is hard to accept that the words⁷ "c'est, dit-il, pendant mon séjour à Mechhed, où je restai, après la mort de Sultān-Bābour, plongé dans la douleur d'avoir perdu mon bienfaiteur, que etc." reproduce the text⁸ in which Mīr

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

² Mostly the same as I used in *Ulugh-beg*.

³ *Ibid.*, p. IX.

⁴ *Amīr Nizām al-dīn ʿAlī Shīr* (in Russian) SPb. 1856.

⁵ *Notice biographique et littéraire sur Mīr ʿAlī-Shīr-Névāʿī*, *Jour. As.*, 1861, février, 175-256, avril, 281-357. In another article, *Jour. As.*, 1866, juin, 523-52, août, 126-54, Belin studies Mīr ʿAlī Shīr's *Mahbūb al-qulūb*.

⁶ Barthold, R. *Dozy*, in *IAN*, 1921, p. 237.

⁷ *Notice*, p. 183.

⁸ *Majālis al-nafāʿis*, Univ. MS., 618, f. 19a: *gharīb-va-khasta yiqūlūp erdim*.

‘Alī Shīr says that at that time he was a stranger in Mashhad and lay ill in bed. The original has not a word about the benefactor, or grief over his death. As we shall see, in many other instances the impression given by the actual text of the sources is somewhat different from that created by the “embellished” translation. In his monograph, Belin gives no clear idea of the character of the sources, nor does he tackle the still moot question¹ of how volume VII of the *Rauḍat al-ṣafā* was composed, and how much of it belongs respectively to Mīrkhond and Khwāndamīr. The author quotes Mīrkhond throughout, even in the passages on the death and burial of Mīr ‘Alī Shīr², although Mīrkhond died in 1498, and Mīr ‘Alī Shīr in 1501. Nevertheless, as late as 1920, E. G. Browne³ described Belin’s work as “an admirable monograph” and borrowed from it the far from accurate picture of Mīr ‘Alī Shīr’s “singularly peaceful” life. Almost entirely based on Belin’s monograph is the biography of Mīr ‘Alī Shīr compiled by Ismā‘īl Hekmat to commemorate the fifth centenary (A.H. 844-1344) of the poet’s birth⁴.

A recent volume of the *Journal Asiatique* contains an article by L. Bouvat on the civilisation of the Timurid epoch⁵. The author contrasts the flourishing state of culture until the end of the Timurid dynasty and the subsequent political and social decay. He also points out the baleful character, “au point de vue moral”, of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn’s reign, “so brilliant in many other respects”⁶. The author’s information on the data contained in the sources

¹ In a MS. described by Rieu in his *Catalogue* (Persian MSS., p. 93) Mīrkhond is named as the author. The Tehran lith. edition, 1270 A.H., attributes it to Khwāndamīr.

² *O.c.*, p. 213 sq.

³ *A History of Persian Literature under the Tartar dominion*, 1920, p. 506. Also, *ibid.*, p. 439: “the best account of Mir Ali Shir’s works with which I am acquainted”.

⁴ In a pamphlet published by the Azarbayjan Literary Society, Baku 1926, and presented to the First All-Union Turcological Conference. Reviewed by A. N. Samoylovich in *Mīr ‘Alī Shīr*, ed. by the Academy of the U.S.S.R., 1928, pp. 167-8.

⁵ *Essai sur la civilisation timouride*, *J. As.* v. CCVIII, 1926, pp. 193-299.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

is insufficient and inaccurate. Like many of his predecessors, including E. G. Browne¹, he repeats the mistake² about Ḥāfiẓi-Abrū's work when he says that only the first two volumes have come down to us. M. Bouvat utilises the works of Mīrkhond, Khwāndamīr, Babur and Mīr ʿAlī Shīr. To these he adds³, with no justification whatever, the spurious 'Institutes' of Timur, composed in India in the seventeenth century and in no way characteristic of fifteenth century Iran. On the other hand, he neglects the material accessible only in MSS., including even ʿAbd al-Razzaq's *Maṭlaʿ al-saʿdayn*. This manifestly inadequate acquaintance with the sources is responsible for the fact that M. Bouvat's article gives no idea of the struggles and upheavals which took place under the Timurids, or even of the transformation of Ulugh-beg's Samarqand into the Samarqand of Khoja Ahrār.

[*Additional note.* Only while reading the last proofs have I had the opportunity of acquainting myself with M. Bouvat's latest book⁴. Its pp. 162-180 are devoted to Sultān-Ḥusayn, and Mīr ʿAlī Shīr is additionally mentioned in the chapter *La littérature turque*, pp. 205-7. The book does not add anything essential to our knowledge. Like his predecessors, the author does not give any proper idea either of Sultān-Ḥusayn's reign or of Mīr ʿAlī Shīr's life.]

¹ *O.c.*, p. 425.

² Refuted by me thirty years ago in *al-Muẓaffariya*, p. 25 sq. See also my article on Ḥāfiẓi-Abrū published in *EI* in 1915, and fully accessible to Western scholars.

³ As Nikitsky had done before him.

⁴ L. Bouvat, *L'Empire Mongol: deuxième partie*, Paris 1927, published in E. Cavaignac's series *Histoire du monde*, tome VIII/3.

I. IRANIANS AND TURKS

Mir 'Alī Shīr is perhaps the most brilliant representative of that particular current of the literary and cultural life of the Turks which is characterized by a complete surrender to the influence to 'Perso-Muslim' culture. We know from Maḥmūd Kāshgharī's work¹ that, even after they accepted Islam, the Turks possessed a poetry of their own, both popular and literary, which was hardly touched by Persian influence. But even in those days there existed the proverb: "there is no Turk without a Tat; no cap without a head"². When the Turks became the main, and almost the sole holders of political and military power in the Iranian world, their concept of their own political past was affected by the Persian epics on the "Turanian" king Afrāsiyāb. The Turkish rulers of Iranian provinces remained Turks in their language, names and titles. Turkish even spread among the Iranians. Towns sprang up with a Turkish population; among them, first Kashgar, then the towns of Khwarazm and of the regions along the lower course of the Sīr-Darya, became centres of Turkish literary movements. Yet for the cultured Turks such literary works could not compare with the creations of Persian literature, and this led to their being soon forgotten. Mir 'Alī Shīr knew nothing about Turkish poets, or even about the Turkish kings of the pre-Mongol period. For him "Sultān Toghril" (i.e. presumably the first bearer of this name and the founder of the Seljuk empire) was one of the *Sart*, i.e. "Iranian" sultans, in the terminology of those days³.

The Mongols brought with them a new East-Asian current which powerfully affected the cultural evolution of the Central Asian Turks. While the Mongols were being Turkicised in the

¹ *Kitāb dīwan lughat al-Turk*, 3 volumes, Constantinople 1333-1335.

² Kāshgharī, II, 224. [*Tat* means "a non-Turk, a sedentary", especially an Iranian. V.M.]

³ Quatremère, *Chrestomathie en Turc Oriental*, fasc. I, Paris 1841, p. 33 (from the *Muḥākamat al-lughatayn*).

West, the Turks themselves gradually absorbed the traditions of Chingiz-khan's empire, until the reminiscences of the Turkish rulers of pre-Mongol times came to be obliterated. These Mongol traditions lived on in the three "Mongol" states formed in the West by the break-up of the Mongol empire: the kingdom of the Golden Horde, with its centre on the Volga; Persia, with her centre in the North-West, and the Mongol state in Central Asia, which later came to be called after Chingiz-khan's second son, Chaghatay. Everywhere the Mongol invasion seems to have brought about a considerable increase of the Turkish population. And everywhere the glamour of the Mongol state, regarded as *Turkish*, fostered the growth of Turkish national consciousness coupled with cultural activity. On the eastern border of the Golden Horde, the principal town of Khwarazm, Urgenj, became "one of the largest, most beautiful and most important Turkish towns"¹. The *khanaqa*, built in Urgenj in the first half of the fourteenth century by Türe-beg-khanım, is one of the handsomest buildings of the Mongol epoch. Still further East, in Barchand on the Sir-Darya, the scholar Jamāl Qarshī², a native of Almalīq (near Qulja), met in 672/1273-4 the theologian Ḥusām al-din Ḥāmīdī al-^cĀṣimī Barchinlighī who wrote poetry in three languages: his Arabic verses were eloquent, the Persian witty, the Turkish truthful³. This seems to be the earliest attempt to characterise the three literary languages of the Muslim world and their respective creations. Already under the caliph Ma'mun (A.D. 813-833), eloquence was regarded as the privilege of Arabic literature, and ideas as the prerogative of the Persian letters⁴, and now Turkish came into its own with the recognition of its greater naturalness and spontaneity. From what he heard from his father and uncle who spent three years in Bukhara (probably in 1262-1265), Marco Polo describes this town as "the best city

¹ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, in V. Tiesenhausen, *Collection of materials for the history of the Golden Horde* (in Russian), SPb. 1884, p. 308.

² On him see *ZVO*, XI, 283 sq.

³ V. Barthold, *Turkestan*, p. 151.

⁴ *Aḥmad ibn abī Ṭāhir Ṭāifūr, Kitāb Bagdād*, ed. Keller, 158.

in all Persia" ¹, i.e. in the country where Persian was spoken. In *Ulugh-beg* I have mentioned the constructions of the Central Asian khans and, in later times, those of Timur and Ulugh-beg in Andijān, Qarshī, Shahrisabz and Samarqand. In the last three towns the rulers built for themselves, whereas Andijān was founded solely in the interests of the population, and had no palatial residences. An anonymous historian of the early fifteenth century ² adds that khan Duva settled in Andijān many people from all over his dominions, and "to this very day each quarter of the town is called after some particular people" ³. Andijān became a purely Turkish town. According to Babur (born in Farghāna in 1482) there was not a man in the town, or its bazaar, who did not know Turkish. He adds that Mīr 'Alī Shīr's works were written in the Andijān dialect, meaning probably that in Andijān, a town of culture, a "correct" idiom was spoken, i.e. one close to the literary language ⁴. But Mīr 'Alī Shīr never visited Andijān and only when speaking of his residence in Samarqand casually mentions two men from Andijān who were studying there ⁵.

One might have expected the Mōngol khans, and later Timur, to foster outside Iran a culture comparable to the Iranian, but this did not happen. By virtue of its cultural attainments, Iran continued to enjoy an exclusive position among the lands occupied by the Mongols. Iran alone produced historians capable of describing the feats of Chingiz-khan, Timur and their descendants. At least, only the works or Iranian historians writing in Iranian towns ⁶ have come down to posterity, and we owe to them nearly all we know of the events that occurred in Turkestan, from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth.

¹ *Travels of Marco Polo*, Russian translation by I. I. Minayev, p. 6. [Marco Polo, ed. Yule-Cordier, 1929, I, 10].

² Daulatshāh, ed. Browne, 371.

³ Iskandar's Anonym (probably Mu'īn al-din Natanzī), MS. As. Mus., f. 245b. [Such was the case of Marghelan even in the twentieth century. V.M.]

⁴ *GMS*, I, 2b. Babur says that the Andijān dialect is *qalam bile rāst* "consistent with the writing".

⁵ *Majālis*, 28a.

⁶ Though occasionally they were men of Turkish descent.

II. HERAT AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Around Samarqand Timur built villages to which he gave the names of Sulṭaniya, Shīrāz, Baghdad, Dimishq (Damascus) and Miṣr (Cairo) so that they should witness to the paramountcy of Samarqand over all the other cities. Herat was not included in the number, and Timur did not foresee that in the near future this town was destined to emulate Samarqand, even in the political field.

Whatever Timur's intentions may have been, it turned out that he dealt a fatal blow to Khwarazm, the main centre of extra-Iranian¹ culture, whereas many Iranian provinces, if not all of them, were able to recover rapidly from Timur's devastations and massacres. The opinion often held by European scholars² on the results of Timur's devastations is not confirmed by the facts. The account of Clavijo, who crossed Persia during the last year of Timur's reign, clearly shows that at that time Northern Persia did not give the impression of being a ravaged and depopulated land. Various towns were governed by Timur's sons and grandsons, which in itself was bound to contribute to their restoration. Each of the princes strove to enhance the brilliance of his court by drawing upon both local and Central Asian cultural elements. Turkish poets were to be found not only in Herat, but also in Shīrāz³.

Herat had always been a large city but, before the coming of the Mongols, it was not the capital of any particular dynasty. It is true that the Ghūrīds (twelfth to fourteenth century) favoured it with some attention, but only the Kurt dynasty, related to the Ghūrīds⁴, arose in Herat. This was perhaps the first

¹ [In this case it might have been more adequate to speak of "External, or Greater Iran". V.M.]

² Especially A. Müller, *Der Islam im Morgen- und Abendland*, II, 268 sq., where some exception is made only for the "ostpersische Provinzen".

³ Daulatshāh, *l.c.*

⁴ [Through their ministers. *Kart* is a better reading than *Kurt*. V.M.]

dynasty of Iranian origin to spring up after the Mongol invasion. After the collapse of the Mongol power in Persia, the Herat ruler MU'IZZ AL-DĪN ḤUSAYN (1331-1370) became independent and strove to subjugate the other parts of Khorasan. At the time when in Turkestan the Turkish military force, as represented by the Chaghatay begs, took the upper hand, it was in Herat, for geographical reasons, that the two elements, Iranian urban culture and Turkish military tradition¹, were bound to clash sooner than elsewhere, even though the necessity to conciliate them was, somewhat vaguely, realised by men of the Timurid epoch, including Mīr 'Alī Shīr. Already the first of the Chaghatay begs, QAZAGHAN (1346-1358), made war on the ruler of Herat². He is said to have contemptuously referred to Ḥusayn as a "Tajik who advances claims to the sultanate"³. Before the battle Qazaghan pointed out to his followers the disadvantages of the position chosen by Ḥusayn, adding: "this Tajik does not know the art of warfare"⁴. The Chaghatays defeated Ḥusayn's army but could not take the fortified town. From that time onwards the relations between the Kurts and the Chaghatays continued alternately more, or less, friendly, until Herat was taken by Timur (1381), the Kurt dynasty deposed (1383) and its members exterminated (1389).

Herat became the residence of Timur's sons who ruled Khorasan: first Mīrānshāh, then, after 1397, Shāhrukh. The latter's fief, in addition to Khorasan, included Sīstān and Māzandarān. The prosperity of Sistan could not be restored in the same measure as that of the other provinces, for in 1383 Timur had destroyed the famous "dyke of Rus-

¹ It can be seen from the curious comparison of the Persians and the Turks in the *Muhākamat al-lughatayn* that Mīr 'Alī Shīr cherished the hope that the Turks might outstrip the Persians even in the cultural field. Somewhat naively, the author saw the superiority of the Turks over the Persians in the fact that every Turk knew Persian, while hardly any Persian knew Turkish.

² See *Ulugh-beg*, p. 12.

³ *ZN*, I, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 34.

tam" ¹. Both under Timur and under Shāhrukh, Sistan several times revolted against the Chaghatay power and was laid waste anew. Māzandarān was joined with Khorasan already under the Chingizids. According to Hamdullah Qazvinī ², Khorasan, Kūhistan, Kūmis, Māzandarān and Tabaristan were, under the Mongols, like a separate state, and their revenues were entered separately from the general revenue of the Mongol dominions in Persia. The explanation of this arrangement must be probably sought in the conditions of nomad life: the Mongol detachments stationed in Khorasan withdrew for the winter to the shore of the Caspian sea. Such movements are often mentioned in Timur's and Shāhrukh's histories.

One result of the troubles that followed Timur's death was that Herat, instead of Samarqand, acquired the rank of the capital of Timur's empire. The Timurids had to struggle not only amongst themselves, but also with the survivors of the dynasties dispossessed by Timur. In the West, the Turkman dynasty of the BLACK SHEEP succeeded in securely restoring its kingdom, and even in extending its possessions beyond the old boundaries. After Shāhrukh's three expeditions to the West, Jahān-Shāh (1436), son of Qara-Yūsuf who had fought against Timur, was recognised ruler of Azarbayjan. In the remaining part of Persia, the descendants of Timur's three eldest sons, Jahāngīr, 'Omar-Shaykh and Mīrānshāh, were gradually replaced by the sons of Shāhrukh. Of these, ULUGH-BEG ruled from 1409 in Samarqand, IBRĀHĪM-SULTAN from 1414 in Shiraz, and SUYURGHATMĪSH from 1418 in Kabul, Ghazni and Qandahar. Another of Shāhrukh's sons, Baysunqur, who had assimilated Persian learning to a greater degree than his brothers, remained in Herat. He was regarded as his father's vazir and, with him, contributed to the splendour of the capital. For one of Baysunqur's infant sons, SULTĀN-MUḤAMMAD, a special state was created in Central Persia in 1442, comprising the towns of Sultāniya, Qazvin, Ray and Qum ³.

¹ V. Barthold, *A historical and geographical survey of Iran* (in Russian) Spb. 1903, p. 48.

² GMS, XXIII, I, 147.

³ AR, f. 257b.

On the whole, this division of the former empire favoured the restoration of culture and its further development. Besides the capital, other cities too realised achievements which later profited the whole of the Iranian cultural world. In his account of Ibrāhīm-Sultān's death (1435), 'Abd al-Razzaq mentions as his particular merit his patronage to SHARAF AL-DĪN YAZDĪ which enabled "this most elegant writer in the world and the noblest man in Iran"¹ to finish his work on Timur's history (*Zafar-nāma*). Under the Uzbeks this work was translated into Turki by a Bukharan author², but even under the Timurids it attracted the attention of the Turks. The poet Lutfī, whom 'Alī Shīr prefers to all his other predecessors³, completed a versified version of the *Zafar-nāma*. No fair copy of this work (over 2,000 verses) was prepared and it remained unknown⁴.

The concentration of the power in the hands of the members of Shāhrukh's family did not lead to political stability. Shāhrukh's sons and grandsons fought against each other. Gradually the Timurid state shrank and, in the provinces still under Timurid rule, the power passed to the descendants of 'Omar-Shaykh and Mīrānshāh. In 1446, Shāhrukh himself led an expedition to the West, against his grandson Sultān-Muḥammad⁵ who had seized Isfahan and was besieging Shiraz. The prince fled, and among his advisers whom Shāhrukh brought to account was the historian Sharaf al-dīn, the prince's constant companion. It was said that in some verses he suggested that an old man should make room for a young one, and he was also accused of having assured the prince that Shāhrukh would never come to the West. On being questioned, Sharaf al-dīn admitted only the last charge, but explained that far from being an incitement to rebellion it was only a hope that Shāhrukh would treat his promising grand-

¹ *Ibid.*, f. 245b.

² *ZVO*, XV, 257. The MS. of this translation exists, as far as I know, only in Constantinople (Nūr-i Othmāniya, 3268).

³ *Muhākama*, in Quatremère's *Chrestomathy*, 34. On Lutfi see *Ulugh-beg*, p. 136.

⁴ *Majālis*, 29a.

⁵ *Ulugh-beg*, p. 145.