Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran by Maria E. Subtelny

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However, the lines between collaboration and resistance are rarely so clear, and this tension is felt throughout the story. Rather than a weakness of the memoir, however, I would suggest that this uneasiness accurately reflects the reality of the Tibetan experience, which has yet to come to terms with its own equivocal responses to the incorporation of Central Tibet into the modern Chinese state.

For this very reason, Khêtsun’s story is most compelling and insightful when he describes the quotidian hardships of a Tibetan “class enemy,” the physical and mental deprivations, strategies of survival, fear of betrayal, systems of rewards and punishments, cruelty of the powerful, and the persistence of humor, hope, love, and the human will. Unfortunately, however, at times the story veers from personal to national narrative, in the process blurring the lines between eyewitness account and a more amorphous national memory. Most noticeably, Khêtsun’s description of the 1950s follows a well-worn narrative and offers few new insights into the events leading up to and during the 1959 rebellion. Indeed, when Khêtsun writes of the initial period after “liberation,” “Then, in typical colonialist fashion, and in order to appease Tibetan sentiment, the Chinese established a ‘People’s Hospital’ … and primary school” (p. 13), it is difficult not to feel that the author is expressing retrospective indignation rather than his contemporaneous reactions. Nonetheless, in succumbing to these tendencies, Khêtsun’s autobiography is no different than most, including the myriad “Cultural Revolution” memoirs that have flooded the English-language market. In fact, many of Khêtsun’s recollections will feel all too familiar to anyone who has read this parallel literature, as when he writes, “Having to go to the [political education] meetings every evening before we could recover from the day’s toil was one of the worst torments of the Communist system” (p. 164). Yet, as this work demonstrates, to ignore the ethnic element and to equate the Tibetan experience with that of Han Chinese would be to grossly misunderstand both the past and why the reform-era narrative that blames the “Gang of Four” for the horrors of the Maoist period holds little weight in Tibetan regions. As such, not only will the publication of this book be a welcome event for anyone who is interested in modern Tibet, but also it marks a valuable addition to undergraduate and high school syllabi that wish to provide a more inclusive and representative introduction to recent Chinese history.

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Maria E. Subtelny’s Timurids in Transition is a valuable addition to the growing body of scholarship on fifteenth-century Central Asia and Iran, and
particularly on the region of Khorasan and its oasis centers. The scene for a cultural renaissance and privileged with a greater variety of sources than other adjacent contemporary locales, Khorasan in the second half of the fifteenth century has been the focus of scholarship for some time, including prior significant contributions by the author herself. This volume, however, attempts to venture beyond the cultural and artistic accomplishments by examining a key question: Which factors allowed for, or compelled, a powerful nomadic dynasty that adhered by and large to a set of steppe-based principles to transform itself into an equally strong agrarian power during the reign of the last Timurid, Sultan Husayn Bayqara? In the book’s six chapters, Subtelny charts the acculturation of the descendants of Timur (Tamerlane) into their new, sedentary environment and accords a central role to Bayqara and several of his contemporaries who were able to recognize and manipulate unique economic opportunities that led to the completion of the nomadic dynasty’s alleged transformation.

The first chapter opens with Timur, founder of the dynasty and wielder of the ever-elusive Weberian-modeled charisma, and focuses on the continuity of institutions and values from Chinggis Khan’s era down to Timur’s time. Such continuity, as in the nebulous steppe customary law (yasa or törä) or in the role of the imperial guard corps (keshik), sets the stage for understanding the tension that developed between nomadic, Turko-Mongolian principles and Perso-Islamic sedentary culture. This tension yielded both conflict and compromise and, in essence, necessitated a period of transition.

Chapter 2 follows more closely the career of Husayn Bayqara (r. 1469–1506), the book’s protagonist. Bayqara’s rise to power, in the classic pattern of a noble steppe prince, included periods of political vagabondage, flight and refuge seeking, heroic feats, and the final act of Khorasan’s conquest. In theory, the prince was unprepared to administer a sedentary realm, but, as described in chapter 3, following Bayqara’s ascension, capable professionals were appointed to key administrative positions. Nevertheless, conflicts ensued between the Persian bureaucrats, yearning to instill sweeping centralizing reforms, and the Turkic military opposition, seeking to maintain its hold over their traditional sources of income at the expense of the state treasury. Ultimately, Bayqara realized that in order to avoid a deep fiscal crisis, he had to resort to the development—and taxation—of agriculture.

Chapters 4–6 examine three potential solutions for the maintenance of a sound economic foundation for the Timurid state: agricultural activities, religious endowments, and the utilization of popular shrines as loci for agro-management. The significance of agricultural management had been clearly established in advice literature written under Timurid patronage, and its particulars systematically described in an agricultural manual composed in Herat in 1515 (and discussed in depth by Subtelny in a separate publication). In the present volume, Bayqara is celebrated as the Timurid ruler most interested in agriculture, under whose reign the management of hydro-agriculture reached new heights. He also seems to have influenced his military and administrative elite to become involved in agricultural development. At the same time, the Timurids explored religious endowments (waqf) as a source for agricultural management.
Subtelny is careful to discuss *waqf* in a balanced manner, aware of its limitations. Although she highlights the role of prominent women donors, the very limited record of *waqf* that survived from Bayqara’s rule hinders any far-reaching conclusions regarding financial management and the endowments’ connection to agricultural activity.

Finally, chapter 6 showcases the widespread phenomenon of shrine visitation under Timurid rule and endeavors to complement other studies on the phenomenon by emphasizing the shrines’ economic significance. The emphasis on the cultivation of the land seems to complete the transition of the dynasty, although the transformation was rather short-lived. Within a decade or two, the Timurids would vanquish before new conquerors from the steppes.

Whereas most studies of the political history of that era and region have relied principally on sixteenth-century official court histories, this volume engages more diversified source materials, including documentary evidence, advice literature, and administrative and agricultural manuals. Subtelny has used most of these sources before in her numerous publications, but here, she aims at a more comprehensive analysis of the nature of the transformation from nomadic dynasty to sedentary power. An important feature of *Timurids in Transition* is the impressive appendices that occupy 124 pages and present the reader with both a survey of Timurid deeds of endowment as well as original documents in translation (and a facsimile), chief among them the *waqfyya* of Afaq Begim, Sultan Husayn Bayqara’s wife, for her mausoleum in Herat (a detailed discussion of the deed also stands at the core of chapter 5). Thoroughly researched and elegantly presented, this volume offers valuable insights into questions that stand at the heart of medieval Islamic and Central Asian history.

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**JAPAN**

*Toyota’s Assembly Line: A View from the Factory Floor.* By Ihara Ryoji. Translated by Hugh Clarke. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2007. xvii, 1 pp. $79.95 (cloth); $34.95 (paper).

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This most welcome study is a translation of Ihara Ryoji’s *Toyota no rōdō genba* (Tokyo: Sakurai Shoten, 2003), originally published in Japanese. Ihara is a professor at Gifu University who spent three and a half months in 2001 employed as what he calls a “casual” worker at a Toyota assembly plant in the Nagoya region. He thus replicated the participant observation methodology of journalist Kamata Satoshi’s 1973 exposé of working conditions in Toyota’s