Abstract

The article analyses the use of terminology and imagery related to pastoral nomadism in two fifteenth-century works of Persian historiography. One is a history of the Türkmen Aq Qoyunlu, who ruled in Western Iran; the other is a chronicle of the eastern Iranian Timūrids. The comparative lexical analysis focuses on terms denoting nomadic military followers and individual pastoral or tribal groups, and examines how each of the authors relates these terms and the groups they designate to his patron polity. The article argues that pastoral nomadism may have been of somewhat unequal importance to the prevalent political culture of the Aq Qoyunlu and Timūrid elites.

Introduction

As is widely known, many medieval Iranian political regimes were based on nomadic military power and dominated by leaders of Turko-Mongol origin, but the histories of these regimes were principally composed by Persianate scribes who often occupied bureaucratic and administrative posts. This article will attempt to contribute to the study of two interrelated questions that have recently been under discussion, mainly with respect to post-Mongol historical writing in Persian. The first question is rather general, while the second involves more specific issues.

The general question revolves around the kinds and degrees of similarities and differences that exist between historiographical works produced in western and eastern Iran. Jürgen Paul has observed that there is a marked...
difference in the depictions of pastoral nomads in the texts. Whereas western sources are very explicit about nomads and their role in politics and warfare, eastern sources tend to be more reserved, to the point that pastoral nomads cannot easily be identified. The present article will give further examples to demonstrate the difference between historiographical works from these two geographical origins in their depiction of nomads. In doing so, it will take up and try to supplement some of Paul’s findings concerning relevant terminological and stylistic problems.

First, this concerns the use of the terms ḥašam/ahšām in a wider sense than that of ‘personal retinue’. Paul, among others, has pointed out that these terms may in many instances also designate pastoral nomads in a rather general sense, albeit with a military connotation. The second problem to be addressed is the notably stronger inclination of western historians to have recourse to themes related to mobile pastoralism as metaphorical elements in their accounts. These matters, in turn, form the more specific issues to be addressed in this paper. One line to follow will be the analysis of the way that various groups of pastoral nomads are designated in the two works under study. The sources to be analysed are the Maṭla’ al-sa’dayn wa majma’ al-bahrayn [The rising of the two fortunate ones and the meeting of the two seas] by ‘Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandi and the Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya [The book of Diyarbakir] by Abū Bakr Ṭehrānī.

As regards the analysis, particular emphasis will be placed on how the authors represent people who may be identified as pastoral nomads and who function as political actors. Another focus will be the way in which each historian uses terms denoting nomads with reference to his own polity. Finally, some stylistic features that highlight mobile pastoralism will be examined as elements of political aesthetics. In conclusion, the results of these individual threads of lexical analysis will be related to the wider discursive, ideological and political context in which Persian historians of the fifteenth century worked. The analysis is based on an extensive, though not exhaustive, reading of both sources. The work by Ṭehrānī, in particular, deserves a more thorough study than can be carried out in the framework of this article.

2 Ibid.: pp. 646-52.
Terms of analysis: Historiography as an element of political culture

The two sources under study broadly fall into the categories outlined by Paul to specify geographic origins. The western author, Ṭihrānī, wrote the history of the Aq Qoyunlu, a regional principality in Anatolia, whose nomadic leaders became empire builders, dominating much of western Iran during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. His eastern counterpart, Samarqandī, was one of the Timūrid court historians based in the city of Herat. The reason for the choice of these two authors and their works as subject of this study is that they have been suggested as apt general representatives of eastern and western Iranian historiography by Charles Melville, who has explicitly raised the general problem of differences and similarities between works from these regions.

However, in a preliminary consideration of whether eastern and western Iranian historiographies constituted two distinct schools in the fifteenth century, Melville stresses the similarities. He maintains that both of the historians under study wrote for a nomadic political elite, and concludes that differences between their works “[...] were ones of form and structure, rather than language, ideology or political ethics”.

One such formal difference that is clearly visible is the way each author organises his narrative. While Samarqandī strictly follows the annalistic format, Ṭihrānī gives almost no dates and the narrative breaks off several times. Nonetheless, Melville is certainly correct in his general observation that, by and large, both authors adhere to a common epistolary style. This is characterised by an emphasis on Irano-Islamic royal ethics and some degree of literary refinement.

What makes Melville privilege the similarities over the differences is that Samarqandī and Ṭihrānī both share the same essential outlook on issues such as the meaning of history, dynastic change, legitimacy and the upholding of Islam. While this is true, it does not necessarily mean that both authors represent their respective regimes in exactly the same way. Likewise, their Timūrid and Aq Qoyunlu patrons may not have considered the same elements as important to their respective political ideologies. As Michele Bernardini pointed out, the Timūrid historians, for instance, deliberately

---

3 Ibid.: p. 439.
5 Ibid.: p. 38.
6 Ibid.: pp. 29-31, 36.
downplayed or glossed over Timur’s Turkic origin, while they strongly emphasised the Chingisid Mongol heritage that he took on.\textsuperscript{7} By contrast, the leading Aq Qoyunlu factions explicitly laid claim to a genealogical connection with the Türkmen Oghuz.\textsuperscript{8} These claims to distinct legitimising legacies suggest that, within a largely common framework of reference, representatives of either regime may have favoured somewhat different accentuations of specific political matters.

With regard to the differences between the works of Samarqandi and Tïhrînî, Melville qualifies his judgement somewhat. He states that the comparatively lesser degree of structuring and formalising in Tïhrînî’s account may be attributed to the “more overtly nomadic nature of the rulers” he served.\textsuperscript{9} One might indeed ask whether, through the eyes of their respective historians, the Aq Qoyunlu saw pastoral nomadism as a fundamental feature of their political order more emphatically than did the Timurids. This article argues that, besides the formal and structural differences between the two works, there are also differences in language and style that suggest that this may actually be the case. As a western historian, Tïhrînî, for instance, tends to be more outspoken on the activities of nomadic political actors than the eastern chronicler Samarqandi. Furthermore, compared with his Timurid counterpart, the Aq Qoyunlu historian more readily refers to his own regime in terms used to designate nomadic groups, and has greater recourse to metaphors derived from mobile pastoralism. By focusing on these matters, the present study may lead to a slight reassessment of Melville’s general conclusion that both authors attached rather equal importance to the same elements of political ideology. One may perhaps modify this conclusion somewhat, considering the question of how far the Persianate bureaucrats, Samarqandi and Tïhrînî, might possibly have adjusted their style and terminology to suit the more or less assumed preferences and tastes of the nomadic political elites they served.

This article understands the use of terminology and imagery related to pastoral nomadism as a phenomenon of political culture. In general, this concept may, on one level, refer to culturally based attitudes and preferences


\textsuperscript{8} Woods, John E., The Aqquyunlu: Clan, confederation, empire (Revised and extended) (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1999): p. 25. By the fifteenth century, the Oghuz were considered as a nomadic tribal confederation out of which the Saljuq dynasty had emerged in the eleventh century. For a related study of the Saljuq period and a map showing most of the localities mentioned in this article, see the contribution by David Durand-Guédy to this volume.

\textsuperscript{9} Melville, “Between Tabriz and Herat”: p. 38.
that guide the actual political behaviour of the members of a given regime. This would include, for example, the forms of interaction between various power holders and institutions according to written and unwritten rules. On another level, political culture may refer to discussions of or reflections upon those attitudes and preferences, and the business of politics in general, by interpreters who are somehow professional. This would include basic assumptions about the political, the designation and character of the polity and the roles attributed to relevant actors in processes of decision making.\(^\text{10}\)

The latter aspect is of greater significance to the present study, as both historians, Samarqandī and Ṭīhrānī, may also be considered to be such interpreters. In consequence, an analysis of the way they use nomadic terminology and imagery may shed some light on the significance that pastoral nomadism carried within the overall political culture of the elites for whom they composed their histories. This perspective may also prove promising if one considers the more general problem of differences and similarities between eastern and western Iranian historiography.

It is often difficult to precisely determine the relations between rulers and military leaders on the one hand and historians on the other. In general, however, the composition of historical works in Persian was actively promoted by most medieval Iranian and Turkish dynasties. The genre developed in close conjunction with political advice literature, while the primary concern of medieval Persian historians was to offer a meaningful narrative legitimising the rule of their patrons in various religious, genealogical or astrological terms.\(^\text{11}\) These, in turn, may reasonably be interpreted as being part of discussions about political attitudes, and thus, the second level of political culture. In this respect, the dominant Islamic and Iranian motifs, for instance, were supplemented by steppe nomadic models.

\(^\text{10}\) See Rohe, Karl, “Politische Kultur: Zum Verständnis eines theoretischen Konzepts”, Niedermeyer, Oskar and Beyme, Klaus von (eds.), *Politische Kultur in Ost- und Westdeutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994): pp. 1-21. As a theoretical and methodological tool, the concept of ‘political culture’ has been mostly applied to, and most thoroughly developed for the study of, modern political systems in mass societies. However, its core elements, namely the concern with relations between different representatives of a regime, their (possibly diverging) assumptions about the political, and the reflection upon these assumptions by scientists or writers, may be said to suit an analysis of medieval political orders as well. For a discussion of different approaches to the study of ‘political culture’, see also, Wilson, Richard W., “The many voices of political culture”, *World Politics* LII (2000): pp. 246-73.

of authority and community, at least from the time of the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century. For this period and the subsequent decades of Mongol rule in Iran, scholars such as Thomas Allsen, Jean Aubin and Melville himself have convincingly underlined the significance of personal relations between individual historians and members of the political-military elite. Such relations may be seen as forming a part of the first level of political culture.

These personal relations, often based on common political interests, could be shown to facilitate the process of cross-cultural conceptual integration involving Turko-Mongol, Islamic and Iranian elements. In the course of this process, the Mongol Ilkhan, for instance, who were pagan at the time of conquest, came to be depicted as just another Iranian dynasty by the influential scholar Baydawī. Later, the convert Qāzān (d. 1304), in particular, was transformed into an ideal Irano-Islamic monarch, governing with wisdom and justice and supporting the orthodox faith. It is through complex ties of advertising and patronage that historiography, along with related literary genres, such as ‘mirrors for princes’ or hagiographical texts, played a major part in this integration process.

Moreover, John Woods, Beatrice Manz, Maria Subtelny, Michele Bernardini and others have demonstrated that this process continued well into the fifteenth century, albeit not without sometimes violent conflicts about notions of authority and terms of rule.

---


14 See Melville, “From Adam to Abaqa”: p. 78.


The eastern historian, Samarqandī, explicitly links his Timūrid patrons to the Īlḫānid dispensation. The title of his chronicle, Maṭlaʿ al-saʿ dayn wa majmaʿ al-bahrāyn, already indicates that the narrative stretches back from Samarqandī’s own time, i.e., from the reign of the Timūrid sultan Abū Saʿīd (d. 1469) to that of the last effective Īlḫān of the same name. By the time Samarqandī wrote his history, the latter’s death, in 1336, had been firmly established coinciding with the birth of Timūr in official Timūrid political discourse. The eastern historian was a legal scholar by training and descended from a family that was already attached to the court when he started his career. He was most closely tied to Timūr’s son and successor, Šāhrūḥ (d. 1447), whose service he had entered in the early 1440s and of whose mausoleum in Herat he was in charge after the sultan’s death.

The work of the western Aq Qoyunlu historian, Ĥīrānī, is the first more or less systematic account of their history. It seems to have been composed between 1469 and 1472, following the Aq Qoyunlu conquest of Tabriz under their leader Uzun Hasan (d. 1478). The author himself, probably a native of Isfahan, is mentioned as a qāżī of Tabriz, by a later historian. Ĥīrānī apparently first served the rival Türkmen Qara Qoyunlu and the Timūrids, before entering the service of Uzun Hasan when that ruler decisively defeated the Timūrid sultan Abū Saʿīd in 1469. The military exploits of Uzun Hasan are at the centre of Ĥīrānī’s narrative, and he presents his rise to power as being guided by divine providence. Nevertheless, the title of his history, Kitāb-i Diyarbākriya, does not make any specific claims and it may, moreover, illustrate the fact that Ĥīrānī’s style of writing is not as highly elaborated as Samarqandī’s.

Melville comments on the title of the latter’s eastern history and the ideological claims it puts forward but does not address the title of the former’s western work or the stylistic difference between them. It may

---

18 Bernardini, Mémoire et propagande: pp. 52-3.
22 See Melville, “Between Tabriz and Herat”: pp. 31-2.
be a minor one and it is not necessarily connected to a supposedly more pronounced nomadic character of the Aq Qoyunlu regime in comparison with that of the Timūrids. However, the lexical analysis will attempt to show that terms and imagery from a context of pastoral nomadism are of greater significance in the western work of Ṣīhrānī. This applies in particular to his depiction of pastoral nomads as actively participating in politics and his terminological conceptualisation of the Aq Qoyunlu polity. Furthermore, it will be shown that such terms, and an aesthetics that may be related to mobile pastoralism, play a notably greater role in Ṣīhrānī’s work than they do in Samarqandī’s account in reference to his eastern regime. The next section will concentrate on the problem of identifying pastoral nomads in the texts and on their depiction in military contexts.

Terms of identification: Pastoral nomads in warfare

Besides the terms ḥašam/ahšām, other markers will be considered in order to identify nomadic groups in the texts. These include the mention of livestock, seasonal migrations and specific grazing grounds. In addition, tribal names and ethno-linguistic terms, such as Kurd, may point to a nomadic background for the groups so designated, especially when coupled with ḥašam/ahšām. Tribal names are also often employed together with generic terms, although these may give no indication as to the kind or size of the group to which they are applied. Frequent among these are the terms tā’ifa, jamāʿ at and qaum. As nomadic groups primarily appear in contexts of warfare, generic terms for troops, such as laškar, and certain military positions will also be considered.

Both authors deal with nomadic populations most frequently as incorporated into their patrons’ armies, or opposing them or as their victims. Paul has noted that the people who constituted the ordinary warriors and who are usually referred to as ahšām-i Aq Qoyunlu by Ṣīhrānī, led a normal pastoral nomadic life when not on campaign. Indeed, the western historian sometimes uses the general designation ahšām and the more specific one ahšām-i Aq Qoyunlu almost interchangeably with laškar when describing his patrons’ military operations. In one passage, for instance, he reports that Uzun Ḥasan sent most of the troops (laškariyān) to summer grazing grounds (yaylāq), while he was laying siege to a fortress. In the next sentence the author refers to the people sent back as laškar va ahšām, stating that they were attacked by an opponent. In another example, Ṣīhrānī reports that the

---

23 Paul, “Terms for nomads”: p. 454. For an analysis of the Anatolian political context in which early Aq Qoyunlu history took place, see also his contribution to this volume.
24 Abū Bakr Ṣīhrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakriya, ed. Lugal, Necati and Sümer, Faruk
**ahšām-i Aq Qoyunlu** had just arrived at a particular summer camp from where some of them were to go hunting, but a messenger of the Aq Qoyunlu was asked by their enemy, the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahānšāh (d. 1467), why Uzun Ḥasan was assembling an army (laškar). The historian has the messenger reply that this news was false and he then names another summer camp as the place where Uzun Ḥasan was staying with all the *ahšām*.25

In Ţihrānī’s account of another conflict with the Qara Qoyunlu, the near equivalence of generic terms for troops and *ahšām* is not so explicit, but the author makes quite clear that this term applies to pastoral nomads who were at times incorporated into the Aq Qoyunlu fighting force. At first, one of Uzun Ḥasan’s brothers refrained from starting a campaign in the region of Mardin and so the *ahšām* returned to their dwellings, splitting into two groups. While the first was attacked by a Qara Qoyunlu prince, Uzun Ḥasan took command of the second group and made them go with him to oppose this enemy. Although his units fought with some success, his brother was heavily defeated and the inhabitants of Mardin delivered the city to the Qara Qoyunlu. Then, Ţihrānī goes on to explain that Uzun Ḥasan allowed the animals and pastoralist warriors (*bahā'im va aḥšām*) in his camp to migrate to wherever they chose because the weather was cold with much rain and snow.26

First, these passages show that the western historian is rather outspoken as regards the involvement of nomadic pastoral groups in the military activities of his Aq Qoyunlu patrons. Furthermore, the last passage in particular may demonstrate that the economic needs of such groups were important enough to be taken into account by the Aq Qoyunlu leaders, as well as to be mentioned by their historian.

When covering campaigns undertaken by representatives of foreign powers, the western author is also quite explicit about the participation of people who are most probably pastoral nomads. Such is the case in Ţihrānī’s account of a Timūrid prince who levied troops from several urban districts and from *ṣahrā nīšīn* (lit. steppe dwellers) in the province of Fārs in order to strengthen his position in the succession struggle after the death of sultan Šāhrūḥ.27 The Timūrid historian, Samarqandī, narrates the same episode, but

---

27 Ibid.: p. 318. The use of the term *ṣahrā nīšīn* in eastern and western sources has also been analysed by Paul. He has shown that it often denotes pastoral nomads who may serve as rank and file warriors and, albeit less frequently, may be employed in a way similar to *ḥašām/ahšām* (See Paul, “Terms for nomads”: pp. 440-5).
uses only the most general terms and does not explicitly refer to nomadic populations, although his mention of the rural districts Lūristān and Šūlistān may suggest to some extent that such groups were indeed among the people drafted.\textsuperscript{28} Ṭihrānī, for his part, reports earlier events, stating that the Timūrid prince in question “conquered the entire province of Fārs with the aḥšām of Šūl, Kurds and Ḥalaḡ [there]”.\textsuperscript{29}

However, the Aq Qoyunlu historian also gives examples of nomads participating more actively in military and political affairs. An example is found in a passage dealing with the Bedouin commander Nuʿayr and the Türkmen Döger, with parts of whom the Aq Qoyunlu had at times hostile relations.\textsuperscript{30} In this passage, Ṭihrānī uses neither aḥšām nor any other specific term to designate the respective groups but only gives their tribal affiliation. However, in addition, he presents some details about the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouins and the internal organisation of the Döger:

After this, news came that Amīr Nuʿayr, who was the commander (sardār) of the clans (tāʾifā) of ‘Unayn and ʿĀna, […] having much of the province of Syria under his authority, and who was constantly moving in the steppe (bādiyya) with 30,000 tents, had killed Dimašq Ḥwāḡa, who was hostile to ʿUṣmān Bek; thereupon, the clan (tāʾifā) of the Döger elected his [Dimašq Ḥwāḡa’s] brother Gökče Mūsā to command them (ba-imārat-i ḥūd).\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{29} Ṭihrānī, \textit{Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya}: p. 296. The Ḥalaḡ / Halach were a Turkic nomadic group that had migrated to the Middle East from Central Asia at the time of the Mongol invasions (see Bosworth, C.E., “Khaladj”, \textit{EP}, IV [1965]: pp. 927-8).


\textsuperscript{31} Ṭihrānī, \textit{Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya}: p. 66. See also Woods: \textit{The Aqquyunlu}: p. 35-43. Uzun Hasan’s grandfather ʿUṣmān (d. 1435) was the emergent leader of the Aq Qoyunlu confederation in the period concerned. Generic group designations, such as tāʾifā in this case, will be translated as ‘clan’ or ‘tribe’ without ascribing to these terms any conceptual significance regarding the structural organisation of the groups to which they are applied.
It is clear that the Bedouins mentioned are pastoral nomads. Ṭiharānī is not so explicit here about the Döger, but their nomadic lifestyle can be inferred from other passages. However, what he does make explicit is that both groups follow their own political agendas, while being active players in a wider political field.

Concerning the term *ahšām*, one may note that, in general, Ṭiharānī does not use it when speaking about the Bedouin communities of the Syrian-Anatolian frontier region. Many of them were more or less closely tied to the regime of the Egyptian Mamluks, and he usually refers to these groups as *ārāb*, adding a tribal name or a geographical denomination.32

As will be further discussed below, it may be that the terms *ahšām* or *ḥašam*, when not restricted to the sense of ‘retinue’, are employed only when the group so designated has at some time had some kind of positive relationship to the regime for which each historian is writing.

Samarqandī, however, rarely uses the terms *ḥašam/ahšām* in the wider sense of ‘pastoral nomads’. When he does, he places particular emphasis upon a small group of men, who are most obviously their political and military leaders. To give but one example, the eastern historian enumerates the envoys sultan Šāhruḵ received when he was wintering on the royal pastures of Karabagh during his first Azerbaijan campaign in 1420/21. Among others, Samarqandī mentions “[... the chiefs (*kalāntarān*) of the Zanglū-ḥašam and Amīr Ḥusayn, who was the commander (*sardār*) of the Ḫiẓrū-Türkmen”, presenting themselves at the royal camp.33 The question of why the author applies the term *ḥašam* only to the former group, while he uses an ethno-linguistic designation to specify the latter, must remain unresolved for the time being. However, both groups and their leaders come to the fore only insofar as they declare loyalty to Šāhruḵ and appear in a subordinate position before Samarqandī’s Timūrid patron.

To conclude this section: the passages analysed here show that the

32 See Drory, “The role of the Banū Faḍl”: p. 471. For an analysis of the Bedouins’ place in Mamluk political culture and a case study of their military activities according to fifteenth-century Arabic historiography from Egypt, see the article by Sarah Büssow-Schmitz in this volume.

33 Samarqandī, *Maṭla‘ al-saʿdayn*: II/1, p. 296. The Ǧiẓrū-Türkmen may have stemmed from a group known as Hidirüli, parts of which were attached to one of the Oghuz tribes that had come to Azerbaijan and Anatolia in the eleventh century. A Persian historical dictionary of tribal names features the Ḫiẓrāli and the Zangali and locates them in Azerbaijan, but declares both groups to be Kurds (see Beyoğlu, Ağacan, *Türkmen Boylarının Tarihi ve Etnografyası* [İstanbul: İstek, 2000]: pp. 662-3; Sütüda, Manučehr and Mu’mīn, Ḥurshīd, *Nāmāma-ya Īlāt va ’Āsāyir va Ṭavā‘if* [Tehran: Markaz-i Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Buzurg-i İslāmī, 1385 h.ş. - 2006/7]: p. 206, 257).
western historian uses terminology denoting pastoral nomads to a greater extent than his eastern counterpart. Moreover, Ṭihrānī tends to bring out more clearly the role that the groups designated by such terms play in military and political affairs, including their significance for the Aq Qoyunlu regime. The following section will present a few examples that further illustrate some aspects of this difference.

Terms of perspective: ḥašām/aḥšām in political relations

The following passage from Samarqandī’s work lends itself well to a comparative discussion because the event is also reported by Ṭihrānī. It is thus the second incident treated by both authors, the first being the case of the Timūrid prince levying troops. The passage to be analysed here deals with a large group of people who are granted pasture by the Timūrid sultan Abū Sa‘īd in 1465, when the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Jahānsāh was campaigning against his rebellious son. This passage is somewhat exceptional in that the eastern author makes clear in uncommon detail that the group concerned consisted of pastoral nomads:

In these days, 15,000 tents of mobile pastoralists and steppe dwellers (kūc aḥšām va ṣahrā nišīnān) who could not bear the tyranny and injustice of the Türkmen anymore and who had finally found an opportunity, came from the boundaries of the region of [Persian] Iraq [i.e. western Iran] to the province of Khurasan. This [opportunity] was that Mīrzā Jahānsāh was occupied fighting his son, Amīrzāda Pīr Būdāq, and besieging Baghdad and no other matter crossed the royal mind; and when [Abū Sa‘īd]* found notice of the coming of the nomads from Iraq (aḥšām-i ʿIrāq), he let the sunrays of his majesty’s favour shine on their ruined conditions, and he treated their cavalry leaders (sarḫaylān-i aḥšām) with perfect respect and wished to grant all of them grazing grounds befitting a king. So he gave them pasture and a station (yūrt va maqām) in the confines of the province of Khurasan, opened for them equally the doors of compassion and care to the surface of hope, and all of them took a wide and calm place.34

There are several points of interest in this passage. As already mentioned, the first is the degree of explicitness with which Samarqandī speaks about the people migrating to Khurasan as pastoral nomads. He mentions the grant of pasture as an essential element of the arrangement and, with respect to

34 Samarqandī, Maṭlaʿ al-saʿdāyān: II/2, p. 941. * Samarqandī does not name the sultan here but uses instead the formula “the morning sun like wisdom of the sultan of the world”.

Terms of politics and pastoral nomadism

designation, combines the term aḥšām with the word kūč. This Turkish word, besides denoting a stage in a military march, most commonly refers to either the seasonal migrations or the mobile household taken on these migrations by pastoral nomads. The second point of interest is closely related and particularly noteworthy, namely, that the eastern historian depicts the migrating pastoralists as seizing an opportunity, thus crediting them to some extent with independent agency. After all, they left the domains of a rival ruler and came to the Timūrid realm. Nevertheless, Samarqandī clearly puts the ruler at the centre. The general impression remains that Abū Saʿīd is taking the initiative with respect to the nomads, giving them pasture and improving their lot. The last point to be addressed is that the eastern historian again places special emphasis on the military leaders of the group. While Samarqandī’s wording stresses the sultan’s credentials as a wise and just ruler, it may be the deployment of a loyal fighting force that mattered most politically, even to the author.

Considering the question of differences in the ways the authors depict pastoralist groups as acting politically, this passage in Samarqandī may first be contrasted to Ṭehrānī’s report of another event. This one shows some parallels to the episode quoted above, in that a group of nomads abandons the Qara Qoyunlu and joins the author’s patron regime. Ṭehrānī only uses the term aḥšām without further specification and his wording seems significantly stronger. He states that, by changing allegiance and appealing to his Aq Qoyunlu patrons, these aḥšām “set themselves free from the wickedness of and distress caused by the Qara Qoyunlu (ḫūd-rā rahānīdand)”.

His account of the people migrating to Khurasan is more neutral. Ṭehrānī does not include any military terminology but gives additional details on their place of departure and the decision-making process. These details indicate more clearly that the nomads were indeed the party to initiate this move. The author claims that Jahānšāh, while wintering near Baghdad, had grain loaded on camels in the region of Rayy and transported to Hamadan. The grain and/or the camels obviously belonged, at least in part, to the nomads and Ṭehrānī gives this transfer as the immediate reason for their

35 See Doerfer, Gerhard, Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen: unter Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen vor allem der Mongolen- und Timūridenzeit, 4 vols (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag. 1963-75): III, pp. 621-8. Doerfer lists another word spelt identically in Arabic and Persian script for which he gives the specific meaning Vasallendienst. As he maintains that this second word occurs only in conjunction with the Verb dādan, it seems justified to privilege the reference to pastoral nomadism.

36 Ṭehrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya: p. 185.
Daniel Zakrzewski

wish to relocate. Furthermore, he adds that they went to Khurasan with notables of Rayy, among whom he names two great landlords.37

However, the remarkable point to retain is that the Aq Qoyunlu historian does not refer to the migrating nomads as āḥšām but uses instead the term āʿrāb. Although it not clear what exactly he means by this designation, the fact remains that this group left the domains of the Qara Qoyunlu and were granted pasture by the Timūrids, while having no obvious relation to the Aq Qoyunlu. Thus, it seems consistent that Samarqandī calls them āḥšām, while Ṣāḥrānī avoids this term. It may be that, even in the wider sense of pastoral nomads, the term āḥšām is reserved for groups that were in some way allies or partners of the regime in question. However, the use of a distinct designation by each author does not so much constitute a difference in this case; rather, it indicates a common practice in that the terminology employed appears to be determined by the perspective of each historian as a spokesman for his regime. Further research is certainly needed to reach more reliable conclusions on the question of how specific terminological preferences relate to specific political points of view. In this respect, a broader basis of sources would be of particular importance.

As regards the differences between the two works under study, here, they return to the fore in accounts of a later incident, involving a group of pastoral nomads in Khurasan. Ṣāḥrānī also calls these people āʿrāb and they may be the same as those who had been granted pasture by the Timūrids earlier. In this instance, the āʿrāb of Khurasan grouped together out of fear of being attacked by Aq Qoyunlu commanders, whom the Timūrid sultan Ḥusayn Bayqara (d. 1506) was chasing out of the province, and the āʿrāb in fact attacked the Aq Qoyunlu commanders.38 Although we cannot be sure that the same āʿrāb are meant in both instances, it is significant that Ṣāḥrānī reports their activities, even though both the groups mentioned were very clearly not related to the Aq Qoyunlu regime in any positive way. The first group of āʿrāb had been subjects of the Qara Qoyunlu and were later integrated into the Timūrid political order. In consequence, they are called āḥšām by Samarqandī. The second group mentioned by Ṣāḥrānī, if they were

37 Ibid.: p. 370. For an analysis of a modern day pastoral nomadic grouping that migrated between the lands of two regional powers with questions of loyalty and the appropriation of resources being involved, see Büssow, Johann, “Negotiating the future of a Bedouin polity in Mandate Syria”, Nomadic Peoples 15 (2011).

38 Ṣāḥrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya: pp. 550-1. In 1470, the Aq Qoyunlu succeeded in temporarily occupying parts of Khurasan and installing a loyal descendent of Šāhruḥ as governor of Herat. They proved incapable of keeping the city and the province under their control and were driven out again very quickly. See also Woods, The Aqquyunlu: pp. 112-3; Subtelny, Timurids in transition: pp. 63-6.
not in fact the same group, achieved a military success against Aq Qoyunlu troops. Of course, this makes them important enough to be mentioned, but their attack upon and defeat of an army belonging to his patrons seems to be a somewhat normal occurrence to the western author.

Samarqandi makes another mention of a group of *ahlām* in his report of events surrounding the forced Aq Qoyunlu withdrawal from Khurasan. The significant difference, however, is not the terminological one. Rather, it is, once more, the political behaviour ascribed to the nomads in question. This may be a separate event from the one that Ṭihrānī mentions, but in Samarqandi’s account they become the victims of a raid by Ḥusayn Bayqara: “He assailed all the tribal and nomadic pastoral groups (aymāq va ahlām) that there were as far as Baṣṭām and most of the possessions of the nomads (ṣahrā nišīnān) were made booty”.39 Samarqandi’s wording suggests that these people were tied to the Timūrid regime. Yet, their significance seems to reside mostly in the fact that their possessions were a valuable resource more or less at the ruler’s disposal.

This section has attempted to provide further evidence of the more pronounced inclination of the western historian to portray pastoral nomads as active political players. By contrast, the eastern author tends to depict such populations as being rather dependent on the good will of a ruler. Both, however, seem to employ the designation *ahlām* only for pastoral nomadic groups related to the regime that each historian wrote for. The following section will leave the question of agency somewhat aside and turn in more detail to the terminological analysis of specific designations. The main point to be discussed is the significance that each author attaches to the term *ahlām* and the Turko-Mongol concepts *īl* and *ulūs*, first and foremost in reference to their respective patron polities.

Terms of reference: *ahlām*, *īl*, *ulūs* and the patron polity in times of crisis

By discussing some passages that deal with political crises within the Timūrid and the Aq Qoyunlu regimes, this section will analyse some aspects of their respective historian’s use of the terms *īl* and *ulūs*. This will first deal with the way these terms are linked to the term *ahlām* and the extent to which Samarqandi and Ṭihrānī employ them as a positive reference to their own polity, either as terms standing alone or in various combinations. Before

---

getting into the analysis proper, the following two paragraphs will give some brief explanations of the terms *īl* and *ulūs*, which gained particular prominence after the Mongol invasions of the Middle East.

The terms *īl* and *ulūs* often occur together and usually point to some sort of tribal structure. Mindful of this strong tribal connotation, Paul, has nevertheless persuasively suggested that both terms, especially in combination, may also be used to designate pastoral nomadic groups and warriors coming from such a background. They are indeed employed in this way by the two historians considered here, although there are differences between Samarqandi’s and Ţîhrâni’s use of *īl* and *ulūs*.

Gerhard Doerfer has explained that, in Mongolian, the latter term, *ulūs*, denotes a tribal confederation from the perspective of its ruler. However, Peter Jackson, for example, has stressed that it refers more specifically to a complex system of rights to pastures and populations distributed among the relatives and descendents of Chingis Khan. The former term, *īl*, on the one hand, implies the notions of ‘submission’ and ‘peace’ and, on the other, may be understood as denoting a confederation of mostly tribal political entities characterised by a peaceful state of affairs within that alliance. Doerfer proposes the German term *Friedensgemeinschaft* as an appropriate translation, taking the various connotations into account. The probably original Turkic form *el* may also be translated in the general sense of ‘people’, ‘country’ or ‘polity’, while ‘peace’ seems to be the most general common meaning. According to Allsen, the notion of ‘submission’ is clearly expressed by the Mongol title ‘Īlhān’, as it indicates the status of the Chingisid rulers of Iran as being subordinate to their cousins who had taken over the Chinese Empire. As outlined above, the rule of the Mongol Īlhāns became a major reference in terms of historical legitimacy, especially to the eastern author, Samarqandi. However, one important thing to note is that, as Bert Fragner has pointed out, the Īlhānid rulers actually reconstituted Iran as

---

44 Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente*: II, p. 17; Allsen, *Culture and conquest*: pp. 20-1; Starostin, Sergei, Dybo, Anna and Mudrak, Oleg, *Etymological dictionary of the Altaic languages*. 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2003): I, p. 501. The author of this article is aware of criticism levied against this dictionary. While giving the reference in order to clarify a general linguistic issue, he wishes to refrain from interfering in specialist debates, for lack of competence.
a political entity, centred in the western region of Azerbaijan with Tabriz as its capital city. Yet, apart from claims to this historical connection, the terms īl and ulūs themselves will be shown to play a more significant role in the political language of the western author, Ṭīhrānī.

In the preceding sections, we have seen that both historians use the term ahšām in a similar way as a designation for distinct pastoral groups, but the analysis also suggested that Ṭīhrānī, in addition, gives much prominence to this term in the conceptualisation of the Aq Qoyunlu polity itself. This now becomes particularly clear, as he links it closely to the terms īl and ulūs, while none of the three seems to have particularly positive connotations with reference to the Timūrid regime in Samarqandi’s work.

The passage from Ṭīhrānī to be analysed in the following paragraph reports events that occurred during the so-called ‘great civil war’ during the middle of the fifteenth century. Several Aq Qoyunlu princes were fighting each other in changing constellations and with varying outside allies. I believe that ahšām, as well as general terms such as laškar, is applied somewhat indiscriminately to denote the militarily active nomadic followers who, in some way, constituted the backbone of the regime. The terms īl and ulūs may be rendered as ‘confederation’ or ‘confederate tribal following’ and appear to refer to the most complex level of Aq Qoyunlu political organization, with the connotation of ‘community’. This is not to say that these translations are appropriate in every context, but Ṭīhrānī’s use of the terms is significant, in this instance, as there was no commonly recognised ruler during the events described.

At one point during this period of severe internal strife, the faction to which Uzun Ḥasan belonged was threatened by his powerful uncle Ḥamza (d. 1444), who was the most promising pretender to supreme leadership. In the face of this threat, Uzun Ḥasan was charged with gathering his people and household (mardum va ḥāna) near Kemah and bringing them to Erzincan, together with the tribal followers and confederate nomadic warriors of the Aq Qoyunlu (īl va ahšām). In the next sentence, the author makes no distinction between these terms, reporting that: “those ahšām had dispersed at the news of the arrival of Ḥamza and it was difficult to reassemble them.” In the fighting that ensued, ahšām and laškarīvān attached to individual princes and commanders are mentioned, while some important representatives of the regime gradually turned away from Ḥamza. In the course of one battle, Uzun Ḥasan successfully attacked his uncle’s

encampment, whereupon “Ḥamza fled toward Diyarbakir while everyone of the ʾil va aḥšām whom he helped to escape headed in whatever direction they could.”47 This led to the temporary installation of Uzun Ḥasan’s cousin Ja′far as supreme leader, but he quickly realised that the confederation (ʾil) disliked him, and he left. Ṭihrānī then names three Aq Qoyunlu chiefs (ruʿ asā) who stayed with the community (ulūs) when numbers of aḥšām had gone over to Ḥamza, and who despatched someone to bring Jaʿfar back to the ʾil; his father, Yaʿqūb, who led another faction to which Uzun Ḥasan was allied, had also left, scared of the consensus of the ulūs.48 Soon, Jaʿfar was back among the ʾil, but his and his supporters’ activities made the ulūs abandon him once more, so he fled and the tribal and confederate pastoralist warriors (ʾil va aḥšām) gathered around his father. Yaʿqūb, however, was equally forced to take flight in the face of the superior power of Ḥamza, as he was apparently lacking support from the high commanders of the confederation (sardārān-i ulūs). Despite this setback, Uzun Ḥasan led an assault on some units, scattering the confederate tribal warriors (ʾil) who then appealed to Ḥamza, except for a minority who had opposed him before.49

In this passage, the terms ʾil and ulūs both obviously stand for the most complex level of the Aq Qoyunlu polity. However, Ṭihrānī does not use them together in the combination ʾil va ulūs, but uses instead ʾil in combination with aḥšām, and this designation seems to be simply synonymous with ulūs. Moreover, Ṭihrānī’s use of these terms conveys the impression that they constituted essential elements of the Aq Qoyunlu conception of political community. There is a strong tribal connotation inherent in these designations, but the nomadic warriors, aḥšām, appear as a constituent part of this community. Given that the Aq Qoyunlu did not have a leader who was recognised by all relevant representatives of the regime, one might ask whether ulūs in fact exclusively denotes a nomadic-tribal polity from the perspective of the ruler, as Doerfer asserts. We have an example in Ṭihrānī of exactly this perspective when he states that Uzun Ḥasan headed towards Ottoman Anatolia with the entire ulūs.50 In the passage analysed above, however, ulūs seems rather to connote ‘community’ in the sense of ‘basic body politic’. Furthermore, it does not seem to imply a specific pattern of political or socio-economic organisation, as was the case with the Chingisid ulūs.

As regards ʾil, Ṭihrānī similarly seems to discard the sense of

47 Ṭihrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya: p. 149.
48 Ibid.: pp. 150-1.
50 Ibid.: p. 385.
‘submission’ so characteristic of the Mongol context and gives it rather the general connotation of ‘people’ or ‘polity’. By linking īl to aḥšām and by using it synonymously with ulūs, the author makes explicit the tribal-confederate character of the Aq Qoyunlu political order. However his inclusion of aḥšām in such a formula equally suggests that pastoral nomadism was a fundamental feature of their regime.

The eastern historian, Samarqandī, occasionally uses the formula īl va ulūs to specify a distinct community in the sense exposed by Doerfer. However, he does not link any of these terms to aḥšām and his use of the formula does not make the groups so designated appear as pillars of the Timūrid polity. As an example, one could take Samarqandī’s report of an event during the reign of Šāhruḫ. The sultan’s forces put two emirs to flight and took the son of one of them prisoner. The report ends by stating that this son’s followers, simply called his īl va ulūs, were left in turmoil after the incident.51 In another passage, describing activities of the Jalāyir in the region of Māzandaran, Samarqandī is quite explicit as far as their nomadic-pastoral way of life is concerned,52 but again he does not make a concept central to the Timūrid political order out of the formula or either of its components:

His glorious majesty [i.e. Husayn Bayqara] […] threw the ray of attention onto the eradication of the Jalāyir īl. The Jalāyir īl, since long ago, had grazing grounds and a station in this province and thought that this entire dominion was lawfully their own; they had gathered large herds and flocks and countless mounts and followers, so that they imagined that they needed not tolerate a governor they did not want in this dominion; they made bloodshed and sedition their custom, and engaged in nothing but raiding and booty […] For the sake of good order, his glorious majesty wished to make it the fate of the disobedient among them to have their feet fettered in chains and to free the confines of that dominion from the troubles caused by that tribe

51 Samarqandī, Maṭla’ al-sa’dayn: II/1, p. 309.

52 There were several groups known under the name Jalāyir, but it is not evident whether or how they may have been related to each other. One group bearing this name was a Mongol tribe that participated in the conquest of Iran and became one of the western Ilḫānid successor dynasties. A second group known as Jalāyir was a powerful tribe in eastern Iran and Central Asia at the time of Timūr and throughout much of the fifteenth century. See Masson Smith Jr., John, “Djalāyir/Djalāyirids”, EI², II [1965]: pp. 400-1; Manz, Beatrice Forbes, The rise and rule of Tamerlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): pp. 85-8; Subtelny, Timurids in transition: p. 71.
(jamā’ at). He ordered the tuvāčī emirs to bring to the īl va ulūs of the Jalāyir the good news that he had stipends and a land grant assigned to them in that province; in the manner of secretaries, and in order to deceive the Jalāyir people (mardum), they negotiated this issue for a couple of days. They appointed agents to lead them and on the stipulated day, the Jalāyir tribe (qawm) came collectively […] and, according to the arranged plan, they were taken captive and decapitated […].

The formula īl va ulūs is a mere convention in this passage. In order to designate the Jalāyir, Samarqandī equally uses īl alone as well as various generic terms such as jamā’ at, qawm and mardum. None of these designations, however, seems to imply that these people were of particular importance to the Timūrid regime. While the author states that these Jalāyir had long been present in the area, his interest in them here stems mainly from the fact that they had caused trouble within the Timūrid realm, whereupon the sultan took justified action against them.

When describing events that put at risk the unity or the very existence of the regime, comparable to those quoted from Čehrānī above, the Timūrid historian stresses the significance of princes and individual commanders in a similar way. One such example of external threat and internal strife is Samarqandī’s report of the temporary conquest of Herat by the Qara Qoyunlu in 1458. Over the entire episode, the troops are designated by the generic terms laškar and sipāh in all but one instance: One of the Timūrid princes involved reorganised his military following (tabl va ‘alam va ḥayl va ḥašam) after being released from captivity. The terms īl or ulūs, however, do not occur at all in Samarqandī’s rendering of these events.

This section has focused on the way each historian uses the terms īl and ulūs in passages dealing with political crises. While these terms have a strong tribal connotation, they may also refer to pastoral nomadic groups or designate a distinct political entity. Although Samarqandī and Čehrānī both sometimes use these terms in a similar way in other contexts, the passages analysed, here, reveal differences as well. Samarqandī mainly employs īl and ulūs combined and in a formulaic fashion. He seems to consider neither term to be an important conceptual reference to his Timūrid patron regime,

---

53 Samarqandī, Maṭla’ al-sa’dayn: II/2, p. 905. The ‘tuvāčī emirs’ may be regarded as military-administrative officials whose primary responsibility was the conscription and equipment of troops as well as the keeping of relevant records (see Manz, Rise and rule: p. 84). On the translation of jamā’ at or other generic group designations such as qawm as tribe, see n. 31.

54 Samarqandī, Maṭla’ al-sa’dayn: II/2, pp. 829-51.

while Ṭihrānī, in contrast, uses *il* and *ulūs* as fundamental concepts in reference to the Aq Qoyunlu polity. Furthermore, he includes the term *ahšām* in such references and thereby points to the importance that may have been ascribed to ordinary warriors and pastoral nomads in the political affairs of the Aq Qoyunlu regime. This perspective is less likely to be found in Samarqandī’s work, although further research is certainly needed to clarify these issues, but one may assume that neither historian would refer to the polity of his patrons in terms that were unacceptable among the respective leaderships. The same may be said of the stylisation of mobile pastoralism as an aesthetic feature, which will be the topic of the following section.

**Terms of style: The aesthetics of mobile pastoralism**

In this section, I compare the use of metaphors and other stylistic features in both authors. The thesis is that, in this respect, there is a difference between them too: while Ṭihrānī uses metaphors taken from the world of pastoral nomadism or closely linked to it, such metaphors are absent in Samarqandī. This use of metaphors is tentatively seen as part of ‘nomadic aesthetics’, here understood as a conscious use of nomadic referents in a text.

Terms from the field of pastoral nomadism that refer to specific groups, such as military followers, tribal warriors and distinct political entities, are used quite differently by Samarqandī and Ṭihrānī. With respect to the metaphoric use of pastoralist themes, further differences can be observed. Ṭihrānī gives much prominence to imagery derived from mobile pastoralism, while Samarqandī hardly makes use of such themes as aesthetic elements in his narrative.

In the first example to be quoted from Ṭihrānī, he also applies the formula *il va ulūs* to a distinct political entity in a rather conventional way. He reports the death of the Qara Qoyunlu ruler Qara Yusuf in 1420, stating that his people were left in turmoil, and adds a comment that concludes with an Arabic quotation: “from the royal throne he mounted onto the plank of the coffin and descended to the pasture of ‘the grave is the first of the final resting places’”.

Although Ṭihrānī was commenting on the death of a rival

---

56 Ṭihrānī, *Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya*: p. 74. In the printed edition, the concluding passage in Arabic is marked as a quotation without an indication of a source. A variant of this saying, which replaces ‘final resting places’ with ‘resting places of the afterlife’, is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in one of the canonical collections (see Ibn Māja/Muhammad ibn Yazīd al-Qazvīnī, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, ed. 'Abd al-Baqqī, Muhammad Fu’ād and al-Zahbī, Muṣṭafā Muḥammad Ḥusayn, 4 vols. [Cairo, Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1998]: III, pp. 523-4).
ruler, the reference to pastoralism is clearly a positive one. Samarqandī also makes a rhymed comment on the death of this ruler, who was also a rival of the Tīmūrids. Since Qara Yūsuf died unexpectedly, while Šāhrūḫ was approaching to campaign against him, Samarqandī plays on these motifs. He employs similar religious imagery, but no metaphors derived from mobile pastoralism.57

The closest one may get to a conscious recourse to ‘nomadic aesthetics’ in Samarqandī’s work are descriptions of festivities in the gardens of Herat. His report about the circumcision ceremony of a Tīmūrid prince is introduced with the classic Persian rose and nightingale motifs. Then, the author proceeds to praise the arrangement of the various sorts of tents and pavilions, comparing them to clouds that connect to the moon and the sun in the sky, so that the scenery would make able engineers appear to be lacking skill.58

In accordance with widespread conceptions regarding the complementarity of medieval horticultural spaces in Iran and the celestial realm,59 Samarqandī also includes references to other cosmic phenomena here, but does not relate them to nomadic pastoral activities. In contrast, Ṭahrānī introduces his description of the circumcision ceremony of Uzun Ḥasan’s sons, first, with a raid against Bedouins in northern Syria, which provided the Aq Qoyunlu with large numbers of animals.60 He then compares the arrangement of the ceremony ground to the image of the sky in the same fashion as the Tīmūrid author, but integrates the planets and stars in a tellingly different way,

When the brightness of the tents and pavilions ignited the courtyard of the moon and the colours of the carpets stole the light from the face of the sun, harp playing Venus, as a reproof, had to learn how to strike the chords from the way the camp erectors fastened the ropes to the tent poles and anchored them in the ground; and thanks to the shining light of this paradisaical assembly place, Mercury could tell black and white apart and watched over the incomes and expenses of those who organised that feast.61

The literary stylisation of the activity of setting up a royal camp, as in this

57 Samarqandī, Maṭla‘ al-sa‘dayn: II/1, p. 283.
58 Ibid.: II/2, p. 641.
60 Ṭahrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya: p. 244.
61 Ibid.: p. 245.
case, is certainly not unique or exceptional in medieval Persian poetic and
narrative works, but Ṣehrānī’s way of employing this motif differs markedly
from Samarqandī’s. The planets and their attributes are not only outshone by
the sight the festivities offer, but only their observation of it [i.e. the setting
up of the camp] enables them to exercise their own special skills and fulfill
their roles. By contrast, Samarqandī merely claims that the arrangement of
the Timūrid campsite is superior to the work of any human engineer.

Ṣehrānī also compares other cosmic and astronomical phenomena to
nomadic pastoral activities in a more pronounced way than does Samar-
qandī. Most notable among these are the seasonal migrations. The western
historian occasionally presents the sun as performing such migrations, and
reports the coming of spring, for instance, by saying, in rhyme, that “the
throne of daylight lustre shifted from its southern winter pastures (qišlāq) to
the homestead of the spring equinox”. In a similar passage, Ṣehrānī depicts
the sun and his principal patron as doing essentially the same thing. He
explains that Uzun Ḥasan approached the summer camp (yaylāq) in the
Erzincan area just as the sun wanders from the southern qišlāq to the
northern yaylāq.

When Samarqandī describes the Timūrid rulers’ seasonal migrations, he
often rather confines himself to recording their movements. While he
sometimes includes metaphoric references to the changing of the seasons, he
seems less inclined to depict them as complementary to pastoral migrations.
A passage in which the eastern author also announces the coming of spring
and reports that Šāhrūḫ went to the summer pastures at that time may be
quoted as an example:

When the wondrous sultan of spring brought the green troops and
odoriferous herbs to the steppe and the gardens, and the cavalry of
winter, which resembles injustice, set out to depart, the supreme
army [of Šāhrūḫ], on the first day of [the lunar month of] Rabī’
Āhir, approached Saraḫs like an animal that was made to fly; they
indulged in the pleasure of hunting for a couple of days, then
swiftly returned to Bāḏgīs and erected the royal tents around this
yaylāq of the king of the world […].

Of course, Samarqandī places the migration in the context of regular
seasonal change, but the comparisons that he makes here do not really

---

64 Samarqandī, Maṭla‘ al-sa‘dayn: II/1, pp. 356-7. Bāḏgīs, a hilly region north of
Herat, was a favourite summer campsite of the Timūrid sultans and Šāhrūḫ went there
frequently. See also Manz, Power, politics and religion: p. 127.
highlight that activity as complementary to the change of the seasons itself. Furthermore, this passage may also provide evidence that his style of writing seems, in general, rather more elaborate than Ṭihrānī’s.

When movements of military detachments are described, one can find similar differences in imagery. While both historians often claim topically that some ruler or commander had at his disposal innumerable troops and an army of immeasurable size, Ṭihrānī, in addition, sometimes relates this motif to a pastoral nomadic context more explicitly. In one passage, for instance, he indicates the size of an army by stating that, in only one day, it was grazing a territory that could sustain another army for a month and that their animals drank dry every river and sought out any stream for water, like a water drawer.65 By placing such great emphasis on the animals, the western historian displays a high degree of sensitivity to the realities of warfare. Since military operations involved large numbers of animals of various sorts, this makes him appear more familiar with a nomadic setting than his eastern counterpart.

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to show that, despite the commonalities between the works of Samarqandī and Ṭihrānī, there are also differences between them. The analysis has focused on terminology and imagery related to pastoral nomadism and differences have emerged in several respects. First, terms applied to nomadic populations occur far more frequently in Ṭihrānī’s account, and the groups designated by these terms figure more prominently as political actors in their own right. Second, such terms are of fundamental importance to Ṭihrānī’s conceptualisation of the Aq Qoyunlu polity, while they do not play a significant role in the way Samarqandī refers to the Timūrid regime. Third, the western historian more readily highlights motifs derived from mobile pastoralism as elements of literary style, thereby showing a markedly higher degree of sensitivity to ‘nomadic aesthetics’ than the eastern author.

These differences may not stem from distinct historiographical traditions. The two works have been analysed from this angle by Melville. However, they may point to slightly distinct political cultures. The differences observed give a sense that features of nomadic political ideology and self-styling were of greater significance within the western Aq Qoyunlu ruling elite than they were among the Timūrid leading circles in the east. At the least, one might say that Ṭihrānī considered these features more appropriate and acceptable to his political environment than did Samarqandī.

65 Ṭihrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakrīya: p. 455.
It is certainly not entirely justifiable to conclude that, on the first level, that of actual behaviour, Aq Qoyunlu political culture generally provided for more favourable attitudes towards pastoral nomadism and its possible military, communal or aesthetic manifestations. But, on the second level, where Ṭihrnī reflects upon the political attitudes and preferences of the Aq Qoyunlu by writing their history, such a difference may, to some degree, be assumed. The western historian more readily ascribes an active role in politics to groups that can be identified as pastoral nomads. Moreover, terms used to denote such groups also occur in characterisations of the Aq Qoyunlu political order itself, and the author is comfortable with ‘nomadic aesthetics’. This cannot be observed to the same extent in the work of Samarqandī, whose history may be considered as a reflection on Timurid political culture. Nevertheless, further research on a number of individual questions is certainly needed if we are to draw reliable conclusions.

However, as regards the role of Persianate bureaucrats in the process of the conceptual integration of Turko-Mongol and Irano-Islamic political models, it needs to be said that Ṭihrnī had a major advantage over Samarqandī. As the Aq Qoyunlu were in possession of Tabriz at the time when he was writing, he could present Uzun Hasan as being at the same time the leader of a nomadic tribal-confederate regime and legitimate king of Iran according to the Ilḫānid dispensation. Even if Samarqandī would have wished to make a similar connection for his Timurid patrons, this option was not available to him.

The principal difficulty to be faced, if one seeks to substantiate the differences discussed in this article, is the lack of detailed analyses that make a reasonable reconstruction of Aq Qoyunlu political culture possible. The classic study by Woods traces their dynastic history and also opens up paths for further research on the subject, but, at least to my knowledge, there are as yet no studies that examine in detail the relations of collaboration and conflict between Persianate bureaucrats and Turko-Mongol political leaders and the specific interests and preferences involved – at least, none comparable to studies that have been made of the Ilḫāns and the Timūrids. Conceding that sources on the Aq Qoyunlu are fewer and more scattered, this article has aimed to show that such studies are worth carrying out and could be expected to produce more adequate and solid explanations for the differences that these western and eastern examples of fifteenth-century Persian historiography display with regard to pastoral nomadism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Beyoğlu, Ağan, Türkmen Boylarının Tarihi ve Etnografyası [History and Ethnography of the Türkmen Tribes] (İstanbul: İstek, 2000).


Meisami, Julie Scott, Persian historiography to the end of the twelfth century (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).


Starostin, Sergei, Dybo, Anna and Mudrak, Oleg, Etymological dictionary of the Altaic languages. 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2003).


Subtelny, Maria E., Timūrids in transition: Turko-Iranian politics and acculturation in medieval Iran (Brill: Leiden, 2007).


Biographical Note:

Daniel Zakrzewski, is junior researcher in the Collaborative Research Center “Difference and Integration” and preparing a PhD thesis on the history of the city of Tabriz in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Currently, his main areas of research are medieval Persian historiography and hagiography as well as the historical geography of north-western Iran. He is also interested in theoretical, methodological and conceptual questions relevant to the study of history in general.