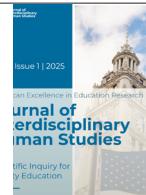




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PATRON OF SCIENCE AND CULTURE IN THE TIMURID DYNASTY: SARAY MULK KHANUM

Abstract. This article examines the historical role and activities of Saroymulk Khanum (Bibi Khanum), a prominent figure of the Timurid Empire. The study analyzes her influence on Amir Temur's political policies, her leadership in scholarly and cultural spheres, her decision-making in critical situations, and her contributions to urban development based on historical sources. In addition, the position of women in the state and society during the Timurid period is explored through the example of Saroymulk Khanum, and her historical legacy is evaluated from a scholarly perspective.

Keywords: Saroymulk Khanum, Timurid Empire, secret letter, The Conqueror's Grandson, bone currency, Spanish envoy, Clavijo's travel account, Bibi Khanum Madrasa, Bibi Khanum Mosque.

INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan has, over many centuries, experienced periods of cultural, economic, and political prosperity. A review of the long history of Uzbek statehood demonstrates that, during these stages of development, women figures also occupied an important position in state governance and social life. Notably, the names of prominent women

such as Tomyris, Bibi Khanum, Nodira, Uvaysiy, Gawhar Shad Begum, and Gulbadan Begum continue to serve as exemplary role models for the younger generation to this day.

MAIN PART

Saray Mulk Khanum is regarded as one of the prominent historical figures recorded in the golden pages of history. Owing to her exceptional services and high esteem at the royal court, she was honored with the titles “Bibi Khanum” and “Great Lady.” Saray Mulk Khanum was the daughter of Qazan Khan, one of the Mongol khans of the Chagatai Ulus, and was born in 1340. At the time when Qazan Khan was deposed from the throne and executed, Saray Mulk Khanum was only five years old (Turgun Fayziyev. Timurid Princesses. Tashkent: Uzbekistan Publishing House, 2009:6.).

In 1355, Saray Mulk Khanum married Husayn ibn Musallab (Amir Husayn). In the spring of 1370, after Amir Temur defeated Husayn ibn Musallab in the battle near Balkh, he took several of Husayn’s wives into his own marriage, among whom was Saray Mulk Khanum. Through this marriage, Amir Temur received the title “Gurgan” (son-in-law of the khan). As Saray Mulk Khanum belonged to the khanly lineage, she held a higher status than other women in the harem.

Her significance, however, was not limited to her noble происхождение alone. She played a vital role as a reliable support to Amir Temur in matters of state administration and was distinguished by her enlightenment, wise counsel, moral virtue, prudence, intelligence, and exceptional insight. In particular, she paid special attention to education and learning, provided patronage to scholars and students, and, at her own expense, commissioned the construction of a madrasa in Samarkand.

Although Saray Mulk Khanum had no children of her own, she played a central role in the upbringing of Amir Temur’s children and grandchildren. The strength of the Timurid dynasty lay in the careful education and upbringing of its heirs. Raising worthy successors was elevated to the level of state policy, and special attention was given to a child from the moment of birth. The responsibility for their upbringing was entrusted to the most suitable and distinguished individuals.

In this regard, Saray Mulk Khanum was deemed worthy of overseeing the education of Mirza Ulugh Beg, the grandson of Sahibqiran Amir Temur. In the narrative “The Grandson of Sahibqiran,” this episode is depicted as follows:

“Today, it was not the sun that awakened the inhabitants of the garden, but the cry of a newborn that broke the silence of dawn. Gawhar Shad Begum, known for her strong and demanding character, gave birth to a son. Although Saray Mulk Khanum had witnessed the birth of many children and grandchildren of the conqueror, the arrival of this infant brought her a special joy. For the child’s father, Shah Rukh Mirza, was as dear to Saray Mulk Khanum as a son of her own. From the moment of his birth, the child was entrusted to the care of the queen, becoming the very soul and essence of the childless sovereign.” (Xurshid Davron. The Grandson of Sahibqiran, or the Tale of a Little Star. Tashkent: Sharq Publishing House, 1995:148.).

In *Mujmal-i Fasihi*, *Fasih Khwafi*, while describing the events of the year seven hundred and eighty-nine (1387), reports that when Amir Temur was staying at Kokcha Tengiz, Saray Mulk Khanum came to him accompanied by Sultan Shah Rukh and Khalil Sultan. This account, in itself, confirms the view that all of Amir Temur’s children and grandchildren were entrusted to the care and upbringing of Saray Mulk Khanum—the wise and prudent queen—from their earliest childhood.

Furthermore, the fact that Shah Rukh Sultan and Khalil Sultan, who were raised under her supervision, developed a strong inclination toward art and literature, while Mirza Ulugh Beg showed a profound devotion to science, learning, literature, and music, allows us to conclude that Saray Mulk Khanum herself was a highly educated, enlightened, and virtuous woman. (Xurshid Davron. The Tale of Bibi Khanum. Tashkent: Sharq Publishing House, 2006:133.)

According to information found in historical sources, Saray Mulk Khanum also took an active part in affairs of state and served as a source of support for Amir Temur through her prudent counsel in difficult situations. One legend recounts that while Amir Temur was away on a campaign, he sent a secret letter to Saray Mulk Khanum, informing her that he sensed signs of treachery among those around him. After some time had passed, the messenger returned from the queen’s residence empty-handed. Surprised by this, Sahibqiran asked:

– Where is the reply letter?

The messenger replied that Saray Mulk Khanum had not written a response. Knowing well his wife's wisdom, Amir Temur then inquired:

– What did the queen do after reading the letter?

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The messenger reported that immediately after reading the message, Saray Mulk Khanum had ordered the trees in the garden to be cut down. Amir Temur understood the symbolic meaning of her action and, on that very day, eliminated those who were privy to the confidential military plan.

This account illustrates not only Saray Mulk Khanum's intelligence and presence of mind, but also her ability to convey crucial political messages through subtle and symbolic actions, thereby safeguarding the interests of the state.

In conclusion, Saray Mulk Khanum understood that writing an open letter could be dangerous and that a secret message might fall into the hands of the courtiers before reaching Amir Temur. Through this symbolic gesture, she intended to convey the warning: "Those around you are betraying you."

According to another account, when Amir Temur began his campaign against Iran, the siege of Isfahan was prolonged, and the army faced a shortage of provisions due to insufficient funds. Finally, Amir Temur sent a messenger to Samarkand with a letter addressed to Saray Mulk Khanum. The letter was brief, stating: "The army's supplies have run out; send funds from the treasury."

Upon understanding the letter's content, Saray Mulk Khanum added a comment on its reverse side: "Great Amir, if your funds have run out, does that mean your policy has also ended?" She then dispatched the messenger back.

When Amir Temur received the letter, he carefully considered Saray Mulk Khanum's pointed remark and devised a solution. On that same day, he collected the bones of sheep, cattle, horses, and camels that had been slaughtered in the camp, sorted them by size, assigned high value to the larger bones and lower value to the smaller ones, and stamped them with a heated steel seal, putting them into temporary circulation as a substitute currency. Consequently, neighboring towns and villages used the "bone money" to supply the army with food. Soon after Isfahan surrendered, the bone currency was replaced with real coins.

This episode illustrates Saray Mulk Khanum's keen political insight, her practical wisdom in crisis management, and her ability to guide Amir Temur's decisions through subtle yet effective counsel.

According to the court protocols established in Amir Temur's palace, women were also granted the right to participate in ceremonies for receiving ambassadors. This is confirmed by Ruy González de Clavijo, the envoy sent by King Henry III of Spain to Amir Temur's court. During his visit to Samarkand, Clavijo recorded his observations in "Embassy to Amir Temur's Court in Samarkand", which contains highly valuable details, including a precise description of Saray Mulk Khanum's appearance.

According to the travelogue, the queen wore a long and wide sleeveless, collarless red royal gown, embroidered with gold, whose hems brushed the ground. To facilitate her movement, fifteen women lifted the hem of her gown. Her face was heavily covered with white powder to protect it from the sun, so much so that it appeared like a sheet of white paper. All noblewomen traveling, whether in winter or summer, applied similar powder to their faces.

Over her face, a fine white silk cloth was draped, and atop her head she wore a very tall red headdress resembling a battle helmet, with its ends resting on her shoulders. Her thick, braided hair fell onto her shoulders, as black hair was highly prized, sometimes dyed to make it appear even darker. Several attendants held her red cap in place to prevent it from slipping. In total, nearly three hundred women accompanied the queen.

This detailed account not only illustrates the splendor of Saray Mulk Khanum's attire and courtly presentation, but also reflects the ceremonial grandeur and the importance of female presence in Amir Temur's court. (Turgun Fayziyev. Timurid Princesses. Tashkent: Uzbekistan Publishing House, 2009:8–9.)

Moreover, Saray Mulk Khanum's contribution to education, enlightenment, and cultural development during the Timurid period was unparalleled. She devoted significant attention to transforming Samarkand into a center of culture. The Bibi Khanum Madrasa, which she commissioned at her own expense, stands as a lasting symbol of her dedication to knowledge and learning.

One day, Amir Temur embarked on a military campaign to India, departing from Samarkand. Before the dust of his hundred-thousand-strong army had even settled on the ground, Bibi Khanum began to put into action the plan she had long harbored in secret. She summoned the most renowned architects and engineers of Samarkand to her council and ordered them to construct a madrasa even more magnificent than any other building in the capital, which was already celebrated across the world and praised in many lands as “the jewel of the Earth.” (Xurshid Davron. The Tale of Bibi Khanum. Tashkent: Sharq Publishing House, 2006:107.)

When she declared her willingness to spend all the wealth she had accumulated over forty years—including the precious treasures brought to her by her illustrious husband from distant and foreign lands—the masters present at the council were so overwhelmed by the prospect of the building’s grandeur that they could hardly contain themselves, biting their tongues in astonishment.

This legend further demonstrates how important and necessary the madrasa was to Bibi Khanum. At the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, the Bibi Khanum Madrasa stood out among the madrasas of Samarkand for its immense size and grandeur. For many years, it served as one of the leading centers of education and scholarship in Samarkand.

Highly qualified teachers of the era were appointed to the madrasa, providing instruction to students in both religious and secular sciences. Bibi Khanum personally oversaw the madrasa’s activities. According to accounts, she would change her attire each night and visit the madrasa in secret, observing the students’ academic progress,

their spirits, daily routines, and the tasks they engaged in during the night. This careful supervision reflects her dedication to education and the cultivation of knowledge.

The Bibi Khanum Madrasa, built by the queen herself, was even more magnificent than Amir Temur's Jami Mosque and surpassed it in terms of architecture and decorative artistry. However, its rapid and hasty construction ultimately led to its gradual deterioration over time.

Today, archaeologists have identified the foundation walls of the Bibi Khanum Madrasa, while the central section, which houses Bibi Khanum's mausoleum, has been transformed into a pilgrimage site. The front of the mausoleum is adorned with colorful glazed tiles, while the interior decorations are finished with green, red, and black pigments. Blue star-shaped patterns were incorporated into the tiles, framed by ornamental tile borders. The mausoleum can be accessed from the outside through a special entrance. Its walls are decorated with a variety of tiles, and within the mausoleum rests a stone sarcophagus.

In Samarkand, there is also the famous Bibi Khanum Jami Mosque. Amir Temur commissioned the construction of this mosque for his great wife, Saray Mulk Khanum, upon his return from the campaign in India, between 1399 and 1404. Accordingly, it became widely known as the "Bibi Khanum" Jami Mosque.

The mosque is considered one of the largest monuments in Central Asia. Its courtyard measures 63.8 by 76.0 meters and is surrounded by iwans and portals. The total area of the mosque complex is 167 by 109 meters.

Over time, the Bibi Khanum Mosque suffered significant damage from earthquakes and fell into ruin. Today, the mosque exists as six separate sections that are no longer connected. In the upper part of the courtyard stands a high iwan with a mihrab, the main portal of the mosque is split into two, and a single minaret remains preserved in the northwest corner.

Originally, these sections were connected by three rows of slender marble columns with lightweight iwans, above which there were 400 small domes. In total, there were 480 columns, spaced 3.5 meters apart; their lower sections featured special pedestals, the middle sections were carved with intricate patterns, and the upper sections were adorned with colored tiles forming domes.

At the center of the courtyard, a large marble platform was placed for reading the Qur'an. It was originally located inside the main building but was moved to the courtyard in 1875 due to the risk of the dome collapsing. This platform was commissioned by Ulugh Beg Mirza and bears the inscription: "Sultoni A'zam, the exalted khan, protector of religion, guardian of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, noble sultan, son of Sultan, Amir al-Mu'minin Ulugh Beg Koragon."

The upper part of the large portal at the entrance to the Bibi Khanum Mosque collapsed during the earthquake of 1897. Inside the portal was a smaller secondary iwan with a carved marble-framed door. On the lintel above the door, the year of the mosque's construction and Amir Temur's genealogy were inscribed. The mosque originally had a double-leaf door called the "Haft Josh", made from an alloy of seven different metals, which has since been lost.

Although the mosque now stands in ruins, the extraordinary elegance of its elaborate decorations still captures attention. The vibrant patterns and intricate designs reflect the refined taste and high skill of the craftsmen of that era.

On February 18, 1405, Sahibqiran Amir Temur passed away in Otrar, and his grandson, Khalil Sultan Mirza (1384–1411), ascended the throne in Samarkand. According to Ibn Arabshah, in 1408, Khalil Sultan Mirza's wife, Shod Mulk Begum, poisoned Saray Mulk Khanum, resulting in her death.

Saray Mulk Khanum's body was placed in a stone sarcophagus in the mausoleum next to the madrasa she had commissioned, where it was mummified and buried. (n.ziyouz.com/portal-haqida/xarita/tarix/temuriy-malikalar/saroy-mulk-xonim-bibixonim)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the indelible mark left by Saroy Mulk Khanum in history reflects the fulfillment and dignity of her life. She has become a model of loyalty, courage, refinement, knowledge, and diligence for modern Uzbek women. Her historical legacy, along with her moral and ethical qualities, confirms that Saroy Mulk Khanum is a historical figure worthy of admiration and emulation. She was a woman of political influence with a voice in the affairs of the state. Collecting, analyzing, and studying the life and multifaceted activities of Sahibqiran's great consort Saroy Mulk Khanum

provides the present generation—especially women—with essential lessons and a timeless example of inspiration.

At present, all practical measures are being taken in our country to ensure that women and girls find their place in society. Increasing their role in society has become one of the priority directions of state policy. A number of legal documents protecting their rights have been adopted, and many privileges have been provided.

These include: the Decree PQ-4235 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 7, 2019, “On measures to further strengthen the guarantees of women’s labor rights and support entrepreneurial activity”; the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Protecting Women from Oppression and Violence”; the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men”; the Resolution No. 402 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated June 23, 2020, “On approving the procedure for issuing recommendations to women to participate in the competition within the framework of additional state grant quotas for higher education institutions and organizing their admission”; as well as the Presidential Decree PF-158 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 11, 2023, under the 25th goal of the “Uzbekistan – 2030” strategy, “Ensuring gender equality, continuing the policy of increasing the socio-political activity of women and increasing the share of women in leadership positions to 30 percent”.

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