CHAPTER ONE

THE ROUTINIZATION OF CHARISMA: THE TIMURID PATRIMONIAL HOUSEHOLD STATE

In accordance with the typological classification developed by Max Weber for the forms of legitimate domination in history, we may characterize the rise and rule of the nomadic warlord Temür (d. 807/1405), as having been based on charismatic authority. Temür’s ambition was to recreate the Mongol empire and reinstate the old Chinggisid order, and he did so as much by force of his own personality as through political machination and manipulation.1 In Weber’s view, charisma accounted for the role of the personal element in history, and he saw it as a creative revolutionary force that could disrupt rational rule, tradition, and even all notions of sanctity. At the same time, he acknowledged that charisma was intrinsically unstable, as the leader had to continually prove himself in order to maintain his legitimacy in the eyes of his followers.2

In the case of Temür, the Turko-Mongolian conception of authority based on charisma (qut) rather than birthright meshed with Perso-Islamic notions of divinely bestowed kingly glory (farr), good fortune (daulat, bakht), and manifest destiny (maqdūr).3 Weber’s concept of charisma was first applied to the assessment of Temür’s career by Eric Voegelin who, in an intuitive essay, demonstrated how he was viewed by the

1 For a study of Temūr in the context of the tribal politics of the Ulus Chaghatay, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41–65.
early Humanists who sought to explain the role of fortune (fortuna) in the course of world history. Voegelin noted that the portrayal of Temür by Renaissance writers actually captured the essential nature of his historical situation more accurately than did later assessments of him that were based on either psychological or purely pragmatic notions of causality. That portrayal was based in part on reports by such contemporary European observers as Bertrando de Mignanelli and Jean of Sultaniyya, who in some instances even contributed to the mythical enhancement of his image.

Not that Temür’s image needed enhancing, for he was extremely adept at manipulating it himself in ways that attest to a deep appreciation for historical precedent combined with a flair for the esoteric. As if to underscore the cosmic dimensions of his own perceived universalist mission, Temür adopted the honorific title, “Lord of the auspicious conjunction” (ṣāhib-qirān), by which he is known in the Persian historiographical tradition. He claimed to communicate with the divine world through an angel, to have prophetic dream visions, and to read the thoughts of his followers. Perhaps most astutely, he linked himself genealogically to two meta-historical figures who were embodiments of charismatic authority in the politico-ideological and religio-cultural spheres, respectively—Chinggis Khan (d. 1227), whose avatar he claimed to be, and ʿAlī b. Abī ʿṬālib (d. 661), the first Shiʿite imām and Perfect Man of esoteric Islam. Not surprisingly, this dual genealogical connec-

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5 See Tilman Nagel, “Tamerlan im Verständnis der Renaissance,” Oriente Moderno, n.s., 15, no. 2 (1996), 1:205–12; and H. Moranvillé, ed., “Mémoire sur Tamerlan et sa cour par un Dominicain, en 1403,” Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes 55, no. 5 (1894): 462–63. By way of example, in Jean’s account we find a reference to Temür’s having ascended to heaven on a ladder, guided by an angel, the forty rungs of the ladder symbolizing the length of time he was destined to rule.
6 See Manz, Rise and Rule of Tamerlane, 14–16.
7 I.e., whose destiny is governed by the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Venus. For the cosmological significance of the title and previous applications of it, see Tilman Nagel, Timur der Eroberer und die islamische Welt des späten Mittelalters (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993), 10–13, n. 18; and Nagel, “Tamerlan,” 212.