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Imagining Samarkand: Fruitful Themes in 13th-16th Century Literature on a Silk Road City

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The aim of this paper is to discuss the extent to which travelers, writers, poets and mythologies exchanged ideas about the city of Samarkand in the Mughal and Timurid eras causing the development of specific historical ideas surrounding this specific city. In order to do this, the paper lays out a brief history of the city, followed by literary analyses of histories of the city. It uses these analyses to illustrate the relationships between histories and myths which arose at various points on the silk road and to point to thematic development surrounding Samarkand. In doing this, it argues that an exchange of information about the city of Samarkand led to the development of an idea of the city which continues to impact academic discussions. The paper pays particular attention to Persian and Mughal Indian materials. It relies primarily on historical accounts from the 13th-16th centuries, myths and semi-historical accounts recorded in this time about earlier eras, and poetry from across Eurasia which references the city. In other words, this paper is not meant to be a history of Samarkand itself; it is rather provides a history of the myths and stories which surround the discourse of the Samarkand.

The ancient city of Afrasiab, which grew into Samarkand, was settled around the 7th century B.C.E. The city flourished under both the Achamenids and the Greeks; the Greeks knew the city as Maracanda, and Alexander the Great remained there with his troops for two years.¹ Samarkand remained the central city of Sogd throughout the first millennium C.E., however Sogdiana and the city were almost always dominated by a foreign empire.² Samarkand was taken by the Arabs in 712 and for two centuries Samarkand was the Eastern-most city of the Islamic world.³ While Muslims had nominal control in Fergana in this period, Samarkand was seen as the last great urban Islamic stop.⁴ Perhaps because of this, the period between the Arab invasion of Samarkand and the Mongol invasion in 1220 fomented many of

1 Grenet, Franz. *Samarqand, History and Archeology* in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Columbia University Press, July 2002.

2 De la Vaissiere, Etienne. *Sogdian Traders: A History*. Translator: James Ward. Brill Publishers, Boston, 2005. p. 28.

3 De la Vaissiere, *Sogdian Traders*. p. 266.

4 Kennedy, Hugh. *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed The World We Live in*. De Capo Press, Philadelphia PA, 2007, p. 294-295.

the mythologies about the city, which will feature prominently in this paper. The vast majority of the population of Samarkand was executed upon the arrival of the Mongols, and the city took about a century to recover; during this time, it was ruled by Mongols, who at various points were in opposition to the Mongol capital at Karakorum.⁵ Emir Timur made the city his official capital in 1469 after a series of highly successful battles throughout Central and South Asia.⁶ While this paper makes an effort to focus on the Mongol and Timurid eras of the city, much of what was written by these dynasties was influenced by perceptions of earlier Islamic glory.

First- and second-hand travel literature and accounts by natives of the city would logically provide the most reliable information of the city, although already by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries many travelers and locals bought into previously established myths and semi-histories related to Samarkand. Samarkand proved a tempting subject for its conquerers, the most famous of whom was, of course Timur (Tamerlane), who wrote of his capital in his memoir, the *Mulfazat Timury*.⁷ Timur viewed his rise to power as divinely ordained by a saint.⁸ Timur's accounts of Samarkand largely relate to the terrors faced by the city before his arrival,⁹ and his role in creating a peaceful realm.¹⁰ Timur's style of conquest demanded that he spend 20 years traveling, from the Aegean Sea to Eastern India, in search to new lands and people to conquer¹¹. It was only after he conquered Delhi that he returned to Samarkand, in 1369 C.E., to rule his empire from that city.¹² From then on, his conquests often took place during excursions from the city, in one memorable instance, under the pretense of a hunting expedition. Timur largely writes of Samarkand as a place to be returned to; although times of peace in his Empire were rare,

5 Hildinger, Eric, *Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia 500 B.C. To 1700 A.D.* Da Capo Press, Cambridge MA, 1997. p. 127 and 169.

6 Hildinger, Eric, *Warriors of the Steppe*. p. 178-179.

7 It is likely Timur did not compose this piece himself, but rather commissioned a subordinate to do so for him.

8 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury: Autobiographical Memoirs of the Moghul Emperor Timur*, Translated: Charles Stewart, Oriental Translation Fund, London, 1930. p. 25.

9 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury*. p. 12.

10 Ibid. p. 138.

11 Curtis, William Eleroy. *Turkestan: The Heart of Asia*. Hodder and Stoughton, New York, 1911. p. 187.

12 Curtis, *Turkestan: The Heart of Asia*. 189.

he spent these moments in Samarkand, where he built mosques and became a patron of the arts.¹³ Timur also recounts the many foreign peoples he brought back to Samarkand, including ambassadors and brides for members of court, which could indicate his desire to create a cosmopolitan capital reflective of his large empire.¹⁴ Finally, Timur portrays much of his early travel and conquest as adventurous opportunities for greatness, as he entered middle age he seems to have developed a greater desire to remain in Samarkand. He increasingly referred to it as both a religiously and cultural acceptable place for a man of his stature to reside.¹⁵ After establishing his throne in Samarkand in 1369, he repeatedly refers to battles and conquests along the frontiers of his realms as disagreeable¹⁶. Unfortunately, the *Mulfazat Timury* ends in the year 1375, limiting our knowledge about Timur's evolving relationship with his city as he entered old age.

The most notable of Timur's descendents to write on Samarkand are the Mughal dynasts, who, after conquering Samarkand and Bokhara, set their sights on the Afghan cities of Herat and Kabul, before ultimately conquering the Delhi sultanate in 1526. Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty conquered and lost Samarkand twice.¹⁷ He wrote of the city with great passion in his memoir, the *Baburnama*. Babur writes that when he thought of Samarkand "there was in me an ambition of rule and a desire of conquest."¹⁸ Like Timur, Babur believed that his conquest of Samarkand was divinely ordained, writing of a dream that predicts his capture of the city¹⁹. At some point he seems to have concluded that too long a respite in the city was dangerous, and blamed his relaxed lifestyle there in 1501 C.E. his territorial losses.²⁰ However, he does recognize that his historic claims to the city give him great power and legitimacy to his residents, something he seems to relish. He writes that he hoped that there was no

13 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury*. p. 138.

14 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury*. p. 148.

15 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury*. p. 138-140.

16 Timur, *The Mulfazat Timury*. p. 140, p. 145, 153.

17 Babur, *Baburnama: The Memoirs of Babur*, Translated by Annette Susannah Beveridge. Luzac and Co, London, 1921, p. 90 and 141.

18 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, p. 92

19 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, p. 132.

20 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, 141-143.

likelihood that the Samarkandis would defend an Uzbek rule of their city, and that they were more likely to greet his forces as a return of legitimate rule.²¹ Also, unlike his ancestor, who rarely wrote of the people of Saarkand outside of describing their misery before his arrival, Babur writes that they are “sure-in-faith, law abiding and religious.”²² Babur is fascinated by the history of the city, positing that its people are descendents of Alexander the Great.²³ Finally, Babur wrote of a particular pleasure of Samarkand that would become a pet memory of his descendents: fruit. Like several travelers to be discussed later, Babur emphasized the sweets of the city; in a letter to his son, Hodayun, in which he encouraged him to retake the city if possible, he wrote, “How can one forget the pleasures of that country... like melons and grapes?”²⁴

Babur's account of Samarkand was used by Mughal rulers, who described their own origins, and his references to the semi-historical aspects of the city became rooted in their own accounts. For example, his son Hodayun, exposes the deep-seated hatred the Mughal leaders felt for the Uzbeks for holding their traditional homeland, along with their simultaneous fear and desire to reconquer Central Asia.²⁵

Later, Emperor Jahangir discussed the fruit of the city, a Mughali preoccupation. He mentions a poet from the city who appeals to him, and notes “What a pity... he hasn't come to give the devotees an apple of Samarkand wisdom.”²⁶ This reference unmistakable, and it is likely Jahangir was aware of the regions' reputation as the greatest fruit-producing region in the known world.

It was not only local rulers who composed first and second-hand memoirs describing the history and nature of Samarkand; foreign travelers, even those who did not visit themselves, were often fascinated by the city's history. Both Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta wrote about Samarkand, and each

21 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, p. 131.

22 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, p. 75

23 Babur, *The Memoirs of Babur*, 75.

24 Foltz, Richard. *Mughal India and Central Asia*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, 129.

25 Hodayun, *Hodayunama*, 4.

26 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. 81.

repeated legends about the place. Polo wrote during the reign of Khubali Khan in China, during which time another of Chengiz Khan's grandsons ruled over Samarkand.²⁷ Polo himself did not actually visit Samarkand, but retold the stories of his father and uncle, who traveled to Samarkand in 1262.²⁸

Although Polo is often treated as the first great western travelers in the region, he came out of a very particular tradition of travel to the east: a search for Christian support in broader Asia. Much of Marco Polo's knowledge of Central Asia likely came from previous expeditions sent to Mongol Khans in the hope of contacting Prestor John, and Polo himself chronicled the supposed history of the relationship between Chengiz Khan and Prestor John.

Thus, Polo's ideas about Samarkand were probably tinged by a need to find and recount stories of Christian allies in the East. Polo wrote that Samarkand "Is a noble city, adorned with beautiful gardens, and surrounded by a plain, in which are all the fruits a man can desire."²⁹ After cataloging the religions of its inhabitants, he proceeds to recount a tale of Chagatai Khan, who Polo believes became a Christian and built a glorious church.³⁰ After Chagatai's death, the new prince showed little inclination towards Christianity, and ordered the destruction of the church. However, the pillar that supported the roof of the church rose from the ground and proved indestructible.³¹ This myth illustrates the extent to which mythologies about Eastern Christian kings played into European desires and sensibilities in the 13th century.³²

Ibn Battuta, who visited Samarkand himself in 1334 C.E., writes that "[Samarkand] is one of the greatest and finest cities, and the most perfect in beauty."³³ Like others, Battuta focused largely on the orchards and fruits of the city; however, he also devoted some of his description to people, stating that

27 Polo, Marco, *The Travels*. Translated: Ronald Latham. Penguin Books, New York, 1958. 81.

28 Polo, *The Travels*. 13 (prologue).

29 Polo, *The Travels*. 81.

30 Polo, *The Travels*. 81.

31 Polo, *The Travels*. 82.

32 Polo, *The Travels*. 13 (prologue).

33 Battuta, Abu Abdullah Muhammad. *Travels in the Near East, Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*. Translated: Rev. Samuel Lee. Dover Books, New York, 2004. 16

the inhabitants of Samarkand “are affectionate to the stranger and better than the people of Bokhara.”³⁴

Like Polo, Battuta was searching for specific religious implications in his travels. Moreover, he also reflects on the influence the Arab invasion had left on Samarkand. While visiting Samarkand, he remarked that many members of the city's population routinely visited the tomb of Qutham, son of Al-Abbas, who participated in the Arab conquest of the city and according to Battuta, “met a martyr's death” during the conquest.³⁵

A second European, who offers more direct knowledge of the city, is the ambassador Clavijo, who was sent by the Spanish Emperor Manuel to meet Timur and report on his empire.³⁶ From 1403 to 1406 Clavijo traveled from Castile to Samarkand, through Turkey and Iran, and then returned following a similar route.³⁷ Clavijo offers an interesting perspective because he was reporting in an official capacity, and was given a high level of access to Timurid officials.³⁸ Clavijo described the city in far greater detail than had earlier European travelers, and seemed most impressed by the displays of wealth within the city, and the extent to which peace was kept among people he described as fundamentally warlike.³⁹ He notes “the richness and abundance of this great capital... is indeed a wonder to behold and it is for this reason that it bears the name 'Samarkand'... two words which signify 'Rich Town.'” In addition, Clavijo touches upon a theme that was popular among the later Mughal writers: the majesty of the fruit of Samarkand. He writes “the melons of this country are abundant and very good, and at the season of Christmas there are so many melons and grapes to be had that it is indeed marvelous.”⁴⁰

Finally, unlike other travelers, Clavijo seems to have enjoyed great independence to travel among other foreign groups in the city, and provides useful information on its cosmopolitan nature. He describes

34 Battuta, *Travels in the Near East, Asia and Africa*. 16.

35 Ibrahimovich, Ibrahimov Nematulla. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta to Central Asia*. Ithaca Press, Reading, UK, 1999. 120.

36 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane: 1403-1406*. Translated: Guy LeStrange. RutledgeCurzon Publishers, Oxon, UK, 2005.

37 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. xiii.

38 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. 222.

39 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. 245, 259, 263, 266, 290 etc.

40 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 286.

how Chinese, Russian, Mongol, Frankish, and Indian merchants and traders mingle in the city, promoting their goods.⁴¹ Additionally, he notes that the natives of the city are of a stunningly diverse background saying “here were seen to be Turks, Arabs and Moors of various sects, with Christians who were Greeks and Armenians, Catholics, Jacobites, Nestorians and Indian folk who baptize with fire in the forehead...”⁴² This description points to two things: first, Clavijo's emphasis on the diversity and lack of cohesion among the Christians within in the city seems to imply that he does not believe there was or ever could be an effective Christian rule within the city; second, his description of the vast diversity of the city points to a level of awareness of its history as a host city to empires.

Before turning to 13th-16th century semi-historical and poetic descriptions of Samarkand, it is important to spend a few moments on the city's position in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi, written around the turn of the millennium. As most Persian language poets of the following centuries were intimately familiar with the *Shahnameh*, it is impossible to write about later epics and poems without reference to the mythology laid out by Ferdowsi.⁴³ In the *Shahnameh*, a king called Afrasiyab leads the Turanians against the Iranians and is the archenemy of the *Shahnameh*'s hero, Rostam. Afrasiyab is the grandson of Tur, who was granted all the lands of Central Asia as far east as the Oxus by his father when the lands of his realm were divided; hence the word Turanian for the peoples of Central Asia.⁴⁴ Afrasiyab took control of the Turanian lands after the death of his father. Among scholars, there is some dispute over whether Ferdowsi meant Afrasiyab to refer to Samarkand.^{45 46} For our purposes, however, the debate is largely irrelevant, as popular consensus beginning in the mid-11th century associated Afrasiyab with Samarkand

41 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 289.

42 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 289.

43 It's important to note that most of the stories of Ferdowsi come from earlier Zoroastrian sources, but there is unfortunately not time to discuss this connection in this paper. See J. Kellen's *Avesta* in the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, along with E. Yarshater's article *Afrasiab* in the same *Encyclopedia*.

44 Bodsworth, C.E., *Turan*. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Columbia University Press, 2011.

45 Pugachenkova, *Afrasiab*.

46 Some scholars have argued that the name Afrasiab is a distortion of the original name of the city, see *Encyclopedia Iranica*; in this paper I have used Afrasiab to indicate the city and Afrasiyab to indicate the mythical character. They are pronounced identically.

and the surrounding region.⁴⁷

Tur and Afrasiyab are portrayed as wild men of the desert lands, who covet the fertile land of Iran to their west; despite this, they are also shown as shrewd and skilled warriors who in several instances pose a severe challenge to the Iranians.⁴⁸ Wrote Ferdowsi, "Many are the cities of Iran which you see to be in ruin, laid to waste by the rancor of Afrasiyab." Ultimately, Afrasiyab is defeated by the Persian Kay Khosrow. Afrasiyab's daughter Ferangis⁴⁹ and her descendents swear allegiance to Iran, symbolizing the acceptance of some element of Central Asian society into broader Iran.⁵⁰ This supposedly ancient history seems to be a call-back to Sassanid greatness before the fall of Iran to the Arabs, at which time Sassanid Persian culture dominated the artistic and cultural scene of not only Samarkand but all the great cities of Central Asia.⁵¹

Later scholars and poets used the connection between Afrasiyab and Samarkand extensively to characterize the urban peoples of Central Asia. A manuscript by an unidentified author from the 12th-14th centuries recounts the Persian myths and semi-histories associated with the exploits of Alexander the Great in the lands East of Greece. This so called "Iskandarnamah" repeats many of the myths of Afrasiyab, but with a stronger connection to the cities of Central Asia and a number of references to Alexander's fear of the "Turks and the descendents of Afrasiyab."⁵² These references reveal more about the relationship between Central Asia and Iran in the Mongol era than they do about the travails of Alexander of Macedon. While the Iskandarnamah uses romantic stories to recount Alexander's exploits in the region, his supposed fear of the descendents of Afrasiyab and his wish to return to and spend time in their realms protecting his new territorial possessions is likely reference to the two years he spent with

47 Pugachenkova and Rtveladze.

48 Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*. p. 45, 109, 162, etc.

49 For a discussion of the source of this name see Djalal Khaleghi Motlagh's *Farangis* in the Encyclopedia Iranica.

50 Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh*. p. 173-174.

51 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*. p. 1-3.

52 Southgate (Translator), *Iskandarnamah: A Persian Medieval Alexander Romance*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1978. p. 38, p. 58.

his army in Samarkand.⁵³

In a later story of the *Iskandarnamah*, Alexander indeed returns to this land, and finds that it has been overrun by fairies,⁵⁴ who have been gifted the land by Afrasiyab.⁵⁵ When Alexander conquers the capital of this land, the author writes “Alexander and his men entered the city. They found a place like paradise, with all the kinds of fruits.”⁵⁶ While its not entirely clear that the author intended the realm of the fairies to be Samarkand, this mention of fruit draws direct parallels to contemporaneous non-fiction writing on the city.

Despite the disdainful and fearful attitudes that Samarkandis were branded with by their Iranian neighbors, at least one poet from Samarkand was able to make fun of the stereotypes and of the early attempts of Central Asians to fit into a classical Iranian society. Suzani of Samarkand who wrote in the late 12th and early 13th centuries is best known for his relatively obscene poetry, which was banned by most later Persian literary councils.⁵⁷ Suzani teased Samarkandis and other Central Asians. He writes “I for one, am a poet, not a Samanid; Nor from the race of the Sasanid Kings.... Here, they don't buy the Samanid renown, so damned are my manners and all I own!”⁵⁸ As a literary figure recognized by the court, Suzani was certainly aware of the negative perceptions of his hometown; his mocking writing is a clear attempt to lay claim to some of these perceptions and even promote some of the perceptions of Samarkand as a wild land on the outskirts of empire, albeit in a fond manner.

By the late 14th and early 15th century, Samarkand had largely recuperated from the Mongol invasion, and had developed better networks and exchanges with the rest of the Persian-speaking

53 Southgate *Isakandarnamah*. p. 38.

54 I cannot find a Persian edition of this *Iskandarnamah*, however it is likely “Fairy” is from the Persian word “Pari,” which typically refers to human-like creatures with a particular mythical feature. This fits the description in the book that “these fairies look like human beings, except for their legs.”(p. 77)

55 Southgate, *Iskandarnamah* p. 76.

56 Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*. p. 96.

57 Sprachman, Paul. *Suppressed Persian: An Anthology of Forbidden Literature*. Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa, California, 1995, p. 18.

58 Sprachman, *Suppressed Persian*. p. 21.

world.⁵⁹ Perhaps for this reason, poetry from this era possesses little resemblance to earlier, fearful writings about the city. The most famous Persian poet to comment on the glories of Timur's realms in the 14th century was, of course, Shams al-Din Hafiz of Shiraz who wrote "If that Turk would just take my head in hand for her black Hindu mole I'd trade Bukhara and Samarkand."⁶⁰ Although likely apocryphal, the story of Timur's response to this line gained great currency in the region and was repeated by many poets and philosophers who were searching for approval from monarchs. Supposedly, Timur called Hafiz before him and retorted "Hafiz! Do you not know that I have wielded my sword in order to build up these cities? You would spoil my efforts by exchanging Samarqand and Bukhara for a Hindu mole!"⁶¹ Much to the pleasure and amusement of Timur, Hafiz then replied "indeed, because of just this exchange that I have fallen into such a beggarly state."⁶² This story was repeated by poets wishing to impress leaders even centuries later, indicating that comparison of a leader to Timur and his realms to Samarkand and Bukhara continued to be seen as a great compliment throughout the Turco-Persian world.⁶³

The poet Mutribi al-Asaam Samarqandi illustrates some of the difficulties in drawing clear lines between genres of literature surrounding the city. Mutribi travelled the world from Samarkand composing brief lines of poetry to impress monarchs. Through his narrative of his travel, he captured the attitude of the Shah Jahangir towards the history of Samarkand, and through his own verses he portrayed the attitude of Samarkand's artistic elite towards their homeland.⁶⁴ After several months spent entertaining the emperor, Samarqandi begs to return home. He recites a line of poetry praising Jahangir but insisting that "love of one's land is like an act of faith."⁶⁵ Jahangir responds by proposing options that will lead to great wealth for Samarqandi, but Samarqandi repeatedly refuses, insisting he must return

59 Jackson, Peter. *The Cambridge History of Iran: Volume 6, The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1986. p. 138.

60 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 20-21.

61 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 20.

62 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir* p. 20.

63 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 21. See also Jackson, p. 141.

64 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 24 and 89.

65 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 89.

home at all costs. Finally, Jahangir relents, recognizing the poet's obvious love for Samarkand.⁶⁶ This exchange may have been meant to serve two purposes: first, it certainly illustrates the desire of the author to leave India and return to his homeland, which is probably factual. However, given his background, it is reasonable to assume that his writings would be presented to the local rulers once he arrived home, and repeated praising his homeland was therefore likely politically expedient.

Given this wide range of sources, we are left to ponder the themes that seem to run throughout many or all of them. The most common and straightforward theme in the writings about Samarkand is a preoccupation with fruit. Almost all purportedly non-fiction sources on the city discuss its fruit. The legacy of Sogdian trade routes meant that even in the 13th to 15th centuries and later dried fruit and other goods from Samarkand traveled long distances along the Silk Road, and had the opportunity to gain fame among foreign communities.⁶⁷ The Chinese were likely the first foreigners to taste Samarkandi apples and other fruits outside of the city itself; there is ample evidence that Sogdians were the most prodigious of the frontier traders, who exchanged goods in quick paced and flexible markets along the south-western Chinese border in the 7th and 8th centuries.⁶⁸ Unpreserved fruits being perishable, however, it seems likely that foreigners from further away had to wait to reach the city before they taste this pleasure; thus, it is notable that those who had never been there, including Marco Polo and the many Mughal kings, specifically referred to the fruit of Samarkand when describing their perception of it. This fact could be used to support two conclusions: first, that travelers and traders from Samarkand passed on news of the miraculous fruit of their hometown to those they met on the road. Second, that the fruit of Samarkand was common in regional markets and was often traded outside of the city, promoting a wider knowledge of its wonders.

Both are likely true, and the writings of Ibn Battuta and Clavijo also show that foreign travelers

66 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 191.

67 Liu, Xinru. *The Silk Road in World History*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2010. p. 67-69.

68 De La Vaissiere, *Sogdian Traders*. p. 217.

who passed through the city passed on news of its fruits to their homelands, even when effective trade for the fruits would have been nearly impossible because of the distance. Clavijo's goal in describing the fruit of Samarkand seems to be quite similar to his goal in describing the rest of the city; to impress upon his masters in Spain the extent to which Samarkand was a well-ordered and wealthy society, both worthy of friendship and dangerous as a foe.⁶⁹ Fruit for Clavijo, Battuta and Polo seems to imply wealth and power. Polo's phrase "all the fruits a man can desire" seems to point to the fact that the Samarkandis never had a need to want for food, and feasted on the best in the world.⁷⁰ Additionally, it points to the theme that connects the Mughali writers to their fruit obsessions: foreign desire and longing for the wealth and splendors of the city. The Mughali references to fruit are easily understood within this context: their feeling of exile is often coupled with a perception that the goods of India are lacking in some manner, and this is true most strongly when they speak of fruit. Babur, having actually tasted the fruit of Samarkand, was perhaps most poetic in his descriptions. Moreover, he seems to have passed down this sense of longing to his offspring.⁷¹ In particular, at some point fruit seems to have become a metaphor among the Mughals for all the was good about Central Asia; this tendency is displayed when Jahangir requests that a poet bring "an apple of Samarkand wisdom."⁷²

The Mughali emperors certainly were not the only foreign writers to combine their musings on Samarkand with a deep longing, although they were certainly most effective at connecting this idea with fruit. Perhaps of all the writers discussed in this paper, their longing is most understandable, for they characterized Samarkand as their lost homeland, which had been unrightfully taken from them by Uzbek usurpers.⁷³ Even Timur, who rarely betrayed emotion in his writing, seemed to have a certain desire to raise Samarkand above other cities. In a moment of expressed nostalgia and love for his capital city, while

69 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 288-289.

70 Polo, *The Travels*. p. 81.

71 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* p. 129.

72 Samarqandi, *Conversations with Emperor Jahangir*. p. 81.

73 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*. p. 128-129.

traveling, he orders that Samarkand be exempt from all taxation and other revenue raising activities.⁷⁴

More interesting is the extent to which a sense of longing pervades the writing of those with no particular claim on the city. Ibn Battuta's description of the tomb of an Arab conquerer of the city, and the place it holds in the consciousness of Samarkand's residents on the city points to a longing for a shared heritage and joint membership in a broader religious community.⁷⁵ To Battuta, although Samarkand lies on the outskirts of Islamic civilization, its urban attitude and the positive efforts of its religious establishment mean that it could ultimately operate along the lines of a orthodox Muslim city.⁷⁶ While this could be considered less of a longing for Samarkand itself and more of a longing for a specific political and religious shared history, Battuta's determination to remain upbeat about the religious history he shares with an otherwise herterodoxical city points to his longing to incorporate the city into his own cultural sphere.

Similarly, while the mythical and semi-historical Persian language writings of Ferdowsi and those who followed him don't betray any desire or longing to *go to* Samarkand, or more generally Turan, they do seem to point to a desire to reintegrate it into what they see as a powerful and just civilization. In the *Shahnameh*, the fact that Ferangis, the daughter of Afrasiyab ultimately declares her loyalty to the just Persian empire of Kay Khosrow, implying a reintegration of the troubled Turanian lands into Iranian power.⁷⁷ It is important to remember that as Ferdowsi wrote Turkic power was spreading throughout the traditionally Persian-language cities of Samarkand, Bokhara, and their neighbors, and Ferdowsi likely wrote for an Iranian audience that was fearful of losing influence. Along the same lines, both the *Iskandarnamah* and the *The Ilahi-nama* of Attar use the name Afrasiyab to refer to Turks and infidels who are eventually brought under the sway of a righteous Muslim Persian Alexander, indicating a longing to

74 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* p. 140.

75 Ibrahmovich, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta to Central Asia*. p. 120.

76 Battuta, *Travels to the Near East, Asia and Africa*. p. 16.

77 Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*. p. 174.

re-civilize the wild lands to the east of Iran.⁷⁸

However, if a superiority complex is prominent in the Persian epics, so too is a sense of awe at the military power of Central Asia. Fear is the third most common theme in the writings about Samarkand, and while it is most obvious in Iranian works, it can also be found in Mughali and European writings. The line “many are the cities of Iran which you see to be in ruin, laid to waste by the rancor of Afrasiyab,” is the most evocative portrayal of the fear-inducing Central Asian Afrasiyab in the *Shahnameh*.⁷⁹ Despite this, after Key Khosrow beheads Afrasiyab he gives him an honorable burial to illustrate that he respected his glory in battle.⁸⁰ This scene seems to capture the attitude of Persian epics towards the Samarkandis and Central Asians more generally; despite belief in their impurity, a begrudging respect was offered to their military might.

While the Mughal emperors largely wrote of the remembered splendors of Samarkand and their longing for a glorious return, they also occasionally betrayed a deep fear of its current rulers, who had defeated Babur in battle twice.⁸¹ Babur wrote to his son about the need to retake the city from the Uzbeks, but also highlighted the perils of such a plan, and it is perhaps for this reason that it was never attempted.⁸²

Of the travel writers examined in this paper, Clavijo was the most impressed with the military power of Samarkand. Clavijo's description is noteworthy because while he describes the thrilling power of the Samarkandis of Timur's armies to bring terror to other regions, he also notes that within the city, Timur runs a well-ordered society capable of regulating itself.⁸³ He writes, “good order is maintained in Samarkand with the utmost strictness and none dare fight with another or oppress his neighbor by

78 Attar, *The Ilahi-namah* p. 90 and Southgate, *Iskandarnamah*, p. 96.

79 Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*. p. 173.

80 Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*. p. 174.

81 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*. p. 129.

82 Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia*.

83 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 220.

force.”⁸⁴ Clavijo remarks that the Samarkandis are not even frightened of mocking the powerful Chinese, for they know that under Timur, they are militarily untouchable.⁸⁵

While some of the sources discussed- especially European sources more concerned with reporting than creating a specific historical narrative- are not bothered by the dichotomy between the “longing” and “fear” aspects of the Samarkand discourse, other authors do attempt to address this issue. Notably, Battuta addresses the issue by pointing out that Samarkand was once a full participant in Orthodox religious practice. This means it has the capacity to return to the cultural and religious sphere of the Arabs, despite the “devastation” visited on the religious practices of the region by the Mongols.⁸⁶

The manner in which the Mughals overcame the dichotomy between longing and fear was more straightforward. For them, the name Samarkand evoked a lost paradise, which could not be recaptured because of the plague of the Uzbek invaders.⁸⁷ Their longing for its fruit and its culture was likely intensified by their knowledge of the deep danger of mounting an invasion against the city.

With regards to Samarkand, the stories traded over time grew to focus on the themes of fruit, longing and fear, and seemed to transcend class, location, empire and historical era. Although there is not enough evidence to reasonably argue that each of the authors examined in this paper influenced others outside of their region, the dominance of these three themes across all of the works points to the fact that a specific set of beliefs arose about Samarkand, and were spread throughout Eurasia through literary, political and economic contact.

84 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 220.

85 Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*. p. 222.

86 Ibrahimovich. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta in Central Asia*.

87 Babur, *The Baburnama*, p. 92.

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