



CHAPTER THREE

RUY GONZÁLEZ DE CLAVIJO'S NARRATIVE OF
COURTLY LIFE AND CEREMONY IN TIMUR'S
SAMARQAND, 1404

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And she had so much white lead [albayalde] and other
white stuff on her face, that she seemed no more than
a paper mask.

—Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 290.¹

Although Ruy González de Clavijo probably did not intend it, his description of the appearance of “Cano” (the Great Khanim), Timur’s chief wife, as she entered the great pavilion serves as a potent metaphor for much that he witnessed during his sojourn in Samarqand between 8 September and 20 November, 1404.² As ambassador of King Henry III of Castile (r. 1390–1406), Ruy González de Clavijo enjoyed generous access to the life and ceremony of the Timurid royal court and left one of the most detailed and lengthy accounts of their settings.

“Cano,” identifiable as Saray Mulk Khanim, had come to join her husband Timur (r. 1370–1405) for a great feast, one of several

¹ Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, ed. with introduction and notes by Francisco López Estrada (Madrid: Castalia, 1999), 290. The Spanish reads: *E ella tenía en la cara tanto albayalde e otra cosa blanca, que no parecía, salvo como un paper*. I thank Tom Cummins for his extreme generosity in helping to translate passages from Spanish into English and Hugo Van der Velden for several conversations on the topic of travel literature.

² Generally referenced in the Persian sources as *bānū-yi kubrā* or *bānū-yi ‘uzmā*, Timur’s first wife “notified Timur on the birth of his children and grandchildren. On important occasions, such as weddings or victory celebrations, she organized ceremonial banquets (*tūy-i sangīn*) for the whole family.” See Priscilla P. Soucek, “Timurid Women: A Cultural Perspective,” in *Women in the Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed., Gavin R.G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 199–226, 203. Saray Mulk Khanim additionally brought Timur prestige because of her illustrious descent. Soucek’s essay contains many additional details about her, as well as other noble women of the Timurid house.



arranged at the Kan-i Gil (lit. Mine of clay) meadow located outside Samarqand. Clavijo offers an expanded description of her procession into the pavilion and of what she was wearing. Joined by fifteen servants to carry her train, eunuchs, and a male servant carrying a “shade” (*sombra*), Saray Mulk Khanim was dressed in red silk, her face covered by a white veil. She wore a complex headdress, fashioned from red fabric ornamented with pearls, rubies, turquoise, feathers, and held together with gold wire. As she moved forward, the tall headdress swayed with each step. Clavijo estimated some three hundred attendants making up her royal suite. Her shade was assembled from white silk stretched over a wooden arch at the end of a wooden pole resembling a lance—Clavijo observes that the shade was “made like the top of a round tent.”³

Clavijo’s analogizing is to be expected given that by this time his senses had been assaulted by a bewildering array of ‘architecture,’ much of it ‘soft’ architecture of various types of tents (some trellis tents, others stayed with guys), awnings, and walls of cloth assembled temporarily for ad hoc purposes. Much of that soft architecture simulated the form and affect of hard, permanent architecture whether through aspects of form or decoration. It is in this respect that his comparison of Saray Mulk Khanim’s made-up face to a paper mask might be held to function as a metaphor for his experiences in Samarqand, particularly his experiences of the physical settings of courtly life and ceremony. Her doubly-screened face—one screen a cloth veil, the other a thick layer of applied make-up—concealed her true identity, just as some of the tents Clavijo witnessed could be observed from the outside but not visited inside; though some of these tents were provided with mesh windows, the mesh operated in such a way as to be opaque from the outside and transparent from the inside. Even Saray Mulk Khanim’s “shade” resembled a tent albeit in miniature. One might even say that Clavijo witnessed Saray Mulk Khanim transformed into a stately, portable, and kinetic edifice. She was one of many spectacles that Clavijo witnessed while in Samarqand and for which he groped to find an adequate descriptive language and nomenclature.⁴

³ *E encima d’ella le traían una sombra que levaba un omne con un asta como de lança; e era de un paño de seda blanco, fecho como copa de tienda redonda, e faziale venir estendido un arco de madera redondo*, Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 290–1.

⁴ I have retained the conventional attribution of the text to Clavijo’s authorship despite the fact that there is no definitive evidence to prove it as discussed by López Estrada. See Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 36–8.

Clavijo's narrative is one of the chief primary sources used by historians mentally to reconstruct the architectural edifices sponsored by Timur in his capital city of Samarqand and its environs. Other sources include the accounts of Ibn 'Arabshah and the panegyric history-biography of Timur by Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi.⁵ This essay takes a slightly different tack. Rather than favoring the strictly literal dimensions of Clavijo's narrative—what might be gleaned from it qualitatively or as information of various orders—this paper considers how he writes about Timurid architecture and spaces of ceremony, how his writing is as much about experience as it is about description, and how his description attempts to embody experience for a reader *in absentia*. In that sense, the rhetorical fabric of his narrative and his means of telling and structuring the story of the embassy are of equal interest to what he actually writes about.⁶ The extent of Clavijo's descriptive detail has been noted by modern readers of the *Embajada a Tamorlán*. This feature of the prose, its 'realism,' is regarded as characteristic of the embassy report genre generally—ambassadors, like spies, were charged with recording what they saw as accurately as possible—and in Clavijo's case this detail has been described as "extreme (if rather pedestrian)."⁷

⁵ The other principal primary sources are in Persian and Arabic by Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi and Ahmad b. Muhammad, known as Ibn 'Arabshah. For editions of their texts, see Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, *Ẓafar-nāma: tā'rikh-i 'umūmī-i mufaṣṣal-i Īrān dar dawra-i Timūrīyān*, ed., Muḥammad 'Abbāsī, 2 vols. (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1336/1957 or 1958); and Ibn 'Arabshāh, *'Ajā'ib al-maqdūr fi nawā'ib Timūr*, ed., 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjilū al-Miṣrīyya, 1399/1979). The last was translated by J.H. Saunders as *Tamerlane or Timur, the Great Amir, from the Arabic Life of Ahmed ibn Arabshah* (London: Luzac, 1936). Ibn 'Arabshah completed his text in 1435 after his return to Mamluk lands (he was a captive of the Timurids between 1401 and 1422).

⁶ Few scholars have commented on the rhetorical dimensions of Clavijo's narrative and questioned his 'objectivity' as an eyewitness. Reviewing López Estrada's new edition of the *Embajada a Tamorlán*, Michael Agnew points this out but does not elaborate on his point: Michael Agnew, *Hispanic Review* 70, 4 (2002): 630–1; 630. The ideological factors that might have shaped Clavijo's text, however, are probably beyond the reach of historians today. One of the few studies to take a thematic approach to Clavijo's text—here dealing with issues of foreignness and the embassy's logistical aspects—is by Uta Lindgren, "The Problems of Being a Foreigner: Ruy González de Clavijo's Journey to Samarkand," *Clio Medica* 14, 3/4 (1980): 225–34. The development in travel narratives of "a rhetoric fit to account for displacements of the body and the particular emotions those displacements arouse," and the various *topoi* and literary techniques they generated, were noted by Paul Zumthor, but they have as yet not been addressed for Clavijo's text. See Paul Zumthor, "The Medieval Travel Narrative," *New Literary History* 25, 4 (1994): 809–24; 812.

⁷ Jás Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Introduction," in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, eds., Jás Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 1–56, 46.

It is this level of description in Clavijo's narrative and its accumulative realistic effect that brought, quite understandably, so many historians of architecture to the source. And yet, historians may have been too eager to form coherent reconstructions from what Clavijo tells us, taking his narrative as a form of documentary reporting quite distinct from the overtly literary Persian primary sources on Timur's court.⁸ Clavijo's text supplied what the Persian sources did not. This was not only a matter of presenting copious detail and evincing an unabashed interest in description—recording the most mundane or culturally accepted (i.e. taken for granted) aspects of life that an insider would not—but he delivered it through a textual matrix that seemed objective and transparent, in a prose style unencumbered by the conventions of literary practice. Though Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi introduces and portrays several of the same settings of Timurid courtly life and ceremony witnessed by Clavijo in his *Ẓafarnāma* (Book of Victory), his Persian text is readily perceived as a rhetorical construct, and a highly complex one at that.⁹ The broad contrast created by comparing the European and Persian language sources has had the unfortunate effect of defining the relative balance of literal and

⁸ For example, Donald Wilber, "The Timurid Court: Life in Gardens and Tents," *Iran* 17 (1979): 127–33, writes: "Fortunately, the writings of foreign, non-Muslim observers are often more pertinent to certain of our interests, and these individuals of many centuries earlier possessed much the same interest in the details of daily life as journalists and travelers today (127)." One of the more adroit uses of Clavijo's narrative is an essay by Bernard O'Kane, "From Tents to Pavilions: Royal Mobility and Persian Palace Design," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993): 249–68. Though he relies on the problematic translation by Guy Le Strange, O'Kane notes the ambiguities of Clavijo's text, especially when it comes to the description of the Aq Saray in Shahr-i Sabz. The most recent assessment of the sites of Timur's courtly ceremony and other functions was developed by Lisa Golombek, "The Gardens of Timur: New Perspectives," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 137–47. In her essay, she revises and corrects some arguments made in earlier studies while also advancing new interpretations. One of the most critical aspects of previous research attempted to locate the gardens named in different written sources and in relationship to suburbs around Samarkand. Golombek's most recent essay, "Gardens of Timur," 138, offers new suggestions to pre-existing maps drawn up by her and Wilber and also by Dietrich Brandenburg. See Dietrich Brandenburg, *Samarkand: Studien zur islamischen Baukunst in Uzbekistan* (Berlin: Hessling, 1972), 205.

⁹ An additional difference worth emphasizing is that Yazdi's text was not an eyewitness account. Yazdi was born in the 1390s and entered Timurid service in 1419 under Ibrahim Sultan in Shiraz. He completed the *Ẓafarnāma* in 1424–5, adapting the text of the same name composed by Nizam al-Din Shami at Timur's order in 1404. See John Woods, "The Rise of Timurid Historiography," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46, 2 (1987): 81–108, esp. 99–105.

figurative elements in each literary tradition: this almost always resulted in rendering Persian sources still more conceptually foreign and of dubious use value.¹⁰ Conversely the surface prerogatives of Clavijo's text, where it addresses architecture, were welcomed as close to, and consonant with, the interests of modern readers. But Clavijo's report should not be taken as a substitute for architectural evidence. If the objective of his narrative descriptions was to provide a key that would yield flawless reconstructions of these sites, then he failed.¹¹ Clavijo's narrative uses certain literary strategies—description chief among them—to authenticate itself as an eye-witness account and then uses that status as a means of enhancing the reader's experience of spectacle. If anything, the abundance of description spectacularizes the spectacle that Clavijo was so keen on relating.

At the kernel of this essay lies our understanding of the physical and aesthetic aspects of Timur's "palaces," the settings of the royal court and how we might understand them through a more critical reading of Clavijo's narrative.¹² Though several "palaces" commissioned by Timur are mentioned in the primary sources, some fifteen palaces in all, only a fragment of one survives, the Aq Saray (White palace) in Timur's second capital Shahr-i Sabz located south of Samarqand.¹³ The poor survival rate of secular structures can be

¹⁰ I have written at some length elsewhere about the effects of this implicit comparative approach and its methodological implications. See David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), esp. 5–15.

¹¹ Compare Clavijo's narrative passages on architecture, soft or hard, to the albeit prescriptive text outlining the construction of the ark, table, lamp stand, tabernacle, altar of the burnt offering, and its courtyard in Exodus 25–7. The text describes the materials of each, their dimensions relative to each other, and spatial configuration.

¹² For sake of time, and not of interest, I do not here engage the study of the genre of Clavijo's narrative in a long-standing debate explored by structuralists—who might deem his text more discourse and incipient narrative because of certain aspects of grammar, voice, and the lack of overriding plot—and a speech-act theory that tends to collapse distinctions between discourse and narrative favoring instead a contextual approach to the text. The propositions of the two approaches and their differences are nicely conveyed in essays by Hayden White and Marilyn Waldman in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹³ A list of palaces attested in the sources is made available in Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1: 445–7, "Supplementary Catalogue of Monuments." Golombek and Wilber note that the naming of the palace as "Aq" Saray was more likely intended to convey the notion of the "aristocratic" rather than

explained in part by the rupture in patronage brought about by the original founder's death. Most Islamic palaces did not attract continued patronage and occupation, some notable examples notwithstanding (the Topkapı Saray in Istanbul and the Alhambra in Granada). Another reason offered for the low survival rate of residential structures, Timur's palaces among them, is that they were "built of impermanent materials, such as wood, mud-brick, or mud-plaster..."¹⁴ Several writers, including Clavijo, sketch Timur as an impatient patron, eager to see buildings take shape in short timeframes and easily dissatisfied by buildings that were taking too long or that were insufficiently monumental. Here, the line of thinking would be that Timur's ambition to build and the scope of construction of his projects was so great, that architects and builders abandoned permanence for his "palaces." What becomes evident from the study of Timur's palaces—and several publications have already hinted at this—is that their architecture need not be identified with the physical attributes of longevity or monumentality. Timur's palaces were set in extramural orchards and gardens around Samarqand. In Samarqand only one palace, the Gök Saray (Sky palace) located in the citadel to the west of the city, was intramural.¹⁵ (And hence comparable to the intramural Aq Saray in Shahr-i Sabz).

Also at stake in the nature of Timur's palaces and their settings is the range of impulses that drove them. Most scholars who have studied this material would agree that Timur's palaces brought together features and practices of settled Perso-Islamicate court culture and Turco-Mongol practices of pastoral nomadism.¹⁶ However, the precise balance between the two sets of traditions and the motivati-

referencing a building that was "white" (*ibid.*, 1: 271). An underutilized source composed by Jean of Sultaniyya actually mentions "eighteen very large palaces full of treasures" belonging to Timur in Samarqand. See Jean of Sultaniyya, "Mémoire sur Tamerlan et sa cour par un Dominicain, en 1403," ed., H. Moranvillé, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 55 (Paris, 1894), 433–64, 451.

¹⁴ Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 1: xxiii.

¹⁵ As to its function, Monica Gronke, "The Persian Court Between Palace and Tent: From Timur to 'Abbas I," in *Timurid Art and Culture: Iran and Central Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, eds., Lisa Golombek and Maria Subtelny (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 19–22, notes it was mostly a treasury and prison and not a residence (19).

¹⁶ The closest parallels to the Timurid dynasty's tentage are found in the 1200s and 1330s under the Mongols. For a general introduction to tentage under the Mongols, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. 13–5

ons that prompted such fusions, or juxtapositions between them, has yielded differing interpretations. We will return to those broad historical interpretations in the conclusion as well as to the reception of Clavijo's text, the gaps in its critical analysis, and its nature as a narrative.

Ruy González de Clavijo and the 1403–1406 Embassy

Scarcely anything is known about Ruy González de Clavijo's biography. He was born in Madrid and he was already a chamberlain (*camarero*) of King Henry III of Castile (r. 1390–1406) when he was selected to lead the embassy to Timur's court. After his return to Spain in March 1406, Clavijo resumed his role as chamberlain to Henry III until the latter's death on 25 December the same year. He served Juan II (r. 1406–1454) in the same capacity. Clavijo died on 2 April 1412 and was buried in a chapel he commissioned in 1406 at the monastery of San Francisco of Madrid.

King Henry III's embassy was the second he had sent to Timur. The first embassy left Spain at Easter in 1402, led by Payo Gómez de Sotomayor and Hernán Sánchez de Palazuelos. The ambassadors met Timur in Ankara following his victory over the Ottoman ruler Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) and returned to Henry III, accompanied by one Muhammad al-Kashi, bearing a letter and gifts (which included two Christian women liberated from Bayezid's harem).¹⁷ This was one of Timur's several contacts with European emissaries. Others Timur initiated himself—with the objective of finding alliances against the Ottomans—including exchanges with Charles VI of France, Henry IV of England, the Genoese, and the Venetians.¹⁸

and 74–5. Also see Peter A. Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: The Nomadic Tradition and Its Interaction with Princely Tentage*, 2 vols. (London: Melisende, 1999).

¹⁷ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 78–9, identifies these figures by name in his introductory pages to the narrative. Translations of the letter to King Henry III and other correspondence sent by Timur to European rulers are published in Lucien Kehren, trans. and commentary, *La route de Samarkand au temps de Tamerlan. Relation du voyage de l'ambassade de Castille à la cour de Timour Beg par Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo 1403–1406* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1990), 293–9.

¹⁸ For others, see J. Delaville Le Roulx, "Rapports de Tamerlan avec les chrétiens," in *La France en Orient au XVI^e siècle*, ed., J. Delaville Le Roulx, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Thorin, 1885–6), 1: 389–96; and Marie Mathilde Alexandrescu-Dersca, *La campagne de Timur en Anatolie* (Bucharest: Imperimeria Nationala, 1942), 19–29.

The second embassy sent by Henry III left the port of Santa María near Cadiz on 21 May 1403 with the intention of meeting Timur in Georgia. Clavijo was accompanied by the Dominican friar Alfonso Páez de Santa María, Gómez de Salazar of the Royal Guard (who died en route in Nishapur, 26 July 1404), Alfonso Fernández de Mesa, and others. The embassy probably numbered upwards of fifteen persons.¹⁹ By 24 October 1403, the embassy had reached Constantinople where the envoys enjoyed the hospitality of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologus (r. 1391–1425). After six months, Clavijo and his companions left Constantinople on 20 March 1404 and arrived in Trebizond on 11 April. Because Timur had decamped from Georgia, the embassy now had to travel further than initially planned. Joined by Timur's officials, the embassy followed an overland route passing through Zigana, Torul, Erzincan, Erzurum, Surmari, Ararat, Maku, Khoy (where they were joined by an embassy from the Sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Nasir Faraj (r. 1399–1405), Tabriz, Miyana, Zanjan, Sultaniyya, Tehran, Simnan, Firuzkuh, Damghan, Jajarm, Nishapur, Andkhoy, Balkh, Tirmidh and Kish (Shahr-i Sabz) before reaching Samarqand on 4 September 1404.²⁰ The embassy stayed in Samarqand until their dispatch by Timur on 21 November, only six days before Timur embarked on his military campaign against Ming China.²¹

In its structure, Clavijo's narrative resembles a fleshed out daily journal as he and his company traveled toward Samarqand, the final destination. The entries follow a linear chronological order and in most cases are enumerated day by day.²² A broad variety of topics

¹⁹ For more details about the embassy, see Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamórlan*, 29–32. Only two ambassadors are mentioned by name in Clavijo's text, Friar Alfonso Páez de Santa María and Gómez de Salazar.

²⁰ A slightly different route was taken on the return. For maps of both journeys, see Kehren, *La route de Samarkand*, 325–33. The Mamluk envoy is named in Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 425, as Mengli Buqa.

²¹ Though Clavijo claims that they were sent away without seeing Timur, Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 449, suggests that Timur met with the European envoys, which he includes among other ambassadors remaining in Samarqand from the steppes of Dasht[-i Qipchaq] and Jata and other regions, before they left (*va sāir-i ilchīyān az bilād-i āfranj va dasht va jata va digar ātvāf āmada būdand hama rā navāzash farmūda sar āfrāz va khwashdil bāz gardānīd*).

²² López Estrada's edition of Clavijo's narrative was consulted for this essay. López Estrada based his study on the first published edition of the text by Gonzalo Argote de Molina, *Historia del Gran Tamórlan e Itinerario y Enarración del viaje, y relación de la Embaxada que Ruy González de Clavijo le hizo...* (Seville: Encasa de Andrea Prescioni, 1582), and two manuscripts in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. For fur-

are covered, invariably treating aspects of the military and government, trade, farming, local customs, languages and their vernaculars. Occasionally the descriptive narrative is suspended for a discursive history of Timur's rise to power and rule.²³ In all these respects, Clavijo's narrative is entirely conventional. Super abundant description finds little or no subjective interpretation by which Clavijo might have sorted through and established the significance or meaning of what he witnessed: the act of witnessing is given primacy and his narrative's copious description is hence offered up to a reader as a vehicle for imaginary transport.²⁴

The overriding impulse to describe one thing after the other—setting the scene of a physical environment before detailing what took place there, or doing both at the same time as successive vignettes of settings and actions—often leads to breakdowns in the narrative. Connections, especially spatial interrelations and coordinates, are often unclear. These breaks have the effect of supporting the claims of the text as an eye-witness account: it is as if the text were written in real time and not subjected to a complete editing. Every inconsistency and lacuna was not resolved after the fact to manufacture a seamless text. It is in these additional aspects that Clavijo's narrative develops by literary means an authenticity for its audience. Shifts of voice have the same effect—while some passages are written in the first person voice, the majority are presented in the voice of the first person plural, “We ambassadors,” or “We, the said ambassadors.”²⁵ This shifting subjective mode locates the acquisition of knowledge in vision and authorizes most of what is seen through

ther details about López Estrada's edition, see Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 71–4. An edition of the narrative was published in 1782 by Antonio de Sancha. The English translations by Clements R. Markham, *Life and Acts of the Great Tamerlane: Narrative of the Castilian Embassy of Roy Gonsales de Clavijo, 1403–1406* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1859), and Guy Le Strange, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403–1406* (London: Routledge, 1928), use the Spanish editions of Sancha and Molina, respectively.

²³ For the last, see Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 249–53.

²⁴ The primary reader was no doubt envisaged as King Henry III, but Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 79, indicates a wider audience when he states in the prologue that the book would record things that might otherwise be forgotten or lost (*por que no cayen en olvido e mejor e más verdaderamente se puedan contra e saber*).

²⁵ The process of composing the *Embajada a Tamorlán* is a topic that exceeds the scope of this paper. López Estrada has broached the topic, Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 40–6, though much more could be done. López Estrada also treated the issue of voice in Clavijo's narrative, 38–40.



the collective body of the embassy. From the moment the embassy arrived at Kish until it departed Samarqand, the primary content of the narrative from day to day is the life of the court to the virtual exclusion of all else. In this recounting, spectacle plays a central role whether it concerns processions of royal ladies, mounds of cooked meat, performing elephants, fabric architecture, or a portable mosque.

Architecture: Kīsh

The embassy arrived in “Quix” (Kish, also called Shahr-i Sabz) on 28 August 1404. After a general description of the city and its monuments, Clavijo notes that on the morning of 29 August, he and his company were taken to see “some great palaces” (*unos grandes palacios*), which they were told had been under construction for twenty years. What Clavijo designates with the word “palaces” had a wide entrance and high portal and near the entry on its left and right sides there were brick arches decorated with blue tiles. Beneath these arches “were something like small chambers which had no doors.”²⁶ At some distance forward (from the chambers) there was another door and beyond it a great courtyard.²⁷ The courtyard was paved with white flagstones, enclosed on all sides by richly decorated doorways, had a large water tank at its center, and measured some 300 *pasos* (paces or feet) in width.²⁸ From this courtyard, which had a large and high portal, again worked in “beautifully made gold and blue and tiles,” one entered into “a great body of houses” (*un grand cuerpo de casas*).²⁹ Clavijo remarks that the figures of a lion and sun

²⁶ *E so estos arcos estavan unas como cámaras pequeñas, sin puertas.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 247.

²⁷ *E luego, delante d’esta, estava otra puerta; e adelante d’ella, estava un grand corral.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 247.

²⁸ *...enlosada de losas blancas, e cercado todo alderredor de portales de obra muy rica. E en medio d’este corral estava una muy grand alberca de agua. E este corral era bien trezientos pasos en ancho.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 247. *Paso* can be understood as “pace” but it was probably closer to a foot in measurement (this estimate is based on the current width of the Aq Saray portal, which is closer to 300 feet than 300 paces). Problems of interpretation of the *paso* in Clavijo are mentioned by O’Kane, “From Tents to Pavilions,” n. 41.

²⁹ *E d’este corral se entrava a un grand cuerpo de casas, el cual avía una portada muy grande e muy alta, labrada de oro e de azul e de azulejos, fechos a una obra bien fermosa.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 247.



decorated this portal and notes that this device was the arms of the former ruler of Samarqand. On the basis of this observation, Clavijo further asserts that this palace had been started before Timur's rule. This is one of the rare overt interpretations in the narrative where Clavijo makes a judgment of historical fact and presents an opinion on the matter.

The next section of the narrative describes the interior space of the "body of houses" reached by the portal on the courtyard. The ground floor is identified as a reception hall square in shape (*un recevimiento que era fecho en cuadra*) that also provided access to the upper floor (*unos sobrados*). The function of the chambers on the second floor, a series of "many rooms and apartments" (*tantas cámaras e apartamientos*), was identified as accommodation for Timur and his wives.³⁰ Again much information is provided about the decoration of these interior spaces. Moving on from there, the group of Spaniards reached a "square" (*cuadra*) that "his Highness has set apart for occupying and eating with his wives."³¹ Beyond this square [building] lay a great "orchard" (*huerta*) planted with shade trees and many species of fruit-bearing trees and equipped with water tanks. Clavijo concludes by noting that the orchard provided enough space for many people to occupy it in the summer. This last observation is presumably a deduction of what kind of accommodations and spaces were suitable for seasonal use and, moreover, infers the temporary presence of tents in this capacious orchard during those months.

Structured through a physical itinerary of movement through space, Clavijo's narrative description is pieced together from successive snapshots of architectural elements—frequently elaborated by mention of their decoration, materials, or dimension—and whose relative spatial coordinates are sometimes given. But these coordinates do not add up to an evocation of a coherent architectural space, and physical linkages between elements are often inferred rather than nailed down, as in the relationship between the portal on the court and the "great corpus of houses" described after it.³²

³⁰ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 248.

³¹ ...*qu'el Señor avía apartada para estar e para comer con sus mugeres*. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 248.

³² Fully aware of the subjective and problematic nature of Guy Le Strange's English translation of Clavijo's narrative, Golombek and Wilber presented a new translation by Terry Allen of the passage relating to these "palaces" in Kish. See Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 1: 273–4. It is quite clear from read-

Clavijo's description of these unnamed "palaces" has been identified with the palace of Aq Saray (White palace), built at the northern edge of the walled city of Shahr-i Sabz, its portal oriented toward the Zarafshan Mountains and Samarqand beyond them. But the only extant element of the palace, for which construction began in 1379, is the portal (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). That is certainly monumental in size and revetted on all sides by polychrome, glazed tile work of various techniques. Nothing, however, is known of the arrangement of this structure in the area behind its main portal.

Of all the contexts of Timurid court life and ceremony, this is only one of five that Clavijo actually names with the word "palace" (*palacio*). As we will see, every subsequent site that he visited in the vicinity of Samarqand was designated by the paired terms "orchard and house" (*huerta e casa*).³³ The earliest Spanish dictionary, completed in 1611 by Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco (1539–1613), makes a clear distinction between these nouns. *Palacio* is defined as the home of the emperor or king from the Latin *palatium* and a law from the *Siete Partidas* of King Alfonso X's time (r. 1251–1265) is adduced to clarify further the function of the palace: "Palace is whichever place is said to be where the king gathers to speak with men. This is in three ways: to adjudicate disputes; for eating; and to speak wisely." Covarrubias Orozco defines the noun *casa* as: "A rustic, humble, poor habitation without foundation or firmness that is easily disassembled and thus some wish to use the word *casa* because whatever wind threatens to ruin it." That this is an older Spanish meaning is clarified by the passage following it: "Now [i.e. in 1611] in the Spanish language *casa* is taken to mean a habitation or dwelling place made with great firmness and sumptuousness. And the houses of rich men are called [this] in the plural, thus the houses of Sir so and so, or the houses of the duke, or the count, etc."³⁴

From these definitions—and assuming that they are valid for Clavijo's time—it is possible to speculate that the principal features

ing Le Strange that he made deductions from Clavijo's text that he then inserted into the translation but without indicating so. The obvious purpose was to render a seamless translation intelligible to a general reader by limiting the incoherence brought about by the frequent narrative breakdown in the original Clavijo manuscript.

³³ *Huerta* is translated throughout this essay as 'orchard' but these spaces were clearly also 'gardens' being planted with flowers and herbaceous plants.

³⁴ Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Barcelona: Editorial Alta Fulla, 1998).



Fig. 3.1. Entrance portal of the Aq Saray, Shahr-i Sabz, Uzbekistan, c. 1379–96, view 1.
Photo: David J. Roxburgh.



Fig. 3.2. Entrance portal of the Aq Saray, Shahr-i Sabz, Uzbekistan, c. 1379–96, view 2.

Photo: David J. Roxburgh.

identifying the Aq Saray as a “palace” were its reception hall and its monumental form. Clavijo’s use of the phrase “*unos grandes palacios*” though possibly signifying “palace” in the plural, could equally refer to a single palace ensemble which belonged to a very eminent patron, a profile applicable to Timur. It is equally possible that the “grand corpus of houses,” which he later designates as “palaces,” were not contiguous to the arcaded courtyard, but set beyond it as an independent two-storied structure adjacent to the orchard.³⁵ His choice of the term “house” (*casa*) seems to mark a place that could be occupied, but that was of smaller size and less permanent. The gaps in Clavijo’s narrative allow several possible reconstructions for the Aq Saray, a “building” that may well have amounted to a massive and permanent architectural frame set beyond the portal. A portion of the Aq Saray’s inner space was planted with an orchard, possibly set with freestanding buildings, but certainly a site that could be prepared for short-term occupation and use by the erection of tented structures and other soft architectural forms.

Whatever the case, when Clavijo and his companions visited the Aq Saray they saw something incomplete. Timur was not in residence and the interior spaces of his palace had not been outfitted with the sumptuous array of textiles that played such an all important role at the Timurid court.³⁶ This fundamental aspect of the Timurid court setting would become as clear to Clavijo and his companions later in their journey as it was to their contemporary Jean, Archbishop of Sultaniyya.³⁷ In his tract on Timur composed in 1403 under the section listing “The things that Timur Beg likes more than any other,” Jean of Sultaniyya lists: “Firstly, fine and delicate textiles, especially of the colors of fine seed and crimson; *item* [textiles] the

³⁵ The problems associated with hypothetical reconstructions of this ensemble are also discussed by Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 1: 274. Though they based their analysis on Allen’s new translation, O’Kane, “From Tents to Pavilions,” 252, later questioned their architectural reconstruction.

³⁶ For a general treatment of the role of textiles at Islamic courts and their broad relationships to architecture see the now classic article by Lisa Golombek, “The Draped Universe of Islam,” in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed., Priscilla P. Soucek (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 25–38.

³⁷ Jean of Sultaniyya arrived in Paris in 1403 to inform the King of France Charles VI (r. 1386–1422), about Timur’s victory over Bayezid in 1402. During his visit to Paris, Jean of Sultaniyya composed a short treatise in French on Timur. See Jean of Sultaniyya, “Mémoire sur Tamerlan,” 433–64. Further details about Jean of Sultaniyya are presented in Kehren, *La route de Samarkand*, 50–2.

color of pink; *item* fine [textiles] of the colors white and green; delicate cloth as those from Rains [Rheims]; *item* branches of coral; *item* a coral tree; *item* cups of crystal and other vessels ornamented with gold and silver; ; *item* noble tapestries like those in France; ... and of all those things he is well provided.”³⁸ Jean of Sultaniyya itemizes all those appurtenances of Timur’s palaces—furniture, objects, textiles—that Clavijo would himself see in abundance in Samarqand and eventually understand as integral to the settings of Timurid courtly life.

Courtly Life and Ceremony: Samarqand’s “Orchards and Houses”

When Clavijo and his company had been given permission to leave Kish, they did so on the afternoon of Friday, 29 August. The next day, Saturday 30 August, they arrived at one of Timur’s grand houses which was surrounded by an orchard and built on a plain beside a river. After dinner, they left for another village named “Meser” (Misr) where the embassy spent the night.³⁹ The next morning, Sunday 31 August, they received permission to approach Samarqand. In the early afternoon, the embassy was taken to an orchard which Clavijo calls Talicia but that “in their tongue” (*en su lengua*) was called “Chalbelecet” (Khalvat, lit. Privacy) garden.⁴⁰ The embassy would stay there until 8 September when Timur finally called on them. Clavijo describes the various fruit and shade trees planted in the “Chalbelecet” orchard, its tanks of water, and a large artificial mound of earth at its center from which one could view the orchard. This mound was surmounted by “a grand palace” (*unos grandes palacios*) with many decorated rooms. It was in the orchard, however, that a tent was set up for the ambassadors to occupy.⁴¹

³⁸ Jean of Sultaniyya, “Mémoire sur Tamerlan,” 463–4. In the text ‘*item*’ signifies ‘ditto.’

³⁹ A later visitor to Samarqand, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, in 1497 includes a reference to Misr (lit. ‘Egypt,’ but probably meaning Cairo), among other suburbs around the city of Samarqand which were named after cities that Timur had either conquered or wished to conquer (Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Shiraz, and Sultaniyya). See Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, 1: 176.

⁴⁰ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 255. Khalvat has been identified as Gul Bagh (Rose garden), a garden mentioned in the Persian sources.

⁴¹ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 254–5.

On the day the embassy left the orchard at the village of Misr, Clavijo writes: "And from there until the city there was a plain of orchards and houses and squares where they sold many things; and at nine in the morning we came to a great orchard and a house where his Highness was, which was outside the city."⁴² When they reached the entrance to the orchard they were stopped and asked to hand over their gifts.⁴³ They were then taken into the orchard, two attendants flanking each member of the embassy with their arms placed under the Spaniards' armpits—this was a common means of controlling visitors by constraining their movement. The embassy was led forward and passed six elephants carrying "wooden castles" (*castillos de madera*, i.e. howdahs) and standards. The attendants made the elephants perform tricks. A succession of raised platforms followed on which sat Timur's nephew, identified by Clavijo as the son of "Miraxa Miraza" (Miranshah, 1367–1408). Other Timurid princes sat there as well. The princes requested the letter that Clavijo had brought from King Henry III and it was passed from them into the hands of the son of Miraxa Miraza (i.e. Khalil Sultan, 1384–1411, Timur's nephew). After these courtly protocols, the embassy was allowed to move forward and came before Timur.

"And his Majesty was in something like a portal which was before the door of the entrance to beautiful houses."⁴⁴ A basin contained water that shot up into the air with red apples floating below, while beyond it Timur sat on small mattresses covered with rich textiles and cushions. The ambassadors then moved forward performing a series of three bowing and kneeling movements, arms crossed over the chest, and still held under their armpits by Timur's attendants. The Spaniards remained in a kneeling posture on the third movement. This was another prescribed ritual choreography of the

⁴² *E de allí fasta la ciudat era un llano de huertas e casas e plaças onde vendían muchas cosas; e a ora de tercia llegaron a una grand huerta e casa onde el Señor estava, que era fuera de la ciudat.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 257.

⁴³ These gifts are specifically mentioned by Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 422. Among them were pieces of textile, "the designs and patterns of which were woven in such a way that if Mani's brush were to flow across the Artangi tablet, it would fall short in a hundred ways of depicting their likes." See Wheeler M. Thackston, trans., *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid Art and History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1988), 90.

⁴⁴ *E el Señor estava en uno como portal que estava ante la puerta de la entrada de unas fermosas casas.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 259.

Turco-Mongol court, termed *ūljānishī* in Mongolian.⁴⁵ A double-page painting from a later illustrated copy of Yazdi's *Ẓafarnāma* depicts Timur holding audience before a row of men who adopt this kneeling posture of respect (Fig. 3.3).

After the *ūljānishī* ritual, the Turco-Mongol attendants withdrew and Timur ordered Clavijo and his companions to move closer to him and to stand there: Clavijo was standing close enough to observe Timur's sagging eyelids. A short verbal exchange ensued in which Timur asked after Henry III. The dragoman (translator) offered to read out loud the official letter which was in Timur's possession, but Timur indicated his preference to learn of the letter's contents in private. After the official exchange was accomplished, the members of the embassy were seated in preparation for a great feast. They were given preferential treatment over the Chinese ambassadors also present at this audience.

Like all other feasts Clavijo attended, this one is described at great length. The bewildering array of detail overwhelms the reader as he attempts to imagine this remote world and sort through the various claims it makes on the senses. Clavijo's recounting of the feast is presented in a sequential order of events and includes such details as the means of transporting food to the banquet by large leather trays equipped with handles and so heavily laden that they had to be pulled across the ground; the bowls and jugs of gold and silver; and the food, mostly boiled and roasted meats, some prepared as a stew, as well as fruit (melons, grapes, and peaches). The feast was finished off with a drink of mare's milk with sugar (*leche de yeguas con azúcar*), which he observes "is a good drink that they make in the summer time" (*que es buen bebraje que ellos fazen para en tiempo de verano*).⁴⁶ The Spaniards then left the orchard and were assigned to the care of a "gentleman" (*cavallero*) who was identified as Timur's chief doorkeeper (*portero mayor del Señor*).⁴⁷ It is only at the conclusion of this narrative passage that we learn the name of the orchard and the house where Clavijo first met Timur, "Delicuxan" (Bagh-i Dilgusha, or Heart's delight garden). Clavijo notes as an aside that "In this orchard were many tents draped with panels of silk and in other

⁴⁵ The obliged ritual of *ūljānishī* is mentioned in Yazdi's *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 426, relating to Pir Muhammad's arrival at Timur's court.

⁴⁶ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 264.

⁴⁷ This is probably the 'chamberlain' (*hājib*).

manners,"⁴⁸ and that Timur stayed here until the following Friday when he departed for "another orchard and very beautiful house which he had ordered to be built and which was named Beheginar."⁴⁹ This orchard is identifiable as the Bagh-i Chinar (Plane tree garden) of the Persian sources.

The next Monday, 15 September, Timur left the Bagh-i Chinar for yet another orchard and house which were also of great beauty. The ambassadors were invited to another feast to be held there. The entrance to the orchard was very grand and high, its brick fabric decorated with tiles of blue and gold. Inside there were many trees, that provided fruit or shade, and "streets and walkways lined with wood, by which people walked. And in this orchard there were many tents put up and awnings of colored tapestries and other silken cloths of many colors, some with designs, and others plain."⁵⁰ At the center of the orchard there was a building in the shape of a cross (*casa en cruz*) whose interior, arranged as three alcoves, was furnished with hangings. The chief alcove stood on axis with the entrance and had a screen of silver and gilt with a bed set before it. All around were wall hangings of red silk. The description provides many other details of the interior and how it was decorated and furnished, including a table set with ewers and cups of precious metals encrusted with precious stones and pearls.⁵¹

By the time they arrived for the feast, Timur and his company had already eaten. Their late arrival made Timur angry and he blamed the dragoman for the confusion. The dragoman narrowly escaped the designated punishment of having his nose pierced like a pig. Clavijo mentions that their late arrival also meant that they "did not see the said house and orchard or its apartments," but that later "some of them went into it to see it and appreciate it."⁵² This

⁴⁸ *E en esta huerta estaban muchas tiendas, armadas de paños de seda e de otras maneras.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 264.

⁴⁹ *...otra huerta e casa muy rica qu'él mandava agora fazer, que avía nombre Beheginar.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 264.

⁵⁰ *...e por ella avía unas calles e andanes cercados de madera, por do andava la gente. E en esta huerta avía muchas tiendas armadas e sombras de tapete colorado e otros paños de seda e de otras muchos color's, d'ellas entretalladas e de otras maneras llanas.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 265.

⁵¹ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 265–6.

⁵² *... no vieron esta dicha casa e huerta ni los aparejamientos d'ella, viéronla algunos de los sus omnes, que les fue mostrada, e metidos en ella a que la viesen e mirasen.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 267.



Fig. 3.3. “Timur granting an audience in Balkh on the occasion of his accession to power in April 1370,” from a *Ẓafarnāma* (Book of Victory) of Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi, copied by Shir ‘Ali, 1467–48 CE (872 AH), fols. 82b–83a. Johns Hopkins University, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, John Work Garrett Collection. Photo: The John Work Garrett Library, the Sheridan Libraries, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.



portion of the narrative further reveals the experiential testimony of several witnesses—and not the single subject Clavijo—which was coordinated into the final text.⁵³ For the events of 15 September a detailed description of the building located at the center of the unnamed orchard precedes our being informed that because of their late arrival to the feast some members of the embassy visited the house and grounds later. Occasional pieces of information about things seen by the Spaniards were clearly supplied later and then incorporated into the written document. Though it appears to be mostly a real-time narrative, written as a daily journal, the final text incarnates various temporalities, some of them retrospective. The order of happening does not dictate the sequence of telling.

The itinerary continues by recording that Timur on 22 September left this orchard for another “which was a house and orchard like this one” (*que era así casa e huerta como ésta*). This orchard was enclosed by a wall, square in plan, with round and large towers at its corners. The entrance was tall and made like the other entrances to the orchards. At the center of the orchard stood a large house shaped like a cross with a great water tank. This house was larger than the others in the orchards they had visited and was still more ornate. The name of this house and orchard was “Bagueno” (Bagh-i Naw, New garden).⁵⁴ The remainder of Clavijo’s description here narrates the feast that was ordered and the customs associated with wine drinking under the Timurids. Clavijo writes that the men who drank the most earned the title “bahaduer” (the Persian title *bahādur* from the Mongolian word *bağatur* meaning ‘hero’) and that only after the drinking had ended was the food brought in.⁵⁵ The feast culminated with the ambassadors being showered with silver coins (referenced in the Spanish as *tangites*; Persian *tanka*) and bestowed with “robes of brocade” (*ropas de camocan*). Both practices—gifting guests with precious robes and strewing them with coins (the latter practice is termed

⁵³ My reading of the itinerary is distinct from the English translation by Le Strange. He made interpolations to Clavijo’s narrative, particularly by identifying the unnamed orchards in an effort to clarify the successive movements from one orchard to the next.

⁵⁴ For the pages detailing the Bagh-i Naw, see Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 267–8.

⁵⁵ For further information about Clavijo’s accounts of wine drinking and other practices of the Timurids, see David J. Roxburgh, “Timurlu Minyatürlerinde Şarap: ‘Sâki, Bize Âb-ı Hayat Ver,’” *P Dünya Sanatı Dergisi* 40 (2006): 116–29.

nīhār in Persian)—were time-honored traditions of the Islamic royal court.⁵⁶

The next day, 23 September, Timur moved to another house and orchard close to the Bagh-i Dilgusha (*otra casa e huerta que era cerca d' ésta, que ha nombre Delicaxan*) for another feast to which the ambassadors were invited. This house and orchard were also very beautiful, and the rituals of wine drinking and eating were here repeated. The ambassadors were again given robes of brocade before “returning to their abodes, which were very close to where his Majesty was.”⁵⁷ Though the proximity of the two sites is interesting, perhaps even more so is the way that Clavijo's text informs his reader of their spatial position relative to each other. The reader is not given a cardinal direction which he might use to make a mental map but rather an impression of closeness through the temporal dimension, of the little time taken to journey from one orchard to the other.

Before continuing with the narrative of Clavijo's visit it is useful here to address key aspects of his text thus far. On Monday 8 September the ambassadors left their lodgings in the vicinity of the village of Misr for the Bagh-i Dilgusha where they saw tents and Timur “seated before something like a portal” and “beautiful houses;” on Friday 12 September, Timur left the Bagh-i Dilgusha for the Bagh-i Chinar; on Monday 15 September, Timur left the Bagh-i Chinar for an unnamed orchard where there was a cross-shaped building as well as tents and awnings; on Monday 22 September, Timur left the unnamed orchard for the Bagh-i Naw where there was also a cross-shaped building, the largest of all those seen by Clavijo; and on Tuesday 23 September, Timur left the Bagh-i Naw for another unnamed orchard close to the Bagh-i Dilgusha.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The general term used in the Persian language sources to reference gift-giving is *pīshkash*.

⁵⁷ ... e desí tornáronse a sus posadas, que eran bien cerca donde el Señor estava. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 269.

⁵⁸ Yazdi also describes Timur's itinerary after his return to Samarqand in July 1404. Timur stopped first in the Bagh-i Chinar—Saray Mulk Khanim and Tuman Agha came to the Bagh-i Chinar and Bagh-i Bilisht (Paradise garden), respectively—and then he moved to the Bagh-i Shimal (North garden). Next he moved to the Bagh-i Buland (Exalted garden) followed by entry into the city of Samarqand to visit the madrasa-mausoleum complex that he had commissioned to be built for his pre-deceased grandson Muhammad Sultan. After that he moved to the madrasa of Saray Mulk Khanim in Samarqand and thence to the Bagh-i Chinar and after that to the Bagh-i Dilgusha. The itinerary ended with a “feast” (*hij*) in another garden where

The ambassadors were based at one primary site and were invited intermittently to join Timur and his retinue at these various orchards located outside and around the walled city of Samarqand for specific choreographed events. In every case, the architecture of these sites is described consistently by the relatively indeterminate word “house” (*casa*), hence distinct from the term *palacio* which Clavijo used previously to reference the Aq Saray in Shahr-i Sabz and “Talicia” at Misr outside Samarqand’s city walls. Some of these “houses” located in the orchard are described in plan and location.

A shared typology emerges, of a square, walled orchard marked by an entrance and enclosing various plantings, especially trees, often with cross-shaped buildings erected at their center. In others, such as the Bagh-i Dilgusha, we learn of tents and unspecified houses. For most examples, Clavijo describes the furniture and textile components of the “houses,” noting the many mattresses, cushions, and wall hangings that decked the interior and exterior spaces. In every case it is difficult to imagine the scale or scope of ‘hard’ architecture. With the exception of the outer walls, their corner towers, and the ornate entrance portals, the only fixed elements appear to have been free-standing structures which were in every case draped in textiles. The principal Persian source to reference these palaces and gardens—Yazdi’s *Ẓafamāna*—attests to the presence of permanent architectural elements and materials of stone, brick, and tile. However, Yazdi was not an eye-witness and wrote his text fifteen to twenty years after Clavijo. It was the evanescent elements of these courtly settings that impressed Clavijo and his companions the most and in some instances these cloth elements resembled permanent architecture. The intentional simulation of permanent architecture in temporary forms would be more fully developed in Clavijo’s next sequence of narrative which recounts the courtly gatherings staged on the Kan-i Gil meadow.

Timur’s Quriltāy at Kan-i Gil

The next section of Clavijo’s narrative relates that while all these movements had been taking place from orchard to orchard over the span of a little more than two weeks, Timur had ordered an

Timur met the “Frankish ambassadors” (*ilchīyān-i āfrānī*). See Yazdi, *Ẓafamāna*, 2: 420–2.

“assembly” (*quriltāy*) on the meadow of Kan-i Gil to the east of Samarqand. Though the primary function of this *quriltāy* (Mongolian: assembly of nobles, council, jamboree) was to celebrate the marriages of the Timurid princes—including Ulugh Beg, Ibrahim Sultan, Ejil, Aḥmad, Sidi-Aḥmad, and Bayqara—it satisfied a myriad of functions. Others included Timur’s triumphant return to Samarqand after six years of campaigns, the submission of the “horde” (*ordū*) and members of the ruling house to Timur, the execution of justice, the display of the imperial capital’s economic wealth, and the reception of various envoys and ambassadors. Failure to attend the *quriltāy* would be read as potentially seditious behavior and could possibly result in retribution. When Malik Ghiyath al-Din Kart, the ruler of Herat, failed to attend a *quriltāy* ordered by Timur in 1380, Timur besieged and then captured the city.⁵⁹

Clavijo’s narrative associated with the *quriltāy* of 1404 begins by noting that Timur ordered tents to be erected for him and his wives in the Kan-i Gil. Timur also ordered that “all the entourage” (*toda la hueste*) should come in from the orchards and various areas where it was stationed to assemble at Kan-i Gil. Members of the horde came with their wives and set up their tents. The tents were arranged not in an arbitrary fashion but according to the proper status and place of their occupants. After three or four days, Clavijo estimates there were some 20,000 tents. The horde also brought with it butchers and cooks, vendors of barley and fruit, and bakers with their ovens, who were all positioned within the encampment in a remarkable order: “every one arranged according to marked streets” (*e todos ordenados por calles señaladas*). There were also baths and bathhouse owners established among the horde who assembled tents and iron baths filled with water.⁶⁰

The logistics of organizing such a gathering would have benefited from the skills of two military officers of the Timurid court, the *yurtchī* (camp maker) and the *tovachī* (troop inspector). The *yurtchī* was entrusted the task of finding grounds for setting up the camp and its tents, and the *tovachī* was responsible—among other tasks—for overseeing “the construction of buildings, dividing booty, organizing

⁵⁹ Beatrice F. Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70.

⁶⁰ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 270.

camp grounds, and helping with the arrangement of feasts.”⁶¹ *Tovachis* were ostensibly organizers. At Kan-i Gil, the *quriltāy* took place in a setting comparable to that of an “army camp” (*ordū*), though some scholars have suggested that the *quriltāy* was imbued with a festive rather than military tone.⁶² In Clavijo’s narrative, *ordo* carries two senses, referencing the horde and also the army camp. In Turco-Mongol usage *ordū* signified the army camp.

The ambassadors were relocated to another house and orchard belonging to Timur and located closer to the royal camp at Kan-i Gil. On the following Monday, 29 September, Timur left the Kan-i Gil for Samarqand and took up occupancy in some “houses” built near the city wall which he had ordered built in honor of Saray Mulk Khanim’s mother who was buried in a chapel there.⁶³ On that day Timur ordered a feast to which the Spanish ambassadors were invited and which was held to receive the “ambassadors who had come from a land which borders the land of the emperor of China.”⁶⁴ Clavijo’s narrative gives a compelling account of these ambassadors’ curious headgear and clothing, which was made of furs, and of the special furs they presented to Timur as a gift. A few days later on 2 October, the Spaniards were ordered to go to another orchard where their guardian (i.e. Timur’s chief doorkeeper) lived.

The next dated entry is for 6 October when Timur ordered a great feast “in the field where they had camped his horde, which

⁶¹ Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, 174. Describing the construction of the tented appurtenances of the Kan-i Gil *quriltāy*, Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 424, mentions an army of men whose responsibility it was to set up tents, spread carpets, etc. (Persian: *farrāsh*; pl. *farrāshān*). For *tovachī*, also see Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963–1975), 1: 260–4.

⁶² Peter Alford Andrews, “The Tents of Timur: An Examination of the Reports on the Qiriltay at Samarqand, 1404,” *Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia* 7 (1977): 143–87; 144. ‘Military’ and ‘festive’ were not mutually exclusive. For example, after Timur’s defeat of his elusive rival Toqtamish Khan in 1391, Yazdi writes: “the camp was pitched for the royal descent, a majestic and awesome *sarāparda* was set up encircling the plain, and inside it the dome of the victorious court was raised to the apex of the heavens.” This “verdant royal camp” served as the site for a victory celebration which lasted for twenty-six days. See Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 394–7. The translation is by Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 83–4.

⁶³ The building is identified by architectural historians as the madrasa-mausoleum of Saray Mulk Khanim. It faced the Friday mosque Timur had built just inside Samarqand’s Iron Gate.

⁶⁴ ...*embaxadores que a él venían de una tierra que confina con la tierra e señorío del Catay*. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 271.

they call royal.”⁶⁵ Events here would occupy Clavijo and his company until 24 October—the last feast mentioned occurred on 23 October, but lasted all night into the morning of the next day.

Many people were invited to the feast on 6 October, including Timur's entire family and the ambassadors. When they came to the *ordū* they “found many beautiful tents, one after the other, and the most [beautiful] of them were on the riverbank, and it was a very beautiful thing to see.”⁶⁶ The ambassadors were brought forward and asked to rest for a while beneath an awning (*sombra*) of white linen decorated with panels of other colored stuff held up by wooden poles. Comparable structures are illustrated in near contemporary manuscript paintings, such as an example depicting Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg enthroned beneath a white canopy decorated with a text in blue and supported by an armature of red colored poles (Fig. 3.4). Ulugh Beg's wives and a retinue of attendants, including guards, food bearers, and falconers, are positioned along one side.

From his vantage point under the white linen awning, Clavijo remarks:

Near these awnings was a great pavilion which was made like a tent except that it was four-squared. And it was as high as three lances and more. And the skirts of it did not reach the ground, [and were] about a lance [in height from the ground]. And it was one hundred feet wide. And it had four corners, and the center of it was round like a vault and they built it over twelve trees as thick as a man's chest. And they were painted blue and gold and other colors.⁶⁷

This main pavilion was enclosed by another square-shaped wall of cloth fashioned like porticoes. The interior of the pavilion was outfitted with the customary hanging colored textiles, some embroidered with gold. The exterior of the pavilion was covered with bands of colored silk, white, black, and yellow. At each corner, the high

⁶⁵ ...en el campo onde tenían puesto su ordo, que dizen por real. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 272.

⁶⁶ ...fallaron muchas tiendas bien fermosas, e las más d'ellas estaban riberas del río, e bien parecían fermosas de ver, e estaban juntas muchas, unas con otras. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 272–3.

⁶⁷ E cerca d'estas sombras estava un grand pavellón, el cual era fecho como tienda, salvo que era cuadrada; e era tan alto como tres lanças de armas e más; e las faldas d'él no llegavan al suelo quanto podia ser una lança; e avía en ancho fasta cient pasos. E avía quatro esquinas, e el cielo d'él era redondo como bóveda, e armábase sobre doze árboles, tan gruesos cada uno como un omne en los pechos; e eran pintados de azul e de oro e de otras colores. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 273.

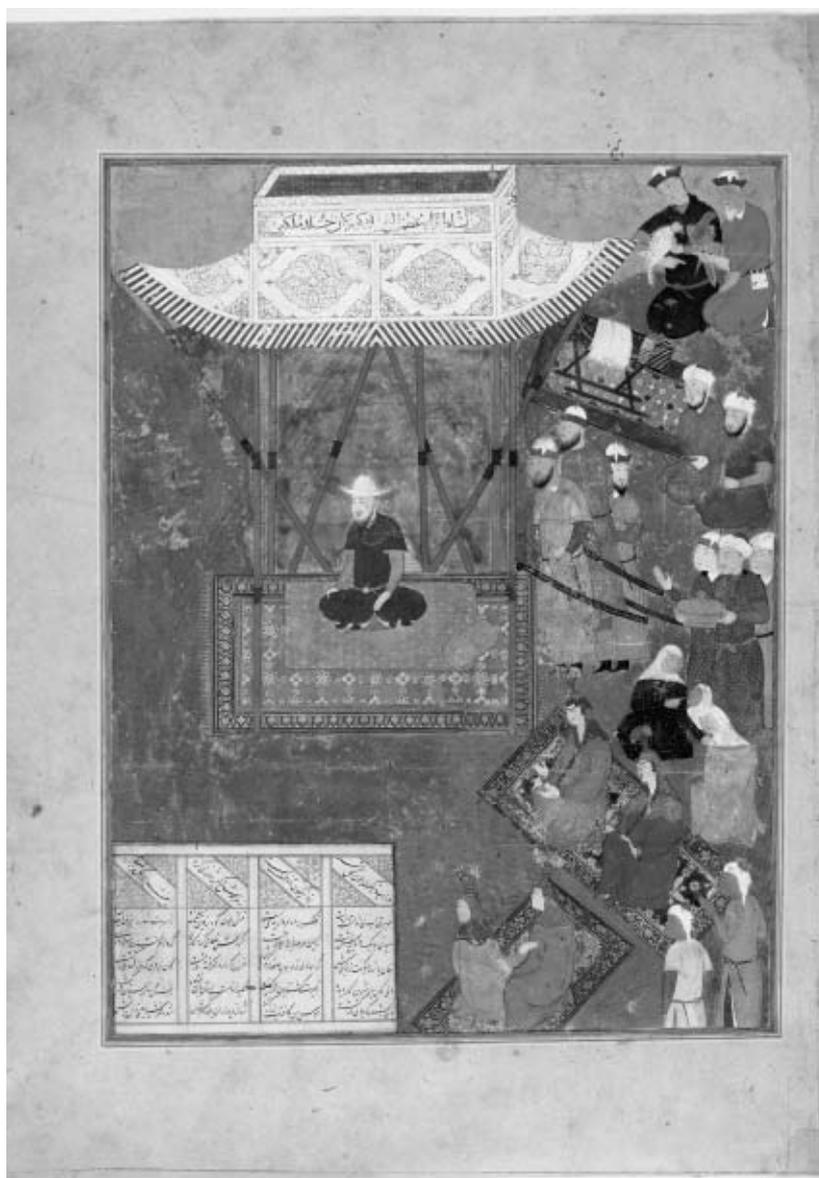


Fig. 3.4. "The court of Ulugh Beg," c. 1440. Freer Gallery of Art, no. 46.26.
Photo: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Purchase,
F1946.26.



wooden poles were capped with a copper apple and figure of the moon.

And at the top of this pavilion among the staves there was a tower with battlements of silk cloth of many types with a door by which you entered into it... And it was so high that from far away it seemed a castle; so grand and high and wide was this pavilion that it was a strange thing to see. There was so much beauty in this pavilion that I am not able to describe it.⁶⁸

Finished with the description of this monumental pavilion, the text moves on to an element enclosing it:

And near this pavilion there was a fence like those of a town or castle of silk cloth of many colors with battlements above and with cords that were outside and inside and by which they tied it down. And inside there were some poles that held it up. This wall was round and it was almost as wide as 300 feet, and the wall was very high, about the height of a man on horseback. And there was a very high entrance in the form of an arch with doors inside. And outside of the work itself, which was the wall, that [portal] was closed and opened; and above the portal there was a square tower with battlements.⁶⁹

Clavijo ends this description by identifying the circular component as a “calaparada” (Persian *sarāparda*, lit. a curtain or an enclosing wall made of cloth). These were walls fashioned from cloth that functioned as barriers to divide inner from outer spaces.

These practices of arranging pavilions, tents, and awnings together in enclosures formed by cloth walls (*sarāparda*) are rarely visualized in pictorial form. One uncommon illustration in a copy of Yazdi's *Ẓafarnāma* dated 1486 depicts an image of Timur enthroned on a litter throne as he is entertained by female dancers and male and female musicians (Figs. 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7). Rows of standing and seated figures join Timur for this *al fresco* entertainment while behind

⁶⁸ *E encima d'este pabellón, entre estos dichos maderos, estava una torre con almenas de paños de seda de muchas maneras, con una puerta por do entran a ella.... Así era tan alto que de lexos parecía castillo, e tan grande e tan alto e tan ancho era este pabellón que era una estraña cosa de ver. E mucho más de fermosura avía este pavellón, que no se podía escrevir. Clavijo, Embajada a Tamorlán, 274–5.*

⁶⁹ *E acerca d'este pavellón estava una cerca así como de villa o castillo, de paños de seda de muchas colores, entretallados de muchas maneras, con almenas encima, e con cuerdas de parte de fuera e de dentro que la tiravan; e de dentro avía unos maderos que los tenían. Esta cerca era redonda, e podía ser tan ancha como trezientos pasos, e la pared, muy alta, cuanto sería un omne de cavallo. E avía una puerta muy alta, fecha en arco, con puertas adentro. E afuera de la obra mesma, que era la cerca que se cerrava e abría; e encima de la portada, estava una torre cuadrada con almenas. Clavijo, Embajada a Tamorlán, 275.*





Fig. 3.5. Timur enthroned with musicians and dancers. *Zafarnāma* (Book of Victory) of Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, copied by Hamd Allah b. Murshid al-Katib, 1486 CE (891 AH), Iran, fol. 97a. Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, İstanbul, no. 1964. Photo: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, İstanbul.

the group one sees a trellis tent covered with patterned textiles, a broad awning covered with patterned textile panels arranged in a grid, and then a white *sarāparda* decorated with blue borders and medallions. A number of trellis tents and other awnings are set up inside the *sarāparda* enclosure where women are seen moving freely through the cloth-walled space.

Inside the *sarāparda* at the Kan-i Gil, and in addition to the main pavilion, there were many tents and awnings (*tiendas e sombras armadas*) of various types. The tallest was circular in shape and did not use guys to stabilize it. Its structure was fashioned from poles as long and thick as lances and the fabric stretched over it. The top fabric was colored red but the lower walls were covered in an unadorned white. This tent had a tall doorway fashioned from small canes and covered in red textile.⁷⁰ “And near this said tent was another very richly ornamented one which they tied down with cords and it was of a red cloth of velvet. And then there were another four tents close to each other and one passes from one to the next, and one goes as if there were a street in the middle of them and they were covered over.”⁷¹ Nearby this grouping of tents there was yet another cluster of tents enclosed by a textile “made to appear as if a frieze of tiles.”⁷² This cloth enclosure was punctuated by “open windows with their shutters” (*ventanas abiertas con sus puertas*). A tall tent, of the same type as before (without guys), stood at the center of this second enclosure.

Clavijo identifies the first and second enclosures as belonging to the wives of Timur, his chief wife Saray Mulk Khanim and his second wife “Guichicano” (Kuchuk Khanim). In their vicinity he describes yet a third enclosure and its tents and awnings and concludes by counting eleven such enclosures in this area. These

⁷⁰ *E avía una puerta alta, con puertas de una cañas menudillas, cubiertas de tapete colorado.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 276.

⁷¹ *E cerca d’esta dicha tienda, estava otra bien rica, que la tiravan cuerdas; e era de un tapete colorado de vellud. E otrosí estavan luego otras cuatro tiendas, juntas unas con otras, que se passavan de una a otra, e iba una como calle por medio d’ellas, e eran cubiertas encima.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 276.

⁷² *por tal manera fecho que parecía como lizero de azulejos.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 276. The color, scope of decoration, and range of fabrics used for the tents signal sedentary and not nomadic production. See Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange*, 75; and Andrews, “Tents of Timur,” 144. The production of tents—their textiles and poles—are mentioned in a later progress report summarizing the status of works under way in the “workshop” (*kitābkhāna*) in Timurid Herat. See Thackston, trans., *Century of Princes*, 323–7, 326–7.

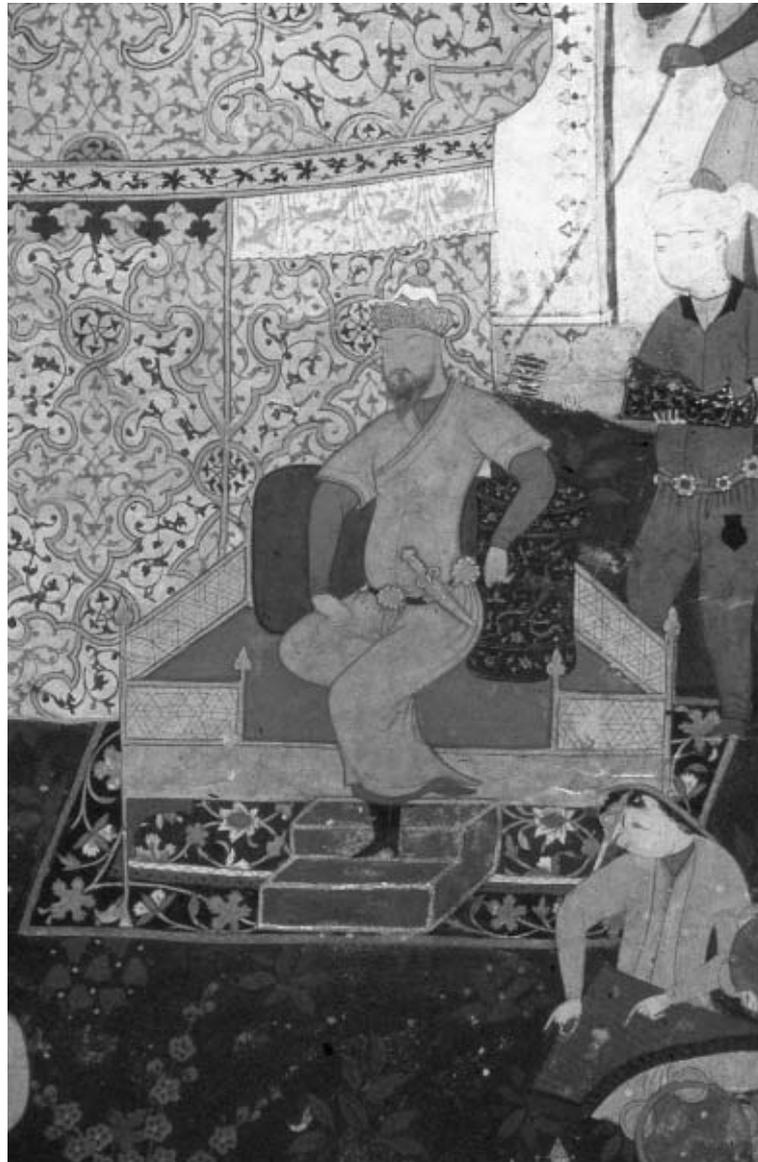


Fig. 3.6. Timur on throne. Detail of Fig. 3.5
Photo: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul.



Fig. 3.7. Female dancers. Detail of Fig. 3.5
Photo: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul.

enclosures belonged to the wives of Timur or to the wives of his “grandsons” (*nietos*) and Clavijo writes that they lived in them in both winter and summer. It is even possible that the Timurid women themselves played a supervisory role in the erection of their separate living quarters—one of the responsibilities given to women during campaign was that of setting up the *ordū*.⁷³

On 6 October, Timur left his enclosure and came to the great pavilion for a feast attended by the ambassadors. On 7 October, another feast was held in one of the enclosures Clavijo had described—he does not specify which. On October 8, a strong wind prevented Timur from attending another feast. On October 9, the ambassadors were invited to yet another feast hosted by “Anzada” the chief wife of Miraza Miraxa (Khanzada, d. 1411, wife of Miranshah).⁷⁴ This was likewise held in an enclosure with a tent—when the ambassadors approached the tents they saw “many jars of wine” (*muchas jarras de vino*) arranged on the ground.⁷⁵ Later on, wine was taken from these jars and served to the company of guests.

Clavijo’s account of this feast is replete with all kinds of details about the seating arrangements, the guests, the forms of entertainment, the “Busa” (a sweetened mare’s milk) that they drank, and the intricate procedures of wine drinking. He offers a detailed account of how wine was presented to Khanzada and her female companions in small golden cups carried on golden trays. Facing Khanzada, the servers carrying these cups performed three kneeling movements on their right knee, standing on one spot and without moving forward. It was only then that other servants lifted the cups from the trays, white cloths preventing the servers from touching the precious metal, and presented them, again in a kneeling position, to Khanzada and the other women. They then withdrew, all the while facing the royal assembly.⁷⁶ Clavijo notes that this service took place over time and

⁷³ Soucek, “Timurid Women,” 202. Andrews, “Tents of Timur,” 152, proposed that the allocation of separate living quarters to Timur’s wives may reflect a continuity of Mongol practice. Each wife of Batu Khan (c. 1205–1255) owned her own tents and vehicles to transport them. See M.Ş. İpşiroğlu, *Painting and Culture of the Mongols*, trans., E.D. Phillips (New York: Abrams, 1966), 27.

⁷⁴ It was not uncommon for high-ranking women of the Timurid house to host their own feasts. Indeed, in life they assumed a broad range of official responsibilities. See Soucek, “Timurid Women,” *passim*.

⁷⁵ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 279.

⁷⁶ At another feast, members of the elite approached Timur by a series of kneeling movements and were presented by him with a wine-filled cup. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 292.

involved several refillings of the womens' cups as well as the womens' ordering the servants to drink cups filled with wine. They did the last to amuse Khanzada and her company. In addition to wine, the women also drank the sweetened mare's milk. Clavijo concludes the narrative by writing that men in their company were drunk (*beúdos sobarcados*) and that this was expected. Following Turco-Mongolian custom, food was served only after the drinking had been completed. Clavijo reports this excessive drinking and its practice across the male and female genders at the Timurid court without overt judgment. It is altogether unclear whether or not he viewed what he witnessed as scandalous.

Timur also invited the ambassadors to a feast on 9 October to celebrate the marriage of one of his grandsons. Saray Mulk Khanim and Khanzada were also present. To further celebrate the day, Timur ordered that all the traders and craftsmen from the city of Samarqand leave the town and come to the Kan-i Gil to set up their tents and engage in trade. These city-dwellers were further ordered to set up a show of their skill to display to the horde camped in the field.⁷⁷ Other events this day included the public execution of the mayor of Samarqand, named "Dina," and another man named "Burodo Mirassa" (Burunday Mirza). Someone clearly informed Clavijo and his companions of the nature of the offenses for which "Dina" and "Burodo Mirassa" had been charged because these are presented at some length. Their public execution brought the political aspects of the *quriltāy* into full light, to both the Turco-Mongols and the Tajik residents of Samarqand—executions normally took place inside the citadel. Turco-Mongols and Tajiks alike were called to the Kan-i Gil to show fealty to Timur and to honor the members of his extended family. The many ambassadors from regions near and far also constituted an important audience and were privy to Timur's beneficence and judgment.

Clavijo's next dated entry details events from 13 October when Timur invited the embassy, yet again, to a feast. Approaching the pavilion in which they had visited Timur before, the ambassadors found it flanked by two newly assembled enclosures encircling tents.

⁷⁷ The trade show inspired Yazdi, *Zafarnāma*, 2: 427–34, to compose a long poem about the various skills on display there. Although this is by far the best known event of its kind, other Timurid-era trade shows, for which the various guilds performed at festivals convened by rulers, have been listed by O'Kane, "From Tents to Pavilions," 253–4.

The tents and enclosures forming them were covered with textiles “more richly ornamented and more precious than any of the others that had been assembled before.”⁷⁸ The walls of the enclosures were still higher and their entrances covered by a domed arch. These were covered in sumptuous textiles embroidered in gold. Crenellated towers rose over the doorways and the walls of the enclosure were punctuated with windows bound with cloth coverings (*con lazos hechos en el dicho paño*). One of the enclosure’s walls was composed of an unadorned white cloth. Each enclosure contained tents but Clavijo was not given entry to them that day. When he returned the next day, a second great pavilion had been erected identical to Timur’s first pavilion except that it was made from white silk and inside were colored and embroidered textiles.⁷⁹ The ambassadors were seated at a distance from this pavilion under an awning; other awnings were provided to each group of ambassadors which had come in from different far-flung regions. A circuit of wine jars had been placed all around Timur’s pavilions and the tents. These marked a perimeter that no-one was allowed to trespass and were guarded by archers. This was yet another means of defining divisions between space, of making thresholds that marked transitions from one place to another amid a territory lacking permanent architectural elements. The soft architecture established these successive spaces and visually announced hierarchies among them—court protocol underscored these hierarchies by prescribing movements and codes of behavior just as they did in palace ensembles of hard architecture.

A feast followed where the guest of honor was Timur’s grandson “Piyir Mahomad” (Pir Muhammad, 1376–1407). Clavijo provides many details of the entertainment provided at this feast—several pages are allotted to the elephants who performed tricks—and of the entrances of the “Great Khanim,” Saray Mulk Khanim, with her many female attendants and eunuchs, and of Timur’s second and third wives who joined the company from their individual enclosures. All in all, nine princesses of the royal house came in. The feast began only after they were all seated, beginning with the distribution of sweetened mare’s milk, wine, the presentation of entertainment, and ending with the serving of food.

⁷⁸ ...eran muy ricos e más preciados que ninguna de las otras que antes estavan armadas. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 284.

⁷⁹ ...e de un paño blanco de seda lo de fuera d’él; e lo de dentro eran paños de muchos colores, e lazos e travamentos que en él eran hechos. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 285.

The final days of the celebrations at Kan-i Gil included a feast with Timur on 16 October when the ambassadors joined Timur to drink in his tent and another feast on 17 October hosted by Saray Mulk Khanim. This gathering is again amply described. Her enclosure was set with multiple tents, the chief one a trellis tent covered in red textile with doors covered with material in such a way as to be transparent when viewed from inside and opaque from the outside.⁸⁰ The inner doors of this tent were appointed with figures of St. Peter and St. Paul holding books in their hands made from silver, booty taken by Timur when he raided the “Turks’ treasury” (*el tesoro del turco*) in Bursa.⁸¹ The familiar iconography of this Christian subject matter would have been easily identified by Clavijo.

Inside the tent there was also a “cabinet” (*armario*) made of gold and enamel and encrusted with precious stones and pearls. The cabinet was used as a stand for cups and contained six gold “flasks” (*redomas*) set with pearls and jewels and six “cups” (*taças*) similarly adorned. There was also a table of precious materials and standing next to it a “tree” (*un árbol*), the height of a man, also made of gold, its fruit composed of balas rubies, emeralds, turquoise, sapphires, and rubies and pearls (*balaxes e esmeraldas e turqueas e çafires e rubis e aljófar muy grueso*). Small birds of gold and enamel in many colors (*muchas paxarillas de oro, esmaltadas e fechas de muchas colores*) were perched among the branches. Similar trees, some of them mechanical contraptions, are mentioned in a range of sources from distant and recent historical contexts, making this tree a literary topos.⁸²

⁸⁰ ...e los que estudiesen de dentro pudiesen ver a los que de fuera estaban, e no pudiesen ver a ellos. Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 298.

⁸¹ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 298. The specific Turkic ruler in question is the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I whom Timur overthrew and captured in 1402.

⁸² Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 299. The same tree is possibly mentioned by Jean of Sultaniyya, “Mémoire sur Tamerlan,” 451, where he mentions a “tree of very pure and fine gold” that Timur salvaged from the bottom of the Euphrates as one of the treasures of the Kings of Persia. Timur sent the tree to Samarqand along with other treasures. Similar trees fashioned from precious metals and studded with valuable stones are mentioned in earlier historical accounts. One is an account of Ibn al-Zubayr in his book on gifts and rarities when he enumerates details of the reception of two Byzantine ambassadors at the Abbasid court in Baghdad in 917. Aḥmad b. al-Rashīd Ibn al-Zubayr, *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitāb al-hadāyā wa al-tuḥaf)*, trans., Ghāda al-Hijjāwī al-Qaddūmī (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1996), 148–54, esp. 154. This tree with birds was an automaton and came up from the ground. Another source, the *Tārīkh Baghdād* (History of Baghdad) composed by Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Khāṭib al-Baghdādī (d. 1071), describes it as made of gold and silver with branches holding birds of different sizes which moved and sang in the

After visiting this tent and seeing its contents, the ambassadors were escorted back to the pavilion where they found Timur. One of its complex tented structures, though assembled from many pieces, “looked like a single thing” (*Así que de fuera parecía todo uno*).⁸³ Amid that enclosure there also stood a “wooden house” (*una casa de madera*) decorated with gold and blue that turned out to be the mosque where Timur performed his prayers. Even the mosque at the Kan-i Gil *quriltāy* could be disassembled for transport. Closing a series of experiences of soft architecture which frequently mimicked the morphological and decorative features of permanent architecture, the mosque brought the spectacle full circle: the most archetypal institution of hard architecture had been entirely re-done in a portable format.⁸⁴

One final feast was held by Timur on 23 October at Kan-i Gil. It lasted the entire day. A week later, on 30 October, Timur left the Kan-i Gil for Samarqand where he visited the tomb complex built for his grandson “Mahomad Çoltan Miraza” (Muhammad Sultan, 1375–1403). Clavijo and the embassy joined Timur there for another feast. The ambassadors would only receive permission to leave the city on 21 November after several requests, beginning on 1 November.

Conclusion

Clavijo’s narrative of his visits to the “orchards and houses” of Timur in Samarqand’s vicinity and to the many tents and enclosures at the Kan-i Gil meadow for the *quriltāy* in 1404 offer some of the most

wind. See Guy Le Strange, “A Greek Embassy to Baghdad in 917 AD,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (February, 1897): 35–46, esp. 42. Another account related by the Franciscan Friar William of Rubruck (ca. 1210–ca. 1270) mentions a tree of silver made by the Parisian goldsmith Guillaume Boucher that he saw at Möngke Khan’s court during his journey of 1253–1255; see İpşiroğlu, *Painting and Culture of the Mongols*, 36; and Leonardo Olschki, *Guillaume Boucher, a French Artist at the Court of the Khans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), 28–44. Note that Soucek, “Timurid Women,” 206, has suggested that the possessions on display in Saray Mulk Khanim’s tent may have been selected by her from the “baggage train” (*ağruq*) which she was entrusted to lead from Anatolia. According to Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 420, Saray Mulk Khanim quit the baggage train to hasten her arrival to Samarqand.

⁸³ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 300.

⁸⁴ This is equally a continuity from the Mongol Ilkhanid past when mosques, Buddhist temples, and churches were also made in portable form. See Donald N. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Il Khanid Period* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 7.

vivid descriptions of settings for Timurid courtly life and ceremony. His narrative confirms many details about a social order and political hierarchy that we know from other foreign sources as well as internal ones. It also details a typology of tented and cloth structures fully utilized by the Timurids—there were *khargāh* (trellis tent), *khayma* (tent stayed with ropes), *sāyabān* (pavilion or awning), and *sarāparda* (enclosure)—though only the last is identified by its Persian term in Clavijo's narrative. The means of assembly and composition are fastidiously described for each element of soft architecture. From Clavijo, we also learn something of the itinerary of movements of Timur and his royal entourage and how they observed protocols for court ritual, and thus practiced courtliness. Prescribed codes of behavior and etiquette ensured the decorous participation of all those involved during audience, gift-giving, drinking, and eating. Access to areas of the enclosures was carefully controlled as were seating arrangements and the sequences in which different social groups entered these spaces.

Many of these pieces of information have already been extracted from Clavijo's text and put to good use, often put up against other written sources, such as Yazdi's *Zafarnāma*, to pin down the scope and aspect of architecture in Timurid palace settings. Clavijo's text is presented here in such detail—perhaps even indulgently so—because the available English translations are often less than reliable and because scholars aware of such problems have used them all the same.

But there are other reasons for the extended presentation of Clavijo. Clavijo makes it clear that Timur engaged the prerogatives associated with his status as ruler in various contexts, principally the orchards and houses around Samarqand, the temporary enclosures of the Kan-i Gil, and the “palaces” or “palace” in Kish. By “orchards” he also surely meant “gardens” (Persian *bāgh*), a fact made clear in the Persian sources which offer more expanded discussion of the plantings—the noun *huerta* may even be a synonym for garden. These orchards were set with pavilions, tents, and a paraphernalia of awnings and textiles, thus transforming them from garden to royal court: Timur fully utilized the tent as an apparatus of kingship. Clavijo did not see the “palaces” in Kish when Timur was in residence, so his vision of that space lacked the full effect of sumptuous textile furnishings and furniture that he encountered so abundantly in the environs of Samarqand. Such transformation of a space is

alluded to by Yazdi when he notes of the Bagh-i Bihisht, “through the royal visit it became a garden of paradise.”⁸⁵ The garden was transformed by Timur’s presence—not only literally by his being *there*—because it had been made ready for him by a staff who set up its temporary elements: its walls, textile hangings, furniture, and sumptuous objects, and a menu of food and drink served by the many attendants who waited on the ruler and his entourage.

Some discussion has already been offered of the possible distinctions made in the choice of using the noun *palacio* or *casa* to name the architecture seen by the Spanish visitors. *Palacio* appears four other times in the narrative. Once it is used to refer to the “Chalbelecet” orchard, and a second time to what modern scholars identify as the madrasa-mausoleum built by Saray Mulk Khanim opposite Timur’s Friday Mosque in Samarqand, though the use of the word in this instance is explicable by a conflation of the built form and what was actually happening here (Timur held several audiences and a feast in the building’s courtyard which was also set with tents).⁸⁶ A third time Clavijo references a palace in the vicinity of Muhammad Sultan’s mausoleum but supplies no information about it. A fourth time the noun *palacio* is used in the narrative is in a retrospective accounting of Samarqand as a whole and what Clavijo saw there: “and within these orchards which were outside the city were the greatest and most honored houses. And the king there had his palaces and honored houses as well as [did] the great men of the city and they also had their great estates and houses in these orchards.”⁸⁷ It is almost as if Clavijo only understood that these had all been the ruler’s “palaces” after the visit was done, his nomenclature largely shaped by Spanish notions of what constituted a palace (a building with a designated function and a space permanently given over to that function, mainly public discourse).

It is no wonder that an absolutely coherent nomenclature was impossible. Timur’s audiences and feasts took place in changing,

⁸⁵ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 89; Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 420.

⁸⁶ Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 309. Clavijo’s use of the term has caused some confusion about this building. See Soucek, “Timurid Women,” 209–10. O’Kane, “From Tents to Pavilions,” 251, gets around the problem of nomenclature, suggesting that Clavijo described it as a “palace” because it was also used as a site for Timur’s audiences and feasts, tents being set up in the courtyard of the building.

⁸⁷ *E entre estas huertas que de fuera de la ciudad son, están las más grandes e onradas casas. E el Señor allí tenía allí los sus palacios e casas honradas; otrosí los grandes omnes de la ciudad, las sus estancias e casas entre estas huertas las tenían.* Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, 311.

shape-shifting environments which involved the fusion of sedentary and nomadic traditions of royal life—each one of those traditions was affected by the other. Timur's orchards ringing Samarqand combined fixed architectural components, most likely pavilions, set at their center, tents, and shade-giving awnings set up amid the orchard for temporary occupation. These were then disassembled and moved to the site that would next be occupied or re-outfitted day to day according to need. These extramural, out of doors environments were clearly fascinating to Clavijo and his companions. They had never seen their like and often expressed their failure to describe them, an arch trope current in many literary traditions. It is in this respect that we can shift from a reading of the text oriented toward the excavation of facts—the narrative as something claiming to be real, something that actually happened—toward a reading interested in how the narrative generates an experiential effect on its reader.

The focus of the Kan-i Gil *quriltāy* was a massive free-standing pavilion with numerous enclosures nearby for Timur and other members of the royal house to occupy and host events. Each one of these enclosures was composed of a *sarāparda*, gated and crenellated, with various kinds of tents and awnings inside. All around these royal elements there were other enclosures, for the countless members of the horde (Timur's entourage of military commanders and their Turco-Mongol cohort), and innumerable tents. These elements were laid out in such a way as to resemble urban settings, by forming regular streets. The Kan-i Gil was further imbued with the ambience of the city when all the traders and artisans quit Samarqand to set up their booths and perform shows at Timur's behest. Thus, a narrative of the city was transferred to Kan-i Gil and transplanted onto the evanescent, fugitive space of the military camp.

The artifice of the Kan-i Gil was not lost on Clavijo and his narrative descriptions convey its spectacular properties. He notes its many space-making components marking boundary and threshold, from cloth walls (with gateways and marked by high portals) to circuits of wine jugs. Much of what he witnessed simulated the morphology—squared compounds, walls, crenellations, portals, domes, towers—or decoration—windows covered with mesh or textiles made to appear as if they were a frieze of tiles—of hard architecture. Some of these temporary structures were so large that when seen from a distance one might think them castles. And yet, despite these kinds of formal relations, where soft architecture set itself up as something

it was not, it was a real thing.⁸⁸ When Clavijo first met Timur at the Bagh-i Dilgusha he was seated under “something like a portal” though it was made of cloth and wood. Though Clavijo understood that several of these pieces of soft architecture had been fabricated from discrete components, he notes how they were interlinked and how they appeared to be physically integrated. This was another dimension to the simulations at work in soft architecture. The perceptual ambiguity of soft architecture even called into question what he had perceived as hard architecture before in a way comparable to his likening a parasol to a miniature tent: there were moments when vision alone could not guarantee Clavijo, with absolute certainty, knowledge of the physical substance of what stood before him. Overall, the process of finding a language adequate to conveying what he saw and their exceptionally dense descriptions yielded a narrative that simultaneously performed the work of conveying what was there to the absent reader and the utter wonder of it.

In addition to all these complex dissimulations of permanent architecture, some tents were clearly just that and easily perceived as such, though they were adorned with sumptuous textile coverings to impress. Other tents were simply white and unadorned, signifying the high status of white felt used in Mongol tentage and for other customs. Here white silk seems to have replaced the white felt. The array of materials seen by Clavijo and his companions was daunting and challenging to describe, and yet other aspects of the process of court ceremonial made it still harder to comprehend. Timur’s palaces were portable, cloaked with the paraphernalia of the Islamic palace, a sumptuous array of textiles, furniture and treasures acquired through booty, and their portability was thoroughly embraced.⁸⁹ When Clavijo returned to spaces he had visited before amid the *quriltāy*, he encountered changed or adapted environments. One can imagine that over the course of these many days of celebration, the experience of the whole was like a crescendo, the steady overwhelming of the senses by a panoply of impermanent materials coyly

⁸⁸ Noting the basic formal similarities between soft and hard architecture, Golombek, “Draped Universe,” 30, writes that Timur’s tents “simulated real architecture.”

⁸⁹ Ibn ‘Arabshāh, *‘Ajā’ib al-maqdūr*, 216, mentions other rare treasures set inside Timurid tents, including a “curtain,” presumably a tapestry, Timur acquired as booty from Bayezid I.

aping permanent architecture while also working within the paradigms of Mongolian custom and its semiotics of the tent.

The use of tentage under Timur's rule was more than an anamnesis of the nomadic practice of seasonal migration: Clavijo's text makes that clear. Timur continued to live in tents and to use their visual language to project his image as Turco-Mongolian ruler, but these tents were cloaked with all the opulent trappings and furnishings of the Islamic palace and moreover simulated features of permanent architecture. In these last respects Timur's tentage was a clear departure from earlier Mongol practices of tentage in Mongolia, China, and Iran from the 1250s up to the early 1300s. Timurid practices of tentage were not a matter of identity crisis, of being caught somewhere between nomad and sedentary in an inexorable process toward complete cultural assimilation—as Monica Gronke has intimated⁹⁰ or a “compromise between nomadic and urban life,” the re-creation of a “nomadic environment in the microcosm of a city and its surroundings”—as Bernard O’Kane has described it.⁹¹ Both characterizations have the unfortunate effect of depriving the Timurids of a measure of agency and consciousness over what they were doing, casting the shaping of Timur's courtly contexts in terms that are far too passive. Rather, Timur was consciously manipulating discrete cultural traditions for his own ends: artful fusions, hybrids, and juxtapositions of sedentary and nomadic practices were palpable to Clavijo and his company, who were duly impressed by them, even if they did not gauge and then name the relative balance of each in what they saw. Such manipulations of tradition ran across the gamut of patronage of art and architecture under Timur. His architectural commissions are especially revealing. He not only made careful choices about where and what to build, addressing the various confessional constituencies of the societies under his rule, but developed an iconography of the ruler through the inscriptional programs found on those monuments while also vying with the achievements of his immediate nomadic predecessors, the Mongol Ilkhans of Iran, a competition expressed principally through scale. Many of these developments became possible because of the new constellations of

⁹⁰ Gronke, “Persian Court Between Palace and Tent,” 19, writes that Timur was neither “a full-fledged nomadic ruler because he did have a capital,” nor a “wholly sedentarized ruler, because he did not really use his capital to live in. He was a sovereign in transition between nomadic and sedentary living.”

⁹¹ O’Kane, “From Tents to Pavilions,” 253, 256.

regional building traditions practiced by the architects and craftsmen gathered by Timur in Samarqand.⁹² The ideological savvy expressed in the formation of new courtly environments and architectural projects entirely matched Timur's capacity to remake and adapt political structures as he saw fit in expanding and controlling his realm.⁹³

In this process of forming new courtly environments, artifice played a key role and it is an aspect of Clavijo's narrative about Timurid palaces that has been underplayed in readings of his *Embajada a Tamorlán*. In this respect then, Clavijo was not so different from Yazdi and the ways in which the latter wrote about the palaces of Timur, the various settings of courtly life and ceremony—they are both concerned with the affect of 'soft' architecture which each recorded in the conventions of his literary tradition.

In one passage from the *Zafarnāma*, after Toqtamish Khan narrowly escapes death at Timur's hands, Yazdi describes the construction of the camp at the Atal River and the Ur Töpä plain "for the royal descent, a majestic and awesome *sarāparda*" that "was set up encircling the plain, and inside it the dome of the victorious court was raised to the apex of the heavens."⁹⁴ What then follows is extensive praise of the site and its constituent elements, and mention of the cast of characters assembled there to perform courtly celebrations over twenty-six days. The *sarāparda* was made of "gold-spun brocade" and the tents and pavilions were so "innumerable" that "the carpet of the earth [was] lost amidst the camp."⁹⁵ When Timur orders a feast to take place, he is styled as "the happy nature of the Chosroes to whom the celestial sphere is slave" while the camp is compared to a paradise on earth.⁹⁶ Yazdi freely mixes passages of prose with expanded sections of poetry that amplify or extend the subject matter of his prose. In some prose passages, Yazdi demonstrates his skill in stringing subjects and their modifiers into seemingly infinite sentences that are no less impressive than the poetry in manifesting dexterity in working with literary vocabulary, images, and structure.

Elsewhere, Yazdi writes about the events at Kan-i Gil, noting that the site was "raised to the level of paradise by the royal encamp-

⁹² See Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*.

⁹³ The key study remains that by Manz, *Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*.

⁹⁴ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 83. Yazdi, *Zafarnāma*, 2: 393.

⁹⁵ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 83. Yazdi, *Zafarnāma*, 2: 393.

⁹⁶ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 84. Yazdi, *Zafarnāma*, 2: 395.

ment” as a transformative process was set in motion: “forage herbs became tulips, stones became rubies and pearls; grass became elixir, and the ground became gold.”⁹⁷ At the center of it all there were four *sarāpardas* for the royal residence and a massive trellis tent. He describes the tent as “A sphere raised by artifice/ casting a shadow enveloping world upon world.”⁹⁸ Throughout this extended passage about preparations at Kan-i Gil, Yazdi uses a number of metaphors from Islamic culture and its rich literary traditions to praise the edifice and its patron and inspire wonder in the reader through the sheer impressiveness of what was made. The tent and enclosure were awe-inspiring because of their size, scope, and materiality: unlike Clavijo, Yazdi does not dwell on their manufacture as a strategy of conveying the affective power of the ‘soft’ architecture. And yet, it would be incorrect to think that Yazdi was uninterested in the artifice of the site. He wrote a poem about the tentmaker in his expansive poetic eulogy of Timur’s Samarqand trade show at Kan-i Gil:

What can I say of the tentmaker?
 That subtle one made a moving camel.
 From sticks, reeds, rope and canvas he artfully
 made the structure of a camel.
 Then he secreted himself inside to display his
 craft to the people of the world.
 When the veil is drawn aside, see how the
 maker is hidden within his own handiwork.
 In just this way is the entire world, so
 gaze upon it with the eye of insight.⁹⁹

The poem also includes praise of the gem sellers, goldsmiths, drapers, entertainers, fruit sellers, furriers, butchers, leather workers, acrobats, and the cotton-sellers who constructed a bird from cotton and a minaret from “fluffed cotton and reeds.”¹⁰⁰ In every instance, Yazdi’s poetry focuses on the extraordinary capacities of the traders and craftsmen and sometimes on their exceptional skill in artifice, to make something that appears to be other than it is. Yazdi’s appreciation of the tentmaker’s skill, expressed through artful metaphor, was clearly shared by Clavijo. Clavijo’s frequent similes, expression

⁹⁷ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 91. Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 424.

⁹⁸ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 92. Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 424 (*sipūhī bi-san’at bar āfrākhta/ jahān dar jahān sāya āndākhta*).

⁹⁹ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 94.

¹⁰⁰ Thackston, *Century of Princes*, 94. Yazdi, *Ẓafarnāma*, 2: 431.

of uncertainty, and statements of inability to express in words what he saw are equally features present in Yazdi's writing, though Clavijo resorted to different techniques in framing the artifice of Timur's courtly environments. Clavijo's narrative used the rhetoric of the real to convey the spectacle of Timur's courtly life and ceremony at what would be the ruler's last hurrah.