



TIMURID PRINCESS GAWHARSHAD BEGIM

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Abstract

This scholarly article is devoted to the analysis of the life and role in state governance of Gawharshad Begim, one of the most influential figures of the Timurid Empire, the daughter-in-law of Amir Temur and the wife of Shahrukh Mirza. The paper examines the queen's influence on political decision-making, her role in ensuring the stability of the state, and her significant contribution to the architectural and cultural development of her time. In addition, based on historical sources, the study substantiates with factual evidence Gawharshad Begim's position as a central figure among political groups, her role in the upbringing of her sons, and the tragic circumstances of her death.

Keywords: Gawharshad Begim, Shahrukh Mirza, Timurid state, political influence, Ulugh Beg Mirza, Baysunghur Mirza, Herat school, architecture, "Mahdi Ulyo," palace intrigues, Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza, Ghiyath al-Din Tarkhan.

Introduction

Gawharshad Begim was the beloved wife of Shahrukh Mirza, the fourth son of Amir Temur, and the daughter of the Chagatai noble Ghiyath al-Din Tarkhan. Born in 1379, the princess married Shahrukh Mirza in 1393 and bore him three sons (Ulugh Beg, Baysunghur, Muhammad Juki) and two daughters.

According to Abdurazzaq Samarqandi: "Gawharshad Begim was a noble and exalted lady, whose banner was purity and modesty, whose conduct was just and whose deeds were virtuous, possessing high aspirations and great dignity..." [1]. Shahrukh Mirza, being deeply religious by nature, devoted much of his time to

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worship and reading, while the affairs of the state and administration were largely managed by his resolute and capable wife, Gawharshad Begim.

After the death of her father-in-law Amir Temur, this perceptive woman gradually took state affairs into her own hands. Indeed, Shahrugh Mirza himself acknowledged the wisdom of his wife and relied on her prudent counsel in governing the state. Historian Amriddin Berdimurodov, in his collection “Drops from the History of Samarkand,” notes that Gawharshad Begim even possessed a personal seal, indicating that she independently made decisions in certain state matters, supervised their implementation, and formally approved them. The seal, made of dark green jade in an almond shape, bore an Arabic inscription in thuluth script reading: “Gawharshad Begim, daughter of Ghiyath al-Din Tarkhan.” This powerful political symbol has survived to the present day and is preserved in the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg under inventory number CA-13650 [5].

Shahrugh Mirza and Gawharshad Begim raised their sons in the spirit of creativity and construction, providing each with the opportunity to pursue intellectual and artistic activities. As a result, their sons remained loyal to their parents. Ulugh Beg Mirza built a madrasa and an observatory in Samarkand, establishing himself as a great scholar. His brother Ibrahim Mirza patronized the eminent poet Sharafiddin Ali Yazdi in Shiraz, contributing to the creation of the work “Zafarnama” about their grandfather Amir Temur. The third son, Baysunghur Mirza, served as a chief minister in Herat and supervised artistic works, commissioning magnificent paintings within the grand palace built in Bagh-i Safed.

Due to the just upbringing provided by their parents, none of the sons—neither Ulugh Beg, nor Ibrahim, nor Baysunghur, nor Muhammad Juki—entered into conflict with one another or rebelled against their parents. They had grown up enduring hardships, gaining experience in military campaigns, and appreciating the value of peaceful creative labor. However, the next generation, raised in prosperity, became more inclined toward luxury and internal conflict. Their ambitions for power were fueled by the influence of surrounding amirs and nobles.



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Gawharshad Begim, accompanying Shahrukh Mirza on military campaigns, closely observed the character of the princes and the behavior of military commanders. She also attempted to assert her will in the matter of appointing an heir to the throne. Although Shahrukh Mirza intended to appoint his youngest son Muhammad Juki Mirza as heir, Gawharshad Begim opposed this plan, considering her grandson Ala al-Dawla Mirza more suitable. After the death of Baysunghur Mirza at the age of thirty-three due to excessive drinking, the grieving mother paid special attention to his son Ala al-Dawla, who closely resembled his father [4].

In 1444, when Shahrukh Mirza fell gravely ill and was on his deathbed, state officials, convinced of his imminent death, urgently summoned Muhammad Juki Mirza from Balkh. However, before his arrival, Gawharshad Begim, by her decree, had already arranged for military leaders under Jalal al-Din Firuzshah to pledge allegiance to Ala al-Dawla Mirza. Deeply offended by this decision, Muhammad Juki Mirza returned to Balkh after visiting his father. Shortly afterward, Shahrukh Mirza recovered, and responsibility for the incident was placed not on Gawharshad Begim but on Jalal al-Din Firuzshah. Nevertheless, the queen's plan was postponed. In 1445, Muhammad Juki Mirza died, and Shahrukh Mirza was unable to appoint an heir until the end of his life.

In 1446, the aging Shahrukh Mirza launched a campaign against his rebellious grandson Sultan Muhammad Mirza. Gawharshad Begim and Abdul Latif Mirza accompanied him. After a successful campaign, Shahrukh Mirza fell ill and died on March 12, 1447. Gawharshad Begim entrusted command of the army to Abdul Latif Mirza but secretly sent a letter to Ala al-Dawla Mirza to strengthen Herat. Upon discovering this, Abdul Latif Mirza detained Gawharshad Begim and informed his father Ulugh Beg Mirza.

After Shahrukh Mirza's death, bloody struggles for the throne began, with Gawharshad Begim at their center. Ala al-Dawla Mirza initially hesitated to declare himself ruler, but later assumed power and confronted Abdul Latif Mirza. On April 29, 1447, near Nishapur, Abdul Latif Mirza was defeated and captured [3].

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Gawharshad Begim was freed and returned to Herat, where Abdul Latif Mirza was imprisoned. Shahrukh Mirza was buried in the mausoleum of Baysunghur. Later, Ulugh Beg Mirza attempted unsuccessfully to transfer his father's remains to Samarkand, which led to further conflicts among the Timurid princes.

In 1450, Abulqasim Babur Mirza seized the throne, but in 1457 he died suddenly during a banquet. Taking advantage of internal divisions, Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza captured Khorasan and declared Herat his capital.

By this time, Gawharshad Begim was nearly eighty years old, yet she remained politically active. She encouraged her great-grandson Sultan Ibrahim Mirza to rebel against Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza. Upon learning this, Abu Sa'id Mirza ordered her execution. In 1457, Gawharshad Begim was executed and buried in the mausoleum of Baysunghur near the madrasa she had built [2].

Conclusion

Gawharshad Begim was unparalleled both in beauty and intellect. Shahrukh Mirza greatly admired her wisdom and frequently sought her advice. She actively participated in governance, accompanied him on military campaigns, and contributed to architecture and charitable works. She also played an important role in raising her grandchildren and was honored with the title "Mahdi Ulyo." However, due to palace intrigues, she was tragically executed at the age of eighty while fasting.

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