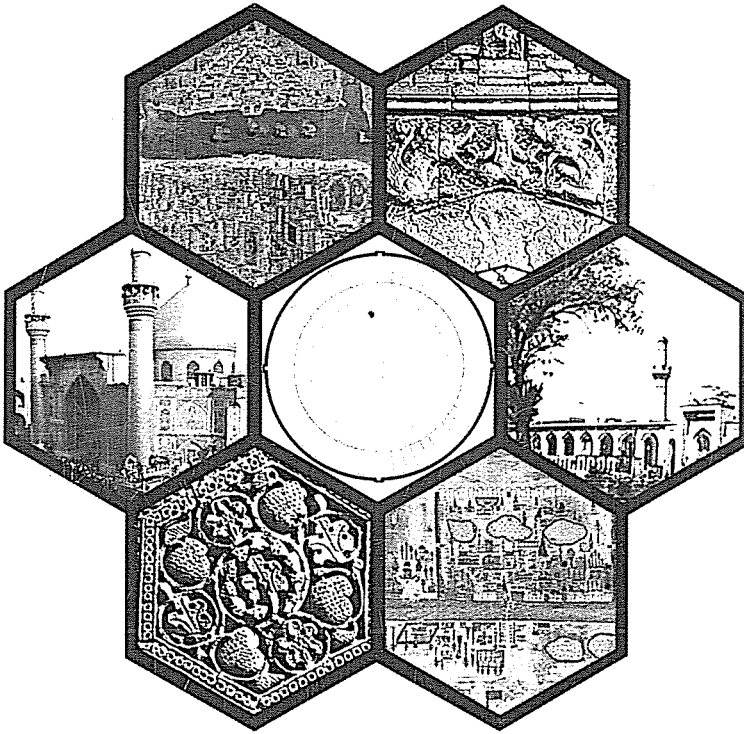


İSLAM MEDENİYETİNDE  
**BAĞDAT**  
(MEDİNETÜ'S-SELÂM)  
ULUSLARARASI SEMPOZYUM

7-8-9 KASIM 2008



İLÂHIYAT  
FAKÜLTESİ



IRCICA  
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SANAT VE KÜLTÜR  
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Ümraniye  
Belediyesi

Marmara Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, İslâm Tarihi ve Sanatları Bölümü

Marmara University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Islamic History and Arts

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İslâm Konferansı Teşkilatı, İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi (IRCICA)

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# İSLAM MEDENİYETİNDE BAĞDAT (MEDÎNETÜ'S-SELÂM) ULUSLARARASI SEMPOZYUM

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## BAGHDAD DURING THE EARLY TIMURID ERA

*Tia Wheeler*

Sources are sparse regarding Baghdad for the period between the conquests of Hulegu in 1258, and those of Timur in 1393 and 1401. A perusal of modern historical scholarship on Baghdad reveals this lack by the repeated summarization of a century and half in a few paragraphs. Most primary sources of that time make passing reference to the city and they offer little explanation of the political and social events. In recounting his extensive travels, ibn Battuta provided a few paragraphs describing the city, focusing on the religious sites and bathhouses. He did not detail the size of the city, instead stating simply, "I next arrived in Baghdad, which, notwithstanding the injuries it has sustained, is still one of the largest cities."<sup>1</sup> Other travelers make brief mention of the city, but none of these descriptions give a clear indication as to the estimated population of the time, thereby making it difficult to assess accurately the extent of damage and the death toll exacted by Timur during his assaults on Baghdad. Additionally, it is uncertain how many and which primary sources for the period before and during the Timurid conquests might have been lost during the great destruction of the 1401 assault.

This paper examines two Timurid accounts, that of ibn Arabshah and that of Yazdi, that both describe the 1393 and 1401 assaults on Baghdad. What follows is a synopsis of Timur and the Jalayrid control of Baghdad, and then a

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<sup>1</sup> ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta in the near East, Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, trans. Samuel Lee (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

chronological summation based on the two texts, offering a comparison of the sources. Throughout the accounts, I theorize as to some of the reasons for the differences expressed by the authors. Of particular note is two author's differing placement of blame for the final devastation Timur inflicted on Baghdad. Furthermore, as evidenced in the paper and discussed at the end, Baghdad serves as a good example of Timur's military tactic of punishing resistant opposition, since the two separate assaults ended in dramatically differing ways.

## TIMUR

Ascertaining the facts of Timur's early life and rise to power is difficult due to the few extant primary sources and the contradictory information provided by later biographies. Timur was born in 1336 in the village of Kish, present-day Shahrisabz, Uzbekistan. Although not a Chinggisid descendant, Timur was a member of the prominent Barlas tribe, a Mongol tribe that had arrived with the Chagatay Mongols and settled in Transoxiana. From a young age, Timur displayed an aptitude for leadership and fighting, and he spent a decade amassing support through both political acumen and battle tactics. By the age of 30, Timur solidified his rule of Central Asia, selecting Samarqand as the capital of his growing empire. Through three campaigns, commonly referred to as the three-year, five-year, and seven-year campaigns, Timur conquered Persia, the regions around the Black Sea, India, Syria, and Anatolia. Timur was enroute to conquer China when he died in 1405.

Although illiterate, Timur desired to preserve for posterity his actions and conquests, so he used Persian and Uigher scribes to document his activities in plain, simple language. Furthermore, he frequently listened to readings of the documents to verify the authenticity and prevent exaggeration. While none of these records have survived, authors of early Timurid historical writings made use of the court documents.

The first source used in this study is ibn Arabshah's *Ajaib al-Maqdur*, an Arabic biographical work written in 1430, and the second source is *Zafarnama*, a Persian biographical work written by Yazdi in 1424. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Arabshah was born in Damascus in 1392. When Timur conquered Syria in 1401, ibn Arabshah, along with his mother and family, was taken from Damascus to Samarqand; this forced relocation accounts for his venomous descriptions of Timur. Alternatively, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi authored his *Zafarnama* upon the request of Ibrahim Sultan, one of Timur's grandsons. Yazdi's account of the 1393 conquest of Baghdad can be considered particularly accurate since his panegyric work is largely based upon to

same titled *Zafarnama* written by Nizamuddin Shami, who was a resident of Baghdad, and thereby an eyewitness during the events.

The accounts of Timur's assault of Baghdad offered by ibn Arabshah and Yazdi are different in length and detail, as well as their portrayal of Timur. As mentioned above, ibn Arabshah often used inflammatory words and phrases in describing Timur and the author sometimes presents events in a view that vilifies and belittles the conqueror. Conversely, Yazdi's panegyric account extols Timur's abilities and virtues using a considerably more verbose manner. Certainly, the fact that a Timurid prince commissioned Yazdi's *Zafarnama*, accounts for the endless praise of Timur.

### BAGHDAD AND JALAYRIDS

When Chinggis Khan's grandson Hulegu conquered Baghdad in 1258, the city and population suffered great destruction and casualties, from which the once preeminent city never fully recovered. Established by Hulegu, the Ilkhanate dynasty extended from Afghanistan west to Iraq, and included the southern Caucasus region. With the death of the Ilkhanate Sultan Abu Said in 1335, the Ilkhanate realm disintegrated into several smaller dynastic states, which included that of the Jalayrids in the Fertile Crescent and Western Persia as far east as Tehran.<sup>2</sup> The Jalayr tribe, originally from Mongolia, emigrated west with Chinggis Khan and distinguished themselves as military leaders in the Mongol army. One member of the Jalayr tribe, Ilge, participated in the Mongol assault on Baghdad, and later served as the supervisor of reconstruction in Baghdad. It was through this political connection that the Jalayrids came to power, when Hasan Buzurg secured the position of *emir-i ulus*<sup>3</sup> under Sultan Abu Said; his son Uwais further extended the position in 1356 by taking the title sultan, unlike his father who used the title emir.<sup>4</sup>

Interaction between Uwais and Timur was minimal, as during much of the early Jalayrid reign, Timur was still consolidating his power and control of Transoxiana. While Baghdad served as a Jalayrid capital, by this time it had lost its position as the religious and political center of the Sunni world, being surpassed by the growing power of the Cairene Mamluks. Furthermore, the city and its population suffered from a plague in 1348, and a massive flood in 1356. The death of Uwais in 1374 instigated a decade of internal conflict as his

<sup>2</sup> Abbas Zaryab, "Baghdad" in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (online edition).

<sup>3</sup> 'Chief of the state.' *Emir* is one of the Persian given titles for a chief, unlike in Arabic where it means a prince. *Ulus* is the Mongol-Turkic word for state or people.

<sup>4</sup> Zaryab.

sons and their supporters fought for control. Ultimately, one of Uwais' younger sons, Ahmed,<sup>5</sup> victoriously conquered his relatives and settled in Baghdad, but he soon faced a much greater threat from Timur.<sup>6</sup> Despite having bested his brothers and other rivals for control of Iraq and Azerbaijan, Sultan Ahmed seemingly lacked the formidable battle skills of his ancestors, showing little political ability and a greater interest in literature and art. Thus, as Timur began advancing toward Baghdad, the region was fresh from internal conflict and the population was not particularly loyal to their new sultan.

### 1393 ASSAULT<sup>7</sup>

According to Yazdi, but not mentioned by ibn Arabshah, minor conflict and skirmishes between Timur and Sultan Ahmed began as early as 1386. Having gained control of Tabriz and Sultaniyya, Timur opted to strengthen his existing political power, as opposed to pursuing Sultan Ahmed as he fled to Baghdad. While Timur was occupied elsewhere in his conquests, Baghdad and Sultan Ahmed were free from direct Timurid threats for the next seven years.

After encountering resistance in the Spring 1393 conquest of Shiraz, Timur executed the Shirazi ruler Shah Mansour, and had his head sent to Sultan Ahmed as a warning and indication that the Jalayrids should willingly submit to Timurid dominion as requested. Additional instructions sent as well stated that Sultan Ahmed should accept Timurid rule by donning a presented robe, adding Timur's name during the khutba at Friday prayers, and minting coins with Timur's name. These were standard actions within the Islamic world that commonly acknowledged submission of one ruler to another. Both accounts from ibn Arabshah and Yazdi agree that this demand was conveyed to Sultan Ahmed. However, ibn Arabshah states that he read in unnamed sources that "Ahmed obeyed by wearing the robe and parading Shah Mansour's head

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed bin Uwais is alternatively referred to as Ahmed Jalayr and Sultan Ahmed. In this paper, he will henceforth be referred to as Sultan Ahmed.

<sup>6</sup> For more about the Jalayrids, see: Khwandamir, *Habibu's-Siyar*, trans. W. M. Thackston (1994), pp.129-143.

<sup>7</sup> Sources used for this section are as follows: Ahmed ibn Arabshah, *Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Emir*, trans. J.H. Sanders (London: Luzac and Co. , 1936), pp.42, 54, 58-64, 100, 106. Ahmed ibn Arabshah, *Aja'ib al-Maqdour fi Nua'ib Timor* (Cairo: 1979), pp.61-69. Sharaf al-Din `Ali Yazdi, *Zafarnama*, trans. J. Darby, 2 vols. (London: 1723), Vol I., pp.157-158, 256.257, 263, 430-439. Sharaf-ad-Din Ali Yazdi and Muhammad Abbasi, *Zafar-Nama: Tarih-I Umumi-i Mufasssal-i Iran Dar Daur-i Timuriyan* (Tihran: Amir Kabir, 1957).

through town ... but doubt it occurred."<sup>8</sup> Yazdi offers an expanded, but not contradictory, version of the interaction between Timur and Sultan Ahmed.

According to Yazdi, Sultan Ahmed sent to Timur an emissary, a respected mufti named Nouredin Abderrahman Esferaini. He sent the emissary instead of arriving in person as he feared for his personal safety, an understandable concern considering that Shah Mansour had been recently been beheaded for opposing Timur, and even more so as Sultan Ahmed had previously angered Timur by fleeing Sultaniyya during their 1386 encounter. The purpose of the emissary was to enquire about the encroaching Timurid army, despite the fact that Sultan Ahmed had reportedly accepted Timur's demands. Timur accepted from the emissary the gifts sent by Sultan Ahmed, but the conqueror did reply to Ahmed's question of safety, according to Yazdi's account. Seemingly, this was because reports indicated to Timur that despite the emissary's message of submission, prayers in Baghdad did not include Timur's mention, nor were coins minted with his name.<sup>9</sup> Numismatic evidence, although scarce for the Jalayrid dynasty, suggests that there was not an addition of Timur's name to Jalayrid coins.<sup>10</sup>

According to ibn Arabshah, as the Timurid army approached the city, but before they had arrived, Sultan Ahmed sent forth troops under the command of a military leader named Sabtani, to engage in battle outside of Baghdad in an attempt to protect the city. Upon being defeated by the Timurids, Sabtani returned to Baghdad and Sultan Ahmed humiliated him by parading through the town Sabtani dressed as a woman. Ibn Arabshah mentions this account as one of the many faults of Ahmed: his reported cruelty, even to his allies. The town where this battle occurred is indicated by ibn Arabshah as Sultaniyya, but according the Yazdi's accounts, Sultaniyya was already under Timurid domain. It is possible that ibn Arabshah incorrectly recounted this event involving Sabtani, and that it occurred in 1386 when Timur first challenged Sultan Ahmed.

Upon hearing that Timur was nearing the city, Sultan Ahmed sent away his treasures for safe-keeping under the protection of one of his sons; ibn Arabshah states they went to a fortress at Naja, while Yazdi only offers that they went to a secure location across the Tigris river. Both author's accounts agree

<sup>8</sup> Arabshah, *Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Emir*, p.42.

<sup>9</sup> Yazdi, *Zafarnama*, pp.429-430.

<sup>10</sup> H.L. Rabino, "Coins of the Jala'ir, Kara Koyunlu, Musha'sha', and Ak Koyunlu Dynasties," *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. X (1950), pp.94-106.

that Timur discovered the plan and sent troops to capture the treasures and to take into custody Sultan Ahmed's son, while Timur and the main army continued toward Baghdad. Ibn Arabshah also mentions that Sultan Ahmed fled to the safety of the Mamluk Sultan Barquq, who received him with honors.<sup>11</sup> This event further aggravated the animosity between Timur and Barquq, as previously Barquq killed an ambassador who was related to Timur. Additionally, ibn Arabshah's account relates that Sultan Ahmed sent an insulting message to Timur which stated "Although my hand is palsied in war, yet my foot is not lame in flight."<sup>12</sup> By this message, he was acknowledging his cowardly action, while taunting the conqueror whose right limbs were permanently disfigured.

Next ibn Arabshah briefly mentions that Timur refrained from further violence and returned to Samarqand. Additionally, the text states that the population of Baghdad resented Sultan Ahmed, who was the opposite of his pious and just father Uwais, and therefore they welcomed Timur as an alternative to the unpopular Jalayrid. This varies in detail from the events of 1393 as described by Yazdi. According to Yazdi, Ahmed fled as the Timurid forces approached the Tigris river, but first he destroyed the bridges and boats in an attempt to save the city. However, Sultan Ahmed's attempt to avert the Timurid army had little impact since the soldiers swam across the river using planks of the destroyed bridges. When the Baghdadi population saw the army swimming across the river they thought it was the will of God and submitted without a fight. Although pursued by several Timurid princes, Sultan Ahmed evaded them, leaving his wives and children in Baghdad to be captured by Timurid troops. Timur stayed in the city for two months, during which time repairs to religious sites were undertaken; these repairs were not due to destruction by the Timurid army, but instead a result of the degeneration of Baghdad's socio-economic structure. The loss of life to both Timurid troops and Baghdadi citizens was low, but the local population was subjected to heavy financial burdens, both from looting and taxes exacted to pay for the restoration and maintenance of Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> Yazdi even mentions Timur dis-

<sup>11</sup> Some modern scholarship state that Sultan Ahmed went to Cairo, but this is not related by either ibn Arabshah nor Yazdi. See: *The Cambridge History of Egypt, vol.I: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and, Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages* (New York: 1901), p.332.

<sup>12</sup> Arabshah, *Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Emir*, p.58.

<sup>13</sup> H.R. Roemer, "Timur in Iran", *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavif Period*, ed. Peter Jackson and L. Lockhart, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.65.

posing of Sultan Ahmed's wine into the Tigris river, indicating his piety; however this contradicts the travel writings of the Castillian ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo,<sup>14</sup> who stated that Timur frequently enjoyed copious amount of wine.

Eventually, in late 1393 Timur left Baghdad, placing it under the command of one of his allies, Khwaja Masoud Sebzuvvari. A year later, Sultan Ahmed returned to Baghdad, easily displacing Sebzuvvari and his army of three thousand men. For the next five years, there were occasional threats on Timur's part to return to Baghdad, but he was occupied with other campaigns. Per ibn Arabshah's account, Sultan Ahmed again fled Baghdad in 1399 upon hearing rumors that the Timurid army was marching toward Baghdad; he once more sought refuge from the Mamluks, but later as the Timurid military headed toward Syria in 1400, Sultan Ahmed returned to Baghdad.

#### 1401 ASSAULT<sup>15</sup>

After a violent conquest of Damascus in early 1401, Timur and his military began an eastward sweep through Iraq, finally re-confronting the Jalayrid ruler. Timur had several reasons to head towards Baghdad, but foremost must have been the elusiveness of Sultan Ahmed, as well as his continued opposition despite previously having acknowledged Timur's supremacy. Once again, Sultan Ahmed fled the city, this time leaving it to the control of a military commander named Faraj; additional information about Faraj is unavailable, but it is clear from Yazdi's account that he is not the Mamluk Sultan Faraj, the young son who succeeded Sultan Barquq in 1399. Khwandamir refers to Faraj as a Jalayrid emir,<sup>16</sup> which may only indicate his position as a military leader. The ambiguity lays in the word emir, as it can mean both prince and a chief or head of a military unit.

Following the events in Syria that had brought much destruction to Damascus, Timur supposed that the reconquest of Baghdad would be a simple act and he decided to send to Baghdad part of his military under the command of several Timurid emirs, while he himself went to Mosul and another

<sup>14</sup> Ruy González de Clavijo, *Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez De Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarcand, A.D. 1403-6*, trans. Clements R. Markham, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society; (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1859).

<sup>15</sup> Arabshah, *Tamerlane, or Timur the Great Emir*, pp.162-169. Arabshah, *Aja'ib Al-Maqdour Fi Nua'ib Timor*, pp.180-184. Yazdi, *Zafarnama*, Vol II, pp.135, 157-158, 202-216. Yazdi and Abbasi, *Zafar-Nama: Tarih-i Umumi-i Mufasssal-i Iran Dar Daura-i Timuriyan*, pp.252-276.

<sup>16</sup> Khwandamir, p.278.

Timurid contingent went to Georgia. It is clear that Timur did not anticipate resistance in Baghdad because the emirs he sent were not his favored sons and grandsons, but lesser important Timurid family members and a few respected military leaders. Before leaving Baghdad Sultan Ahmed gave orders to Faraj that he should turn the city over to Timur, but upon the arrival of the Timurid army in May 1401, Faraj refused and staged a resistance. This position and action is confirmed by both authors, yet again the two accounts vary in that Yazdi's verbose writing provides more detailed information.

According to Yazdi, when the Timurid troops arrived at the gates of the City of Peace, Faraj refused entry to the opposition, explaining that Sultan Ahmed had stated that Baghdad should be surrendered to Timur, and since the conqueror was not present Faraj would not obey the demands of the Timurid emirs. Word of the resistance in Baghdad was sent to Timur, who immediately departed Tauris (modern-day Tabriz) where he was campaigning, and he and the majority of the Timurid army traveled to Baghdad. Upon arriving outside Baghdad, Timur conveyed a message to Faraj that the city should immediately surrender. Faraj sent out an emissary to verify that indeed Timur was present, and the emissary was well-received by the conqueror. However, when the emissary returned to Fajar and confirmed the presence of Timur, Faraj did not believe him and had the man imprisoned. Faraj vowed continued resistance and told the citizens they should persist defending themselves as Timur was not part of the massive military surrounding the city walls.

Based on the accounts of both ibn Arabshah and Yazdi, the population of Baghdad presented a unified and valiant defense, resulting in a great loss of Timurid troops. Ibn Arabshah does not provide details of the final battle, only relating that it occurred on the day of the feast of Hajj, further stating that Timur "made his sacrifice (of) the Muslims."<sup>17</sup> Yazdi expands the recounting of events by explaining how the Timurid emirs sought permission from Timur to stage an assault on the city walls, but the conqueror wanted to continue with only the siege in the hope that Faraj and the people of Baghdad would willingly surrender. It is possible that Timur wanted to spare the historic and religious city, as he often favored the preservation and reconstruction of mosques and shrines, as he had done during the 1393 seizure of Baghdad.

After forty days of siege, on a particularly hot July day, the troops in Baghdad decided to stay inside their homes and they set a ruse in which they placed their helmets upon posts to give the appearance that they were still in

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<sup>17</sup> Arabshah, *Aja'ib al-Maqdour fi Nua'ib Timor*, p.183.

position inside the city walls. However, this deception failed and it was that same day that Timur ordered the assault on Baghdad. Using ladders, the Timurid troops scaled the city walls, and what followed was a devastating battle with heavy losses on both sides. Once the city walls had been breached, Faraj tried to escape but drowned in the Tigris, whereupon Timurid soldiers recovered his body from the water and then mutilated it.

Timur was so enraged by the Baghdadi resistance and the consequent need for a prolonged assault of what he considered an already conquered city, that the punishment was severe. Ibn Arabshah states that Timurid troops killed ninety thousand Baghdadis at a rate of two heads per Timurid soldier, while Yazdi quotes one head per soldier but does not give an exact figure. The accounts of both authors do agree that there were no exemptions from death for children, elderly, and women, groups usually spared during Timurid assaults. Additionally, both authors mention the construction of pyramids using the heads of Baghdadis, although only Ibn Arabshah gives an exact figure of 120 pyramids.

What is noticeable in comparing the two texts is the assignment of blame. Ibn Arabshah implies that Sultan Ahmed was an incapable ruler who repeatedly fled in the face of danger, and that it was his inability to protect the city, since he was not present during confrontations, that led to the double assaults on Baghdad. Conversely, Yazdi clearly indicates that the destruction and carnage of the 1401 assault was a direct result of Faraj's unauthorized resistance. The difference in accounts could be Yazdi's attempt to exonerate Sultan Ahmed who was of Mongol descent, particularly so if Faraj was of Arab or Persian origin.

This study demonstrates a primary Timurid battle tactic, as adopted from Mongol warfare. Cities under Timur's assault had two options: surrender and be spared; or, resist and be ruined. During the 1393 assault, the resistance put forth by Sultan Ahmed and the Baghdadi population, was minimal. Sultan Ahmed attempted to delay the inevitable conquest by destroying the bridges and boats on the Tigris, but the general population yielded after watching the Timurid army swim across the river. Since Baghdad essentially surrendered in 1393, the resulting destruction was minimal and, in fact, the physical infrastructure improved during the post-assault reconstruction. The greatest hardship on the population of Baghdad was financial, but with a low death toll and existing socio-economic structure, they were able to continue with their lives.

However, the post-assault situation in 1401 was greatly different. Determining the true extent of the carnage and destruction in the final Timurid

siege of Baghdad is difficult due to the lack of detailed court records for the Jalayrids at that time. Generally, in Timurid warfare women and children were not killed, but Yazdi and ibn Arabshah both acknowledge the massacre of these groups. Therefore, it is possible that in order to meet the literal headcount, whether one or two Baghdadi heads per Timurid soldier, the conquering force needed to include the weaker population. The physical destruction was massive; Timurid forces razed all private and public building, save religious, educational, and charitable sites. Whatever local population survived the onslaught, they found themselves homeless with no source of income.

The severity following the second Timurid assault of Baghdad was meant to serve as an example of Timur's wrath to future opposition who might chose to resist his demands. As for Sultan Ahmed, the Ottoman Sultan Bayazet gave him refuge, but again Sultan Ahmed had to flee as Timur marched into Anatolia in 1402. Sultan Ahmed eventually regained control of Baghdad, but the city ultimately fell from Jalayrid control in 1411 to the Qara Quyunli (Black Sheep), who in turn were defeated in 1469 by their rivals, the Aq Quyunli (White Sheep).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Zaryab.