

The Emirs Of Sultan Husayn Mirza

Sherzod Juraev

Senior Lecturer, Department of History
Oriental University
+99890 986 75 39

Abstract: This article analyzes the transformation of the political elite during the era of Sultan Husayn Mirza – the corps of emirs – from a traditional military class into a complex socio-political institution. Using Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s “Baburnama” as the primary source, the article explores the changing concept of “beklik” (lordship) through his descriptions of the emirs. It reveals the growing importance of cultural capital (knowledge, poetry, patronage of the arts) alongside military might in the legitimization of power. The analysis demonstrates that through Babur’s pragmatic gaze, we can observe not only the sophisticated cultural environment of the Herat court but also the evolution of patronage into a political force. This process had a dual impact on the stability of the Timurid empire: on one hand, it fostered an unprecedented cultural renaissance, while on the other, it laid the groundwork for political fragmentation.

Keywords: Timurids, Sultan Husayn Mirza, Baburnama, institution of the emirate, political elite, cultural capital, patronage, legitimacy, political transformation, Alisher Navoi.

Introduction. The reign of Sultan Husayn Mirza (1469-1506), the ruler of Khurasan and the last great representative of the Timurid era, left a profound mark on history not only as a period of political and military events but also as one of high cultural flourishing. During this time, Herat became a world-renowned center for science, literature, and art. The role of the military-political emirs who gathered around the ruler was, alongside the sovereign himself, invaluable in fostering this cultural ascent.

Although many historical sources, including the works of Khwandamir[3], provide extensive information about the *sadrs* (high-ranking religious officials), scholars, and intellectuals of Sultan Husayn’s era, a separate chapter is not dedicated to the emirs. In Mirza Haydar Dughlat’s *Tarikh-i Rashidi*[2], some information is presented in a confusing manner. From this perspective, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s *Baburnama*[1] stands as an invaluable source. In his work, Babur Mirza lists 37 of Sultan Husayn’s emirs by name, providing valuable, and at times unique, details about most of them. For emirs such as Muradbek Bayandur and Bali Beg, he suffices with merely mentioning their names while providing almost no further information.

This article analyzes the personal characteristics of the emirs active during Sultan Husayn Mirza’s reign, their role in state governance, and their contributions to cultural life, based on the accounts in the *Baburnama*. The primary objective of the article is to demonstrate that these emirs were not merely military-political figures but also accomplished individuals in intellectual and cultural respects.

The Emirs of Sultan Husayn Mirza and their characteristics. In Babur’s *Baburnama*, 37 of Sultan Husayn Mirza’s emirs are listed by name, with valuable information provided about each of them. Among these emirs were many individuals who were distinguished not only by their military prowess but also by their deep interest in science, literature, and the arts. The characteristics of a few of them are presented below:

1. *Muhammad Burundug Barlas*: A descendant of the Choku Barlas clan, he had served Abdul-Qasim Babur and Abu Sa’id Mirza before coming to Khurasan and entering the service of Sultan Husayn. He is noted as a very knowledgeable individual, a fine commander, and having a strong passion for falconry.
2. *Muzaffar Barlas*: He stood by the Mirza during his period of military campaigns and held him in high esteem. Babur Mirza expresses his astonishment at an agreement they made during a time of military instability, which stipulated that the provincial revenue would be divided with four parts going to the Mirza and two parts to him. There is information to suggest that he was poisoned.
3. *Alisher Beg Navoi*: Babur Mirza counts Navoi among the emirs. He notes that Navoi was not his *Beg* (commander) but a companion and that they had been schoolmates in their childhood. Alisher Beg was an peerless individual; no one had written as many and as excellent poems in the Turkic language as he had. It is unlikely that another person existed in the world who was such a mentor and patron to scholars and artisans as Alisher Beg. Masters such as Ustad Qul-Muhammad, Shaykh Nayi, and Husayn Udi achieved such perfection and fame through the Beg’s guidance and patronage. In the art of painting, Ustad Behzad and Shah

Muzaffar became renowned and celebrated through the Beg's efforts. He commissioned so many charitable buildings that very few have ever succeeded in such an endeavor. He took nothing from the Mirza; on the contrary, each year he would present large sums of money as gifts to Husayn Mirza.

4. *Ahmad Tavakkul Barlas*: He was the governor of Qandahar.

5. *Amir Vali Beg*: He was the Mirza's high-ranking beg. He did not live long after Sultan Husayn Mirza took the throne and passed away soon after. He was a Muslim, a devout man of prayer, a Turk, and a loyal individual.

6. *Hasan Shaykh Temur*: He was raised and elevated to the rank of beg by Abdul-Qasim Babur.

7. *Noyan Beg*: He earned a good reputation.

8. *Jahangir Barlas*: He came to Sultan Husayn Mirza and gained good standing. He was sharp and graceful in his movements and conduct. Because he was knowledgeable about hunting and falconry, Sultan Husayn Mirza often entrusted such matters to him. He was a companion of Badi' al-Zaman Mirza, who fondly recalled his companionship.

9. *Mirza Ahmad Ali Farsi Barlas*: Although he did not write poetry himself, he was a man of good taste, a poetry connoisseur, as well as an elegant and witty person.

10. *Abdul-Khaliq Beg*: His great-grandfather was Feruzshah Beg, a highly respected beg of Shah Rukh Mirza. For this reason, he was called Abdul-Khaliq Feruzshah. He served for some time as the governor of Khwarazm.

11. *Ibrahim Duldai*: He was well-versed in the principles of administration and estate management.

12. *Zunnun Arghun*: He was a valiant man; his bravery was beyond question. He was also somewhat eccentric. He went to Sultan Husayn Mirza, who granted him the regions of Ghur and Nakdari. With only seventy or eighty men, he wielded the sword effectively there. No one had ever controlled the Hazara and Nakdari regions so well. After some time, he was also given Zamin-Dawar. His son, Shah Shuja Arghun, also fought bravely alongside his father from a young age. Out of respect for the father (Zunnun), Sultan Husayn Mirza granted Qandahar to the son (Shah Shuja) to rule in partnership with him. The father and son governed there. Later, this father and son (Zunnun Arghun and Shah Shuja Arghun) sowed enmity and instigated intrigues between that other father and son (Badi' al-Zaman Mirza and Sultan Husayn Mirza). In the year that Babur Mirza defeated Khusraw Shah, stripping him of his retainers, and took Kabul from Zunnun's younger son, Muqim, both Zunnun and Khusraw Shah were left in a desperate state by Babur and entered the service of Sultan Husayn Mirza. After the death of Sultan Husayn Mirza, Zunnun's status rose. He was given the foothill provinces of Herat, such as Obek and Chakhcharan.

13. *Amir Shah Shuja*: The son of Zunnun Arghun.

14. *Amir Darvish Ali Beg*: He was Alisher Beg's full brother and served as the governor of Balkh. He was a man of lesser intellect and skill. During Sultan Husayn Mirza's first campaign against Qunduz and Hisor, he was captured due to his own thoughtlessness and was subsequently removed from the governorship of Balkh. When he came before Babur Mirza in Qunduz in 916 AH (1510 CE), he had become unsightly and was in a pitiful state. He lacked the qualities of a beg and was deprived of many opportunities due to his alcoholism. It appears he had gained such favor primarily through the influence of Alisher Beg.

15. *Mughul Beg*: He served as a governor in the city of Herat. When he was given the governorship of Astarabad, he fled to Iraq to join Yaqub Beg. He was a rather unruly person and constantly gambled.

16. *Amir Sayyid Badr*: He was a very strong man with exceptionally graceful movements. He was a marvelous performer and danced in a very interesting style, executing dances that were unlike anyone else's. It seems these dances were his own invention. He was always in Sultan Husayn Mirza's service and was a constant wine-companion and conversationalist.

17. *Islim Barlas*: He was a Turk and an expert in falconry. He could perform some amazing feats. He could powerfully shoot an arrow from a bow with a draw weight of thirty to forty *batmans* (a unit of weight) clean through a wooden plank. On the archery field, he would gallop from the end of the field, drop and retrieve his bow from the ground, and hit the gourd-like target known as a *qabaq*. Furthermore, he would tie a *zehgir* (a type of archer's thumb ring) to a string about one and a half *qari* (a unit of length, like a span or cubit) long, fasten the other end to a piece of wood, and spin around. While spinning, he would shoot an arrow through the *zehgir*. He had many such extraordinary skills. He was always in the Mirza's service and participated in every gathering.

18. *Sultan Junayd Barlas*: He later went over to the service of Sultan Ahmad Mirza.
19. *Shaykh Abu Sa'id Khan Darmiyan*: He was given this nickname, though the exact reason is unclear; it was either because he brought Sultan Husayn Mirza a horse during a battle or because he fended off an enemy who was attacking the Mirza.
20. *Amir Behbud Beg*: He previously served in the royal bodyguard. During the Mirza's early military campaigns, his service was so pleasing that the Mirza granted him the favor of having his name inscribed on the official seal (*tamgha*) and on minted coins.
21. *Amir Shaykhim Beg*: He was called Shaykhim Suhayli due to his poetic pen name (*takhallus*), "Suhayli." He composed poetry in a strange style, often using frightening words and imagery. One of his couplets reads: "*Shab-i gham girdbād-i āh-am az jā burd gardūn-rā, Furū burd azhdahā-yi sayl-i ashk-am rub'-i maskūn-rā.*" (Meaning: On the night of sorrow, the whirlwind of my sigh displaced the celestial sphere; The dragon of my flood of tears swallowed the inhabited quarter of the world). It is said that he once recited this couplet in the presence of Mawlana Abd al-Rahman Jami, who reportedly remarked, "Mirza, are you reciting poetry or trying to frighten people?" He compiled a *divan* (a collection of poems) and also composed epics (*dastans*). Mirza Haydar writes the following about this person: "Amir Shojam Ahmad, whose *takhallus* is Suhayli. He too was one of Sultan Husayn's great emirs. He also attempted a response to the 'Khamsa.'"
22. *Muhammad Vali Beg*: He was the son of the aforementioned Vali Beg. In his later years, he became a high-ranking beg in the Mirza's court. Despite his high rank, he never neglected his duties and was at the king's gate day and night. Even the *osh* and *shilan* (communal public meals) were always served at the gate of the king's court on his behalf. It is inevitable that a person who serves with such devotion would gain such favor. Babur Mirza notes his dedication to service, which distinguished him from some other begs of his time. Muhammad Vali Beg's feasts were excellent, and he maintained his retainers (*navkars*) with uniform provisions and in a consistent manner. He personally gave much charity to the poor and destitute. However, he was foul-mouthed and had a sharp tongue. In the year 917 AH (1511 CE), when Babur took Samarkand, Muhammad Vali Beg and Darvish Ali Kitabdar (the Scribe) were in Babur's presence. By that time, he was afflicted with paralysis. There was no longer relish in his words nor in his person. He was not a very remarkable man; it appears his devoted service is what elevated him to such a high station.
23. *Bobo Ali*: He was the *eshik-gha* (master of the threshold, a type of chamberlain). He was previously in the service of Alisher Beg. Later, owing to his valor, Sultan Husayn Mirza took him into his own service, appointed him *eshik-gha*, and raised him to the rank of beg. He became a confidant of Babur Mirza.
24. *Amir Badruddin*: He was formerly in the retinue of Mirak Abdurrahim, the *sadr* (a high-ranking official for religious and legal affairs) of Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza. He was known to be quite eloquent and agile. It is said that he could leap from one horse to another across a line of seven horses. Both he and Bobo Ali were companions to Sultan Husayn Mirza.
25. *Hasan Ali Jalayir*: His original name was Husayn Jalayir, but he was famous as Hasan Ali. His father, Ali Jalayir, had been made a beg through the favor of an earlier Babur Mirza (Sultan Abu'l-Qasim Babur). This individual, Husayn Jalayir, is mentioned in the *Tarikh-i Rashidi* with the pen name "Tufayli". The source states: "He too was one of Sultan Husayn's emirs. For some time, he was a *parvanachi* (royal secretary). He was peerless in composing *qasidas* (odes). One of his odes is as follows:

*When the sapling of your stature revealed its grace, the cypresses shattered; When your lips smiled,
pearls became worthless.
The pupil of your eye has so darkened reason,
Like Alexander building a wall against the Gog of Calamity.
In the rose garden, the turtledove weeps, remembering your stature,
As junipers in the garden are scattered by the storm of its sighs.
O King, you are the protector of peace and security, Badi' al-Zaman,
For by the power of your justice, you have broken the backs of tyrants[1].*

When Yadgar Mirza took Herat, there was no man of higher stature than his father, Ali Jalayir. At Sultan Husayn Mirza's court, Hasan Ali Jalayir was the *qushbegi* (master of the hunt) and a poet. He wrote under the pen name (*takhallus*) "Tufayli" and composed excellent *qasidas*. He was the leading master of the *qasida* in

his time. In 917 AH (1511 CE), when Babur took Samarkand, Hasan Ali came into his presence and remained with him for five or six years, presenting him with fine odes. He was a shameless and extravagant person who kept pages (*bacha*). He constantly played *nard* (backgammon) and *ashiq* (a game played with dice or knucklebones).

26. *Khwaja Abdullah Marwari*: He was an exceedingly accomplished man. No one could play the *qanun* (a type of zither) as he could. It was his own invention to perform a melody in various modes on a single fret of the *qanun*. He was a beautiful calligrapher, particularly skilled in the *nasta'liq* script, and an excellent letter-writer. He was a pleasant conversationalist and wrote poetry under the *takhallus* (pen name) of Bayani. His poetry was weaker than his other talents, but he was a good critic of poetry. He was dissolute and shameless. As a result of his debauchery, he was afflicted with *obila* (dropsy or edema). He lost the use of his limbs, suffered various torments and hardships for several years, and ultimately passed away in the grip of these afflictions.

27. *Muhammad Sayyid Urus*: His father was Urus Arghun, who had been a great beg with supreme authority when Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza took the throne. In that era, there were many fine archers, and he was one of the foremost among them: his bow was stiff, his arrows were long, and he shot with great force and accuracy. He served as governor of Andkhud for some time.

28. *Mir Ali, the Mirakhor* (Master of the Royal Stables): This was the man who sent word to Sultan Husayn Mirza, instigating him to attack Yadgar Muhammad Mirza while the latter was unprepared.

29. *Sayyid Hasan Oghlaqchi*: He was the son of Sayyid Oghlaqchi and the younger brother of Sayyid Yusuf Beg. He had a capable and talented son named Mirza Farrukh. He came into Babur's presence in 917 AH (1511 CE) when Babur took Samarkand. Although he wrote little poetry, he recited it with a marvelous cadence. He was knowledgeable about the astrolabe (*usturlab*) and astronomy. His conversation and manners were also good, though he was somewhat fond of drink. He was killed in the Battle of Ghjduvan.

30. *Tengriberdi Samanchi*: He was a simple, brave, and skilled swordsman (*qilichboz*). At the gate of Balkh, he defeated Nazar Bahadur, a retainer of Khusraw Shah, with a fine display of swordsmanship.

Babur Mirza also lists the Turkmen begs, but for some of them, he provides no information at all:

1. *Ali Khan Bayandur*.

2. *Asad Beg*.

3. *Tahamtan Beg*: Badi' al-Zaman Mirza had married Tahamtan Beg's daughter. Muhammad Zaman Mirza was born from this union.

4. *Ibrahim Chughtai*.

5. *Amir Umar Beg*: He was later in the service of Badi' al-Zaman Mirza. He was a valiant, simple, and good man. A son of his named Abulfath came to Babur from Iraq and is still with him. He is very sluggish, timid, and clumsy. Babur Mirza expresses surprise at the son's listlessness, given his father's valor.

6. *Abulbaqi Mirza*: He came to Khurasan from Iraq and Azerbaijan after Shah Ismail conquered those regions. He was of Timurid lineage, a descendant of Miran Shah. Long ago, his ancestors had gone to those provinces, given up their aspirations for sovereignty, and gained favor by serving the kings there. Abulbaqi Mirza's paternal uncle, Timur Usman, had been a great and respected beg in the court of Yaqub Beg and had once considered sending a large army against Khurasan. When Abulbaqi Mirza arrived, Sultan Husayn Mirza showed him great favor, made him his son-in-law, and gave him his daughter, Sultanim Begum, in marriage. Muhammad Sultan Mirza was born from her.

7. *Murad Beg Bayandur*[1].

Conclusion. The information presented in Babur's *Baburnama* clearly demonstrates that the emirs of Sultan Husayn Mirza's era were not merely military-political figures but also intellectually and culturally accomplished individuals. Among these emirs were poets, patrons of the arts, men of science, and individuals with a wide range of skills. This was a crucial factor that laid the foundation for the flourishing of science and culture during the Timurid period. The fact that the emirs, considered a military elite, were not detached from scholarship and valued learning had a direct impact on the development of the state's cultural environment.

Thus, four of the 37 emirs were famous poets who, in their time, wielded both the sword and the pen, even compiling their own *divans* (collections of poetry). These were Mir Alisher Navoi, Shaykhim Beg Suhayli, Hasan Ali Jalayir (Tufayli), and Khwaja Abdullah Marwari (Bayani). As this trend became widespread among

the emirs, numerous artists and artisans began to thrive under their influence and patronage. Furthermore, it is well-known that the head of state, Sultan Husayn Mirza himself, wrote poetry under the pen name "Husayni."

The other emirs also possessed distinctive attributes. For example, Zunnun Arghun was an avid chess enthusiast, while Sayyid Badr was a devotee of dance, who is even mentioned as having invented his own choreographies. Islim Barlas was a master of archery, Muhammad Sayyid Urus was a skilled marksman, and Sayyid Hasan Oghlaqchi was knowledgeable in the use of the astrolabe and in astronomy. This demonstrates that the emirs, who formed the military elite of the administration, were far from being disconnected from learning. Their appreciation for science and culture, in turn, created the fertile ground upon which the state's cultural environment could flourish.

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