

Naindeep Chann, UCLA
Department of History

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Searching for the ‘Sahib-Qiran’

In the late 16th century, an Ottoman bureaucrat, Mustafa Ali, embarked upon writing an ambitious chronicle of world history. Ali’s modern biographer calls the *Essence of History* Ali’s *magnum opus*. In a discussion on the hierarchy of sovereignty, Ali used two designations: *mu’eyyed min ind Allah* “succor of Allah” and *sahib-qiran* “lord of the auspicious conjunction.” While the former title denotes a sovereign never defeated in battle, the latter term signified a world conqueror that established universal dominion. For Ali, there were only three that could be called *sahib-qiran* – Alexander, Chingiz Khan, and Timur.

Far more than any religious or ideological claim, Ali’s *sahib-qirans* came closest to attaining universal dominion in Eurasia. However the title is most associated with Timur. Timur’s fourteenth century military campaigns aimed at reestablishing the Eurasian polity and universal dominion – at least symbolically if not actually – created almost two centuries earlier by Chingiz Khan. Timur’s successors and sedentary bureaucrats could not create a stable polity in the lands conquered by his steppe warriors – Anatolia, the Iranian Plateau, Central Asia, India, and an impending assault on China. Soon after his death, regional leaders, some associated with Timur, were able to establish independent sovereign dominions.

However, as evidenced by Mustafa Ali, Timur’s memory continued to cast a lasting impact on many early modern Islamicate political formations. In fact some historians take Timur’s death in 1405 as the dawn of the ‘early modern’ period in this region of Eurasia. Uzbek Khans, Safavid Shah ‘Abbas, Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, Mughal Badshah Shah Jahan, and even regional kings such as the Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar, Burhan II, employed the title ‘*sahib-qiran*’.

This paper seeks to look at the history, employment, and claims associated with the title ‘*sahib-qiran*’ and their various regional transformations both within particular polities, but also as a site of political contestation and rivalry with the others with whom they viewed with suspicion and courtesy.

From the Roman notion of *civitas* to the Islamic duty of *da'wah* to the French colonial *mission civilisatrice*, universal claims have been deployed in the service of causes, movements, and ideologies of all kinds. They attempt to create order, unity, and meaning, yet thereby give rise to contestation. This conference seeks to address the following questions: **What kinds of universal claims have been advanced and how have they been transformed over time in different regions and historical periods? How do such claims take concrete form in the actions of polities and the practices of communities from the local to the global? How do they accommodate or resist particularities or rival universalisms? We wish to consider a range of entities that promulgate universal claims (such as states, nations, empires, religions, and social and political movements) in a multitude of realms (such as law, morality, norms, and identities).** As this conference is presented in conjunction with the Center for International History's annual theme, "In the Name of Humanity," we are especially, but not only, interested in the ways in which universal claims have been embodied in the discourses and politics of human rights and humanitarian intervention.

We invite submissions from all time periods - ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern - and various geographic regions. Papers on topics that are broadly transnational or global in scope are preferred. Additionally, we encourage interdisciplinary research, and although proposals with a historical perspective are particularly welcome, we will also consider contributions from the fields of anthropology, sociology, literary studies, political science, and economics.

Please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a recent CV as email attachments (Word preferred) by January 1, 2009 and any inquiries to Simon Stevens at the following address: sms2236@columbia.edu.

For more information regarding the conference, please refer to the [Center for International History's website](#) (beginning December 15th). Limited funding for travel and assistance in arranging accommodation may be available.