

Ulugh Beg (1394 – 1449)

Its title meaning “great prince” and the name by which Muhammad Taragay, Mathematician and astronomer, came to be known in later life.

Beg was born at Sulaniyya , Iran on March 22, 1394 and was brought up at the court of his grandfather Timur. At the age of 15 Ulugh Beg became ruler of the city of Samarkand and the province of Maverannakhr.



Although his grandfather was interested in conquest, Ulugh Beg’s leanings were towards science and, in particular, astronomy. In 1420 he founded “madrasa”, in Samarkand.

The *Zij* of Ulugh Beg and his school is a large work that was originally written in the Tadjik language. It consists of a theoretical section and the results of observations made at the Samarkand Observatory. Included in the work are tables of calendar calculations, of trigonometry, and the positions of planets, as well as a star catalogue.

Ulugh Beg and his collaborator Alkashi took great pains to determine accurately the sine of 1° by two independent methods.

The catalogue of stars in the *Zij* contains 1,012 stars and includes 992 fixed stars whose positions Beg re-determined with unusual precision. This was the first star catalogue to be produced since that of al-Sufi, nearly five centuries earlier.

In 1447 he succeeded his father, Shah Rukh, to the Timurid throne, but he met a tragic and violent death when he was murdered at the instigation of his own son on October 27, 1449.

His three-storey observatory was reduced to ruins by the beginning next century.