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## Tamerlane

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*This is an excerpt from Author Adan Makina's upcoming book: "The Tatar Invasions of Muslim Lands: from Islamic and secular perspectives."*

This chapter is exclusive to Tamerlane who is considered the toughest and the last of the Turco-Mongol Sunni-Muslim conquerors who broke the ranks of the Mongols and finally sent their remnants to Manchuria to face the volatile Manchus who finally splintered them by sending them to the mountains and deserts of Mongolia. His right name is Timur-i lang in Persian while Tamerlane is French. At a tender age, according to legend, he was shot with an arrow on one leg and arm, thus, he got injured and was known to limp when walking. Timur the Great rose to prominence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and considered himself the "Sword of Islam." In 1398, he captured India such that he left death and destruction after his departure. He is known as the inventor of the Tamerlane Chess.

Tamerlane's father was called *Og* and he was the descendant of the famous kingdom of *Sechatay* whose main capital was Samarkand or Samarqand that was located along a historic river.<sup>1</sup> He was born in 1336 near the city of Kesh, currently known as Shahrisabz in Uzbekistan. The Muslim military tactician who remained famous in European history for centuries for embodying romance and horror, kept his forces together, divided and dispersed them at times along the countryside during peacetimes and war. From 1382 to 1405, he was known for conquering and reconquering regions stretching from Delhi to Moscow in Eurasia, while in Central Asia, he swept regions from T'ien Shan Mountains to as far as the Taurus Mountains of Anatolia.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his reign, Gur-i-Timur remained on the move with his army of confederated tribes who were drawn from almost every region he captured.

Admiring sown lands over the Steppe, he avoided Dzungaria or Zungaria that was the lands of the Golden Horde, and instead, focused on the Middle Eastern territories that combined Iran, Afghanistan, and Khorezm.<sup>3</sup> Corresponding to the northern half of Xinjiang, Dzungaria is a geographical subregion in Northwest China. Also known as Beijiang, it is a portmanteau of the Mandarin language, for "Bei" that implies north and Xinjiang for "Northern Xinjiang."<sup>4</sup> While other conquerors established themselves fully in the Steppe, Gur-i-Timur simply swept it and crossed it over with lightning speed.

Distinct from Southern Nanjiang that is in the Tarim Basin and the major economic power of Xinjiang, Dzungaria remains the major economic powerhouse that is known as GDP.<sup>5</sup> To this day, there is the Dzungarian Gate that is a significant pass between China and Central Asia.<sup>6</sup>



Dzungaria Map: Photo/Wikipedia

While some researchers portend that he was from a family of shepherds, to the contrary, he was not, because he hailed from a family that was engaged in revenues and other special minerals such as silver and gold extraction and commerce.<sup>7</sup> Born to a royal and loyal family, Tamerlane's father was a wealthy landlord while his mother was the daughter of a famous honorable religious man.<sup>8</sup> However, according to some historians, roughly 17 million people died in his conquests.

As per Marlowe's quote, "The Uzbek literary theorist U. Tsuchiyev describes it as following: "... actually, the real facts can be the foundation stone of any work, but they are not enough to make the work of fiction."<sup>9</sup> The most advanced elements of fiction are the real facts and imaginative power of mind." At times called Amir Temur, as per Christopher Marlowe (1564 - 1593), the English Renaissance poet and dramatist who lived only 29 years, his poetry differs from the Muslim Turco-Mongol conqueror Tamerlane, and that his main character is "Tamburlaine the Great"—a Scythian shepherd and nomadic bandit who suffered at the hands of Mycetes, a Persian Emperor who dispatched his troops to conquer Tamburlaine. Using a foreign writer's language as a reference, Marlowe describes Tamburlaine as "... a tall, broad shouldered person with long arms and golden hair. Clearly, he looks like Europeans."<sup>10</sup> Thus, to the writer of this book, he concurs with Marlowe's dramatization of Tamburlaine—a man who is contrary in character to the Turco-Muslim conqueror Tamerlane. To Marlowe, Tamburlaine resembled a faithless man who fought with his own soul or his life and as well considered himself superior to God for, he gave instructions to his people to burn the Qur'an. Regarding revenging upon his life Marlowe dramatizes in the following lines:

*Theridamas*

*Tamburlaine! A Scythian shepherd so embellished;  
With nature's pride and richest furniture!  
His looks do menace heaven and dare the gods;  
His fiery eyes are fix'd upon the earth,  
Here Tamburlaine is described as Scythian shepherd with fiery eyes, who rebels against God and Heaven.*

As dramatized by Marlowe, at the height of his power, Tamburlaine claims superior to God after capturing Babylon and thus he orders the burning of the Qur'an—an order that contravenes Islamic doctrines and creeds. Below is Marlowe's dramatic injunctions:

*Now, Casane, where's the Turkish Alcoran  
And all the heaps of superstitious books  
Found in the temples of that Mahomet  
Whom I have thought a god?  
They shall be burnt.*<sup>11</sup>

Tamburlaine was not Tamerlane because, at no time did Timur order the desecration or burning of the Qur'an or the *Turkish Alcoran* mentioned in the poem above.

### **Tamerlane's War Expansion**

While his total empire stretched from Russia to India, and from the Mediterranean Sea to Mongolia, his expansive land domain included Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Turkey, Syria and India.<sup>12</sup> Born to a royal and loyal family, Tamerlane's father was a wealthy landlord while his mother was the daughter of a famous honorable religious man.<sup>13</sup> However, according to some historians, roughly 17 million people died in his conquests. To prove that he was not the killer of the largest human population in history, the opening of his tomb in Samarkand, Uzbekistan under the instructions of Stalin of the former USSR in 1941, whether a heresy or a real testimony, a reflection of the two curses inscribed in his tomb, clearly define the kind of person he was. The two curses will appear to the reader at the end of the chapter.



Map of Eurasia

After the decline of the powerful Timurid Dynasty, smaller but powerful empires evolved such as “the Qing and Ming in present day China, the Vijayanagara and Mughal in India, the Safavid in Iran and the Ottoman in Turkey.”<sup>14</sup> John Darwin's masterpiece *After Tamerlane* covers 600 years of global history especially on empires. From 1382 to 1405 his thousands of well-armed soldiers crisscrossed Eurasia. The terminology Eurasia is a combination of Europe and Asia and are divided by the Ural Mountains. Russia and Kazakhstan straddle both continents and the Northern and Eastern Hemispheres. The never tiring Tamerlane who moved with speed undeterred by foreign enemies, traveled with ease from Delhi to Moscow and from the Central Asian Tien Shan Mountains to the Anatolian Mountains known historically as the Taurus Mountains. His destruction of Damascus on 24 March 1401 and his smashing of the Golden Horde could be irrefutable and deserving of further research endeavors, because, Christopher Marlowe's *dramatic character Tamburlaine the Great on the viciousness of Timur, could be out of context and an exaggeration as earlier noted.*

One struggle aspect that distinguished Tamerlane from the past Mongol conquests was that he stumbled upon nations that had already been captured by his previous conquerors. The Timurid realm coincided with the Turkic Islamic traditions and institutions. He is regarded undefeated military tactician and brutal in his military conquests. On the other hand, he was a patron of architecture and arts because of his interaction with famous intellectuals like Ibn Khaldun, Hafez, and Hafiz -i-Abru while his reign introduced the Timurid Renaissance.<sup>15</sup> The Timurid Renaissance was a period in Islamic and Asian history spanning from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It rose to prominence in the 13<sup>th</sup> century after the demise of the Islamic Golden Age of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>16</sup> It was also an era when the mamluks played significant role in the advancement of Astronomy.<sup>17</sup>

The Timurid Dynasty originated from the remnants of the Barlas Mongol tribe of Genghis Khan's army<sup>18</sup> and thereafter settled in Central Asia. Due to intermingling with the Turkish people, they became Turkicized in terms of habits and language such that there was an era they had a strong force and were generally known as Moghulistan for "Land of Mongols" in Persian. After adopting Islam, the Mongols and the Turks of central Asia both embraced Persianate societal influence that injected Persian arts, culture, literature, and language.<sup>19</sup> Also known as Islamic Persosphere, historical Persianate started with the Bavandid (651–1349) in Western, specifically in Central Asia it ended with the Pahlavi (1925–1979). In Eastern, especially Central Asia to the Indian Subcontinent, it started with the Qarakhanid (840–1212) and ended with the Jammu and Kashmir (1846–1952).

The terminologies of persianization and persification are newly-crafted sociological terminologies that remain unique to Persian culture, language, arts, literature, and music. It is a type of cultural shift or assimilation. Persianized or Persified applies to individual and social inclination or acclimation to Persian influence. Such Iranian cultural influences that started during the early and middle Islamic periods had great impact on non-Iranian people such as Arabs and different Caucasian societies like the Georgians and Armenians plus Daghestani and Turkic peoples. Likewise, it infiltrated Seljuks, Ghaznavids, and the Ottomans.<sup>20</sup> There are two types of inequality: man-made and natural. Terms like inferiority complex and superiority complex have been with us for a long time. Regardless of whether it refers to "the Good (Clint Eastwood), the Bad (Lee Van Cleef), and the Ugly (Eli Wallach)"<sup>21</sup>—a movie that first came to fore in 1966 and known as "*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*" in Italian, inequality exists to this day.

## The Timurid Realm and the Turkic Traditions and Institutions

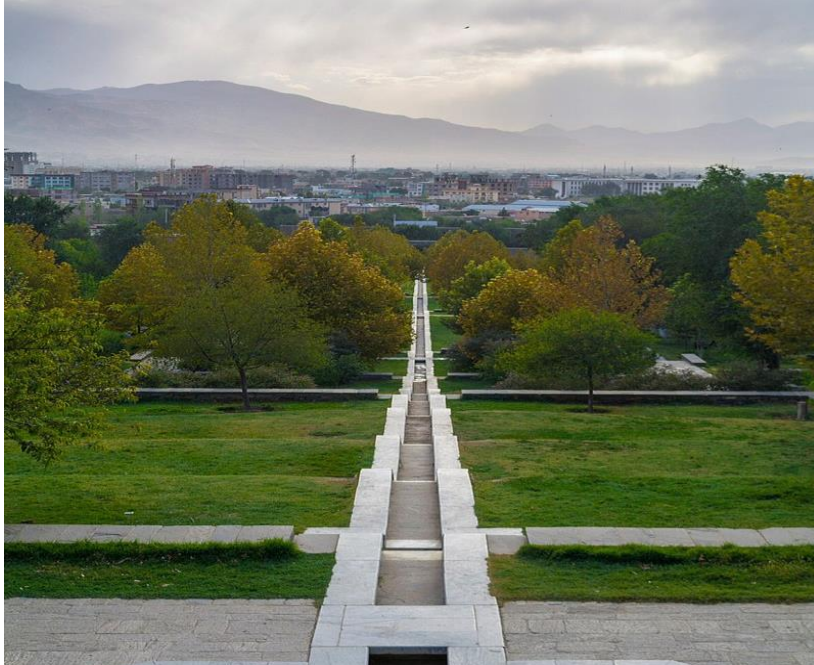


Mosque built by Queen Gawhar Shad of Afghanistan. Photo Credit/UNESCO



Tomb of Gur-i-Timur; Samarkand, Uzbekistan; photo credit/Wikipedia

After reaching its greatest realm and covering expansive stretch of lands, the Timurid intermixed with Turkic traditions and institutions just like the previous succession of empires that dominated Turkey in the past. The Timurid gained a lot from the people and lands that it captured drawing considerable knowledge for most of the Timurid followers accepted Islamic traditions and culture while creating new institutions that helped elevate the living conditions of both parties. Regardless of Timur Lan killing millions of his opponents in different wars, his victorious amalgamation of lands and people of <sup>22</sup>different steppe traditions created a new form of advanced governance and leadership that are worth celebrating. What started as a nomadic Mongolian scattered tribal confederation finally transformed into a formidable respected dynasty under Timur Lan. Despite the deformity of his right arm and leg, Timur Lan challenged every leader, leaving behind death and destruction in his paths. His main headquarter was Samarkand. Born in Shahrisabz, he rose to power in 1370. The limping Timur, passed away February 1405, at Otrar, Shymkent, Kazakhstan while his place of burial was Amir Temur Mausoleum Gur-i Amir Complex, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. He died while on his way to capture China.<sup>23</sup>



Gardens of Babur in Afghanistan. Photo credit/Wikipedia

If there is any truth to the inscriptions found inside the mausoleum of Timur Lan after being opened at the instructions of the former USSR leader Stalin a few years before the breakout of the World War II in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, they were dire warnings in the form of imprecations. Upon opening the articulately crafted mausoleum, the message found was startling, even though, Stalin, the Communist leader, took it seriously. To paraphrase, the message forewarned that any attempt to open it would have dire consequences. Regardless

of the surviving victims' assumption that he was a killer with bloodstained hands who would go to hell after his departure for the Afterlife, his message revealed a contradictory forewarning. It revealed that a more ferocious and brutal leader would emerge who would kill more than the numbers he was thought to have killed. The leader Timur Lan foretold was Germany's Hitler who killed 26 million people.

In the late periodic rule of Timur's leadership, Tamerlane established a centralized government for his opponents.<sup>24</sup> His reformation of fine arts creativities and historical sources some of which exist to this day especially in Uzbekistan are well known.<sup>25</sup> Persians played great roles in the elevation of carpets making and it is not a hidden secret that Iran is the leading maker of the best carpets in the world in contemporary world. Some of the Timurid successors also continued to enhance arts creativities one which was, a woman who deserves praise for her advanced architectural engineering. She was the wife of Timurid ruler Shahrukh (r. 1405–47). She was the de-facto ruler of the Timurid Empire for almost a decade until she arranged the



The Taj Mahal; photo credit/Wikipedia

coronation of her grandson for the takeover upon the death of her husband. Even though the name Afghanistan evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Herat was the capital of the Timurid dynasty between 1405 and 1507.<sup>26</sup>

To Muslims and from secular perspectives, Hitler was a totalitarian ruler who killed innocent people for personal and worldly gains while Timur Lan was a true believer and a martyr.

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