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MILITARY ART AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF AMIR TIMUR IN THE CONTEXT OF 14TH–15TH CENTURY EURASIAN HISTORY

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Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of the military-political strategy and cultural creation of Amir Timur (Tamerlane) and his successors within the Eurasian historical context of the 14th–15th centuries. The author analyzes the innovative aspects of Timurid military art, including the synthesis of nomadic cavalry mobile tactics and sedentary fortification achievements, the logistics of large-scale campaigns, and the concept of imperial legitimation. Special attention is paid to the phenomenon of the "Timurid Renaissance"—an unprecedented flourishing of urban planning, science, literature, and miniature art in Samarkand, Herat, and other centers of the empire. The conclusion is drawn that the Timurid era formed the geopolitical and cultural framework of Eurasian civilization in the Late Middle Ages, integrating the trade arteries of the Great Silk Road into a single cultural and economic space.

Keywords: Amir Timur, military art, Eurasian history, 14th–15th centuries, Timurid Renaissance, cultural heritage, geopolitics.

Introduction

The 14th–15th centuries were marked by profound geopolitical transformations across the Eurasian continent. The collapse of the unified Mongol imperial space (the Ulus of Jochi, the Chagatai Ulus, and the Ilkhanate) created a power vacuum

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that demanded the emergence of new integration projects. A central place in this historical process was occupied by the empire of Amir Timur (1336–1405). Timur's historical significance extends far beyond the creation of a vast military-political entity: his rule laid the foundations for a unique civilizational synthesis that united the nomadic traditions of the Central Asian steppes with the sedentary urban culture of Transoxiana and Iran [1, 2].

Research Methodology

The study is based on the principles of historicism, systematicity, and comparative-historical analysis. The source base includes the works of Persian and Arab chroniclers of the era (Nizam ad-Din Shami, Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yazdi, Ibn Arabshah), European diplomatic accounts (Ruy González de Clavijo), as well as modern archaeological and historiographical research

Strategy and Tactics of Amir Timur's Military Art

Researchers justly characterize Amir Timur's military art as the pinnacle of military-theoretical thought in the medieval East. Timur inherited traditional Mongol combat tactics (maneuverability, flanking envelopments, feigned retreats), yet significantly improved them in accordance with the demands of the era and the nature of his adversaries (the Golden Horde, the Delhi Sultanate, the Ottoman Empire, and Mamluk Egypt).

Some senior commanders were called *sardars*. Other commanders were called *emirs*, whose rank comprised 12 grades. Each commander had a deputy ready to replace him if necessary. The positions of commanders of tens (*onbashi*), hundreds (*yuzbashi*), and thousands (*mingbashi*) were elective, though confirmed by superior commanders. "A commander," he used to say, "whose authority is weaker than a whip and a stick is unworthy of his rank." At the lowest level, "military democracy" was preserved—commanders of tens were elected within their own unit of ten.

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Commanders of thousands were generally appointed from among the sons of emirs or representatives of the nobility. The highest command posts in the army belonged to Tamerlane's relatives and closest associates. Iron discipline was maintained in the army, based on punishments (in particular, one disciplinary penalty was depriving an offender of one-tenth of his pay) and rewards (praise, pay raises, gifts, and ranks).

Thanks to iron discipline and superior training, Tamerlane's army skillfully and precisely executed its commander's orders. Owing to this, he succeeded in defeating the forces of the Golden Horde Khan Tokhtamysh without falling for the traditional Mongol tactic of luring the enemy into the steppes and avoiding ambushes. Timur had a superb grasp of the political system of the region where he had to conduct military operations and skillfully utilized the services of numerous spies. Detailed attention was devoted to studying the enemy's strategy and tactics.

According to Timur's theoretical principles, the army was divided into 3 major lines, each consisting of 3 echelons. Thus, the forces on the battlefield had a formation 9 echelons deep, with the echelons not being equal in numerical strength. Considerable forces were held in reserve to reinforce the center or a flank at the decisive moment. The battle was initiated by lightly armed missile troops at outposts, followed by the vanguard entering combat. The wings of the battle order had their own vanguards, which joined the fight if it became necessary to support the main vanguard. If these forces proved insufficient, the left half of the right wing and the right half of the left wing entered the battle; if their assistance was also insufficient, Timur committed the remaining parts of both wings. If necessary, Timur subsequently committed the reserve, which he commanded personally.

The lines were committed to battle gradually; then, once the enemy was thoroughly exhausted, the main reserve forces, consisting of elite troops, entered the fray. The front line was the weakest. During a battle, Tamerlane initially

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committed reinforcements from the middle of the wings, preserving the flanks and the reserve in order to maintain the capability to encircle the enemy even if the center of his own army was breached, followed by a strike from fresh reserve forces. Such tactics ensured Tamerlane invariable success against his adversaries. Tamerlane's forces consisted of infantry and cavalry. However, during long steppe campaigns, his infantry was supplied with horses; the cavalry—or at least a significant portion of it—was instructed when necessary to fight on foot, thus corresponding to modern dragoons. It dismounted when more accurate and powerful archery was required, though it undoubtedly performed better on horseback than on foot, as nomadic peoples became accustomed to horses from early childhood.

Yet Sahibkiran's talent for unconventional, unexpected actions against the enemy manifested itself most vividly in his campaigns and battles against Tokhtamysh, Khan of the Golden Horde. Speaking in modern terms, unlike other commanders of that era, Amir Timur took a creative approach to solving major strategic tasks in upcoming campaigns and battles, employing an innovative approach when applying military ruses.

Thus, the 1391 campaign against the Golden Horde Khan Tokhtamysh, prior to the decisive battle on the banks of the Kondurcha River, was characterized by a prolonged march of Amir Timur's 200,000-strong army. The troops had to traverse 2,500 km across the steppes, representing an exceptional feat in world military history. Sahibkiran carefully assessed the situation and chose a route of advance that kept his troops safe from the enemy during the march while simultaneously ensuring they remained undetected until encountering the adversary [3, 4].

Amir Timur's forces advanced across hard-to-reach and waterless territories through the steppe regions of modern-day Kazakhstan, successively crossing two rivers—the Tobol and the Ural—to achieve two primary strategic objectives:

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1. To seize control of the main supply routes and reinforcement corridors for Tokhtamysh's army leading from the steppe regions of the Golden Horde toward the Sea of Azov.
2. To cut off the retreat routes of Tokhtamysh's army back to its capital.

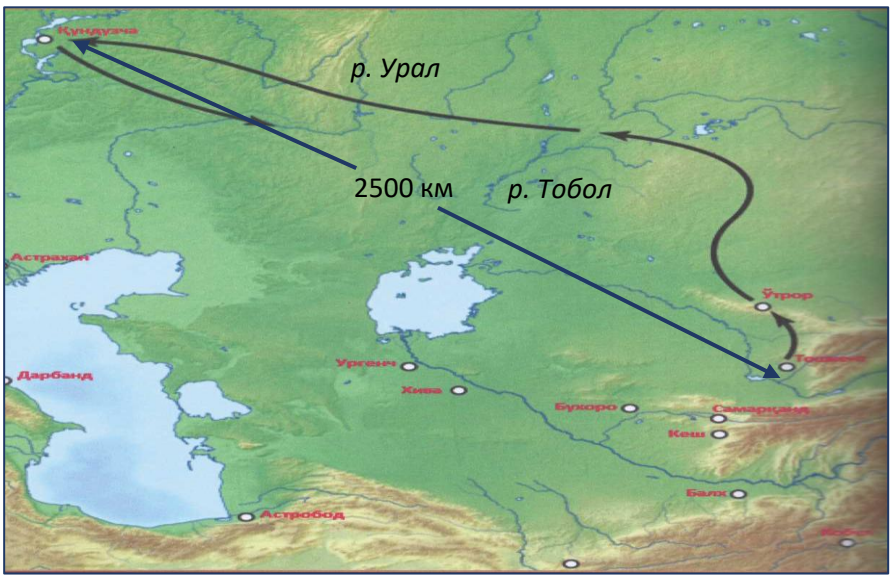


Fig. 1. The 2,500 km march of Amir Timur's forces (January – June 1391). Compiled based on materials [2, 3].

Before the battle, Amir Timur effectively employed a novel military ruse—the tactic of a "psychological" attack: when the armies came within sight of one another, he ordered the detachment of his grandson, Mirza Abubakr, to pitch tents, spread red carpets, and begin preparing a festive meal. This was a deliberate display of contempt for the enemy that stunned and severely undermined the morale of Tokhtamysh's troops even before the battle began. On the third day, at the height of the battle, Tokhtamysh's standard-bearer, who had defected to Amir Timur's side, cast the banner to the ground. Seeing the standard overturned, Tokhtamysh's army fled so rapidly that, unable to see the main banner and not

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knowing where to rally, they scattered and were largely annihilated—some perishing by the sword, others drowning in the Volga [5, 6].

Logistics and Intelligence

Timur's campaigns were distinguished by meticulous strategic preparation. His intelligence network spanned territories from China to the Mediterranean. Matters of logistical support, water supply in arid steppes and deserts, and the rapid construction of field fortifications were elevated to the rank of an exact science.

Use of Engineering Troops

Unlike classical nomadic armies, Timur's army was renowned for its siege machinery. During the sieges of fortresses (for example, in Syria, India, or Anatolia), siege towers (*gurji*), battering rams, stone-throwing engines, and mining tunnels were actively employed [7, 8].

Innovation in Troop Organization

Timur instituted strict discipline (the principle of justice and the maxim "Strength is in Justice" – *Kuch – adolatda* / *Qudrat dar adolat*), organized the army along the decimal system (commanders of tens, hundreds, thousands, and *tumenbashi*), and established elite guard units. His victories at Ankara (1402) over Sultan Bayezid I and on the Terek River (1395) against Tokhtamysh demonstrated the superiority of the Timurid strategic school over its contemporaries.

The Phenomenon of the "Timurid Renaissance" and Cultural Heritage

Paradoxically, Timur's devastating military campaigns were accompanied by unprecedented cultural creation. His policy of patronage was continued by his direct descendants—Shah Rukh, Ulugh Beg, Baysunghur, and Husayn Bayqara [9].

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• **Urban Planning and Architecture:** The imperial capital of Samarkand, along with Bukhara, Shahrisabz, and Herat, became centers of world architecture. The use of glazed tiles, mosaic panels, monumental portals, and double domes (the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, and the Registan Ensemble) established the canons of Islamic architecture.

• **Scientific Breakthrough:** Timur's grandson, the sultan and astronomer Mirzo Ulugh Beg, transformed Samarkand into the capital of world astronomy. The observatory he built enabled the compilation of the *Zij-i Sultani* (*Zij-i Guragani*)—a star catalog whose accuracy amazed scholars in Europe and Asia for centuries.

• **Literature and Art:** The era was marked by the flourishing of literature in the Chagatai and Persian languages (the works of Alisher Navoi and Jami), as well as the establishment of the Herat school of miniature painting headed by Kamoliddin Behzod [10, 11].

Conclusion

The military-political and cultural activities of Amir Timur and the Timurid dynasty in the 14th–15th centuries fundamentally reshaped the landscape of Eurasian history. The synthesis of nomadic military might and sedentary urban culture made it possible to create a stable Eurasian space that ensured the security of trade routes and the flourishing of science, art, and crafts. Timur's military art was ahead of its time, and his cultural heritage entered the golden treasury of world civilization, defining the developmental trajectory of the peoples of Central Asia and the Near and Middle East.

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