

ZAKHIRIDDIN MUKHAMMAD BABUR: WARLORD, POLITICIAN, POET

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Abstract: Babur was a descendant of the famed Mongol warrior Timur. His grandfather was Timurid Empire Sultan Ulugh Beg. Babur's father, Omar Sheikh, was king of Ferghana, a district of modern Uzbekistan. Although Babur came from the Barlas tribe of Mongol origin, isolated members of the tribe had become Turks in language and manners through long residence in Turkish regions. Hence Babur, though called a Mughal (Mongol in Persian), drew most of his support from Turks, and the empire he founded was Turkish in character.

Key words: Mawarannahr, Kabul, India, Mughal, Ferghana, Battle of Panipat, Heart, Humayun, "Memoirs of Babur " or Baburnama.

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The name of Zakhiriddin Mukhammad Babur in the history of Uzbekistan is on a par with such political figures and military leaders as Jaloliddin Manguberdi, Amir Timur, Ulugbek, Alisher Navoi. A direct descendant of Timur, Babur created an empire of Baburids in India (in the western sources it is known as Mughal Empire)

and was a loyal son of his country and the rest of his life he was fighting for its welfare and prosperity.

Babur was born February 14, 1483, in the Uzbekistan city of Andijan region. At the age of 12 years, resulting in the tragic death of his father, he became the new ruler and started a brutal struggle for power in Mawarannahr. During 1494-1496, while still a teenager, Babur participated in the battles of Samarkand, where he first met on the battlefield with his most powerful enemy, Sheybani Khan, who had an enormous impact on the fate of Babur. Babur's native tongue was a Turkic language. Babur was a follower of Islam and believed very strongly in his religion. Babur was the son of the Timurid prince Umarshaykh, the ruler of the Fergana. Babur was known to be incredibly strong and physically fit. As one of his exercises, Babur would carry two men, one on each of his shoulders, then run around and climb slopes. It is also believed that Babur swam through every major river in India, sometimes even against the current.

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For three years, Babur built up an army so that he could recapture his lost territories. He managed to gather sufficient troops in 1504. After crossing the snowy Hindu Kush, Babur besieged and captured the strong city of Kabul. With this dexterous move, he gained a wealthy new kingdom and re-established his fortunes.

In the following year, Babur united with Husayn Bayqarah of Herat against Muhammad Shaybani. The death of Husayn Bayqarah in 1506 put a stop to this expedition, but Babur spent a year at Herat, enjoying the pleasures of that capital.

Babur returned to Kabul from Herat just in time to quell a formidable rebellion, but two years later a revolt among some of the leading Mughals drove him from his city. Babur was compelled to escape with his very few companions. Babur soon returned to Kabul and struck the army of his opponents with such power that they returned to their allegiance to Babur and gave up the kingdom.

Muhammad Shaybani died in 1510. Babur used this opportunity to regain his ancestral Timurid Empire territories. He received considerable aid from the Persian Safavid Empire's shah Ismail I, and in 1511 made a triumphant entry into Samarkand. However, he was defeated by the Uzbeks in 1514 and returned to Kabul with great difficulty.

Babur now resigned all hopes of recovering Ferghana. Although he dreaded an invasion from the Uzbeks to the West, his attention increasingly turned to India. He had made several preliminary incursions when an opportunity presented itself for a more extended expedition in 1521. Ibrahim Lodi, sultan of the Indian Delhi Lodhi Sultanate, was detested and several of his Afghani nobles asked Babur for assistance. Babur immediately assembled a 12,000-man army, complete with limited artillery, and marched into India. Ibrahim advanced against Babur with 100,000 soldiers and one hundred elephants. Their great battle, the First Battle of Panipat, was fought on April 21, 1526. Ibrahim Lodi was slain and had his army routed, and Babur quickly took possession of Agra. A more formidable enemy awaited Babur. Rana Sanga of Mewar collected an enormous force of 210,000 men and attacked the invaders. Babur's army was surrounded, tired, hot, and homesick. Babur managed to restore their courage but secretly did not believe he had a good chance of defeating Rana Sanga. Surprisingly, in the Battle of Khanua on March 16, 1527, Babur won a great victory and made himself absolute master of North India.

In the Battle of Ghaghara River, on May 6, 1529, Babur defeated Mahmud Lodi, brother of Ibrahim Lodi, crushing all remaining North Indian resistance. Babur spent the later years of his life arranging affairs and revenues of his new empire, and improving his capital, Agra.

Babur wrote his memoirs, the *Baburnama*, in the Turkish common language, Chagatai. During the end of Babur's life, his son, Humayun, became deathly ill with little chance of survival. Babur was devastated and began to constantly pray for his son. In these prayers, which he recited while circumambulating his son, Babur said that he wanted to take the disease away from Humayun, and die in his place. Strangely enough, Babur's prayers were "answered." Babur died at the age of 47 from this disease. Humayun inherited the throne. Babur is buried in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The controversy surrounding the building of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya dates from 1528, when Babur allegedly destroyed the Temple marking Ram's birthplace (avatar of Vishnu, see Hinduism) in order to construct a new mosque, although the exact location of Ram's birthplace is disputed. Nonetheless, on December 6, 1992, supporters of Hindu nationalism stormed and destroyed the Babri Mosque, causing riots and throughout the subcontinent with Muslims in Bangladesh attacking Hindus. Ironically, throughout much of its existence, Hindus and Muslims had both worshipped in the Mosque, although the British constructed a partition in the 1850's to prevent clashes between the two groups. P. Carnegy wrote in 1870.[1] The "Memoirs of Babur " or *Baburnama* are the work of the great-great-great-grandson of Timur (Tamerlane), Zakhiriddin Mukhammad Babur (1483-1530). As

their most recent translator declares, "said to 'rank with the Confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau, and the memoirs of Gibbon and Newton,' Babur's memoirs are the first--and until relatively recent times, the only--true autobiography in Islamic literature." The Baburnama tells the tale of the prince's struggle first to assert and defend his claim to the throne of Samarkand and the region of the Fergana Valley. After being driven out of Samarkand in 1501 by the Uzbek Shaibanids, he ultimately sought greener pastures, first in Kabul and then in northern India, where his descendants were the Moghul (Mughal) dynasty ruling in Delhi until 1858. The memoirs offer a highly educated Central Asian Muslim's observations of the world in which he moved. There is much on the political and military struggles of his time but also extensive descriptive sections on the physical and human geography, the flora and fauna, nomads in their pastures and urban environments enriched by the architecture, music and Persian and Turkic literature patronized by the Timurids. The selections here--all taken from his material on Fergana--have been chosen to provide a range of such observations from the material he recorded at the end of the 1490s and in the first years of the sixteenth century. It should be of some interest to compare his description of Samarkand with that of the outsider, Clavijo, from a century earlier. This translation is based on that by Annette Beveridge, *The Babur-nama in English*, 2 v. (London, 1921), but with substantial stylistic revision to eliminate the worst of her awkward syntax. I have chosen to use Beveridge's indications of distances in miles rather than confuse the reader with the variable measure of distance provided in the original. An elegantly produced modern translation is that by Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (Washington, D. C., etc., The Smithsonian Institution and Oxford University Press, 1996). I have consulted Thackston and occasionally used his readings and renderings of the place names where the Beveridge translation was obscure. I would warn readers that my editing of the text has been done in some haste; further work would be needed to improve the style and standardize usages. Interspersed in the text are illustrations, some being contemporary views of places Babur describes; the others (which may be enlarged by clicking on the thumbnails) taken from the miniatures of an illustrated copy of the *Baburnama* prepared for the author's grandson, the Mughal Emperor Akbar. (The title page is here on the right.) It is worth remembering that the miniatures reflect the culture of the court at Delhi; hence, for example, the architecture of Central Asian cities resembles the architecture of Mughal India. Nonetheless, these illustrations are important as evidence of the tradition of exquisite miniature painting which developed at the court of Timur and

his successors. Timurid miniatures are among the greatest artistic achievements of the Islamic world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[2]

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