The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane

Timur (or Tamerlane) is famous as the fourteenth-century conqueror of much of Central Eurasia and the founder of the Timurid dynasty. His reputation lived on in his native lands and reappeared some three centuries after his death in the form of fictional biographies, authored anonymously in Persian and Turkic. These biographies have become an important part of popular culture, but despite a direct continuity in their production from the eighteenth century to the present, they remain virtually unknown to people outside the region. This remarkable and rigorous scholarly appraisal of the legendary biographies of Tamerlane is the first of its kind in any language. The book sheds light not only on the character of Tamerlane and how he was remembered and championed by many generations after his demise, but also on the era in which the biographies were written, and how they were conceived and received by the local populace during an age of crisis in their own history.

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The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane

Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia

RON SELA
Indiana University Bloomington
For Hila
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My journey with Tamerlane’s legendary biographies has taken many turns and I am indebted to numerous individuals who had contributed, by design or inadvertently, to guiding me to its safe, albeit temporary, conclusion. To begin, if I could claim inspiration from an intellectual isnād, Yuri Bregel and Devin DeWeese would be two of its most central figures. Yuri and Devin’s unrivaled erudition, skills of interpretation, academic integrity, and uncompromising dedication to the enhancement of human knowledge should serve as models for any scholarly inquiry. I can only hope that they take pride in whatever merits they may find in this book. Needless to say, they bear no responsibility for my errors and omissions.

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Abbreviations

“Books of Tīmūr”

Dāstān

Dāstān 7390
Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr șāhib-qirān. MS. IVAN Uz No. 7390.

Kunūz

Temurnoma (Ravshanov)

TN Kullīyāt

TN 699
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 699.

TN 1501
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1501.

TN 1526
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1526.

TN 4436
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4436.

TN 4817
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4817.

TN 4890
Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4890.

Other Abbreviations

AEMA
Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi

AS/EA
Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques

Bartol’d, Sochineniia

CAC
Cahiers d’Asie Centrale

CAJ
Central Asiatic Journal
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAM</td>
<td>Central Asia Monitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Central Asian Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI\textsuperscript{r}</td>
<td>Encyclopedia Iranica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IJMES</td>
<td>International Journal of Middle East Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVAN Uz</td>
<td>Institut vostokovedenii\textsuperscript{a} Akademii nauk Uzbekistana (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAH</td>
<td>Journal of Asian History</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAOS</td>
<td>Journal of the American Oriental Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRAS</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JWH</td>
<td>Journal of World History</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Papers on Inner Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIFIAS</td>
<td>Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>SVR</td>
<td>Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Instituta vostokovedenii AN UzSSR</td>
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<td>VI</td>
<td>Voprosy istorii</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZDMG</td>
<td>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</td>
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Note on Translation and Transliteration

The transcription of Muslim names and terms from Arabic, Persian, and Turkic follows a modified scheme of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Place names are given usually in simplified transcription. The transcription of Russian names and terms follows the system of the Library of Congress.

In the excerpts from Timur’s biographies I tried to render the translations as smooth and flowing as possible, avoiding additions in brackets with the exception of introductory titles. All the segments in parentheses do appear in the original text (with no parentheses, of course) but should be understood, I believe, as the narrator’s interjections and commentary, as he was trying to situate certain portions of the text in a historical context or to clarify their meaning for the audience. In addition, although the original text – like most eighteenth-century Central Asian texts – was devoid of punctuation marks and diacritics, I chose to present the biographies in a format appropriate to a modern work of fiction. All the dates in the translations are given in *hijri* years, but elsewhere remain in accordance with their accepted Gregorian usage.
Central Asia in the first half of the 18th century