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978-0-521-51706-5 - The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane: Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia

Ron Sela

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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.

RON SELA is Assistant Professor of Central Asian History at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the author of *Ritual and Authority in Central Asia: The Khan's Inauguration Ceremony* (2003) and coeditor, with Scott C. Levi, of *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (2009).

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Acknowledgments

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”

<i>Dāstān</i>	<i>Sayyid Muḥammad Khoja b. Ja‘far Khoja. Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr. MS. IVAN Uz No. 185/I.</i>
<i>Dāstān 7390</i>	<i>Dāstān-i Amīr Tīmūr šāhib-qirān. MS. IVAN Uz No. 7390.</i>
<i>Kunūz</i>	<i>‘Abd al-Raḥmān Sīrat. Kunūz al-a‘zam (Tārīkh-i Tīmūrī). MS. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung MS Or. Quart. 1231.</i>
<i>Temurnoma (Ravshanov)</i>	<i>Temurnoma: Amir Temur Kuragon zhangnomasi. Ed. P. Ravshanov. Tashkent: Chulpon, 1990.</i>
<i>TN Kullīyāt</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. Kullīyāt-i fārsī. Ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Qāsim ibn Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Khāliq Bukhārī. Tashkent, 1912.</i>
<i>TN 699</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 699.</i>
<i>TN 1501</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1501.</i>
<i>TN 1526</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 1526.</i>
<i>TN 4436</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4436.</i>
<i>TN 4817</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4817.</i>
<i>TN 4890</i>	<i>Tīmūr-nāma. MS. IVAN Uz No. 4890.</i>

Other Abbreviations

<i>AEMA</i>	<i>Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi</i>
<i>AS/EA</i>	<i>Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques</i>
<i>Bartol’d, Sochineniia</i>	<i>Bartol’d, V. V. Sochineniia. Moscow: Izd-vo vostochnoi literatury, 1963–77. 9 vols.</i>
<i>CAC</i>	<i>Cahiers d’Asie Centrale</i>
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Central Asiatic Journal</i>

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<i>CAM</i>	<i>Central Asia Monitor</i>
<i>CAS</i>	<i>Central Asian Survey</i>
<i>Elr</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Iranica</i>
<i>EP²</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>IVAN Uz</i>	<i>Institut vostokovedeniia Akademii nauk Uzbekistana (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan)</i>
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of Asian History</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JWH</i>	<i>Journal of World History</i>
<i>PIA</i>	<i>Papers on Inner Asia</i>
<i>RIFIAS</i>	<i>Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies</i>
<i>Storey – Bregel</i>	<i>Persidskaia literatura, bio-bibliograficheskii obzor. Moscow, 1972.</i>
<i>SVR</i>	<i>Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Instituta vostokovedeniia AN UzSSR</i>
<i>VI</i>	<i>Voprosy istorii</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesselschaft</i>

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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 Tīmūr'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.

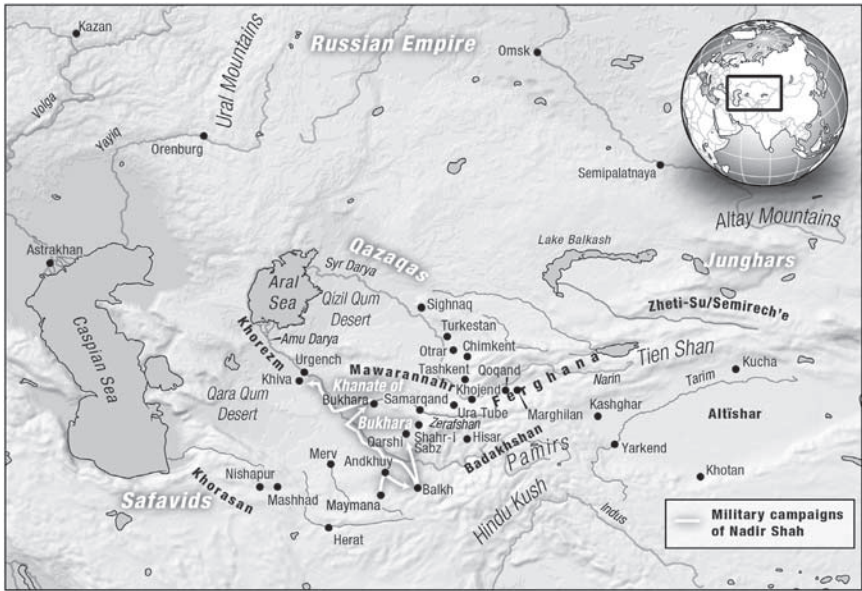
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Central Asia in the first half of the 18th century