

MILITARY HISTORY OF THE SHAYBANID STATE IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE TIMURIDS

Sarvar Tulkinovich Turaev

The fragmentation and constant wars among numerous contenders for power weakened the political might of the Timurid state, paving the way for the conquest of Central Asia by the forces of Shaybani Khan. The advance of nomadic Uzbek tribes into Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) is associated with Muhammad Shaybani Khan (1451–1510), the grandson of Abulkhair, the founder of the nomadic Uzbek state.

In the 1490s, as internecine conflicts among the Timurids intensified, Shaybani Khan captured the border fortress of Otrar and the well-fortified cities of Sauran and Yassy (modern-day Turkistan). As a result, he gained control over a significant portion of the region. Taking advantage of the disputes that arose among the Timurids after the death of Samarkand's ruler, Sultan Ahmad Mirza, in 1494, Shaybani Khan issued a call to all his former supporters, inviting them to rejoin him. His uncles and many prominent nomads responded to this call.

In 1497, Shaybani Khan marched on Samarkand, where Baysunkar (1477–1499), the nephew of Sultan Ahmad Mirza, was ruling. However, the people of Samarkand had heavily fortified their city and its surroundings, prompting Shaybani Khan to abandon the siege and move toward Karshi. From there, he proceeded to Shakhrisabz, plundering both cities and returning to Turkistan with substantial spoils. This raid, which served as a reconnaissance mission, demonstrated that capturing Timurid territories was entirely feasible.

With reinforcements from the Tashkent ruler Mahmud Khan, Shaybani Khan again advanced on Samarkand in 1499 and began its siege. Upon receiving news that Bukhara's governor, Emir Muhammad Baqi-Tarkhan, was rushing to aid the besieged city with his troops, Shaybani Khan lifted the siege and moved to confront the Bukharans. In a battle near the fortress of Dabusia (now ruins near Ziyaiddin, between Samarkand and Navoi), Muhammad Baqi-Tarkhan was defeated and took refuge behind the fortress walls. Shaybani Khan then made a forced march to Bukhara, which surrendered after a three-day siege.

In 1500, Shaybani Khan entered Samarkand. He also captured the cities of Karshi and Guzar. In early 1503, advancing up the Syr Darya, he defeated the combined forces of Tashkent's ruler and his allies, led by Mahmud Khan, Ahmad Khan, and Babur, in a bloody battle near the city of Arkhian, subsequently capturing Tashkent and Shakhrukhiya. In the spring of 1504, the Fergana Valley was also seized. Shaybani Khan chose Samarkand as the capital of his state.

Having consolidated his position in Transoxiana, Shaybani Khan subdued Hisar in 1504, where Khusrawshah ruled. He also captured Termez and the regions on the left bank of the Amu Darya, including Kunduz, Badakhshan, and Balkh. He then began preparations to conquer the vast Timurid state of Husayn Bayqara (1469–1506), the sultan of Khorasan and Khwarazm. The existence of a powerful Timurid state in Khorasan posed a threat to Shaybani Khan.

In the winter of 1504, Shaybani Khan launched a campaign from Bukhara to Khwarazm. After a fierce ten-month siege, Urgench was taken in August 1505. That autumn, a detachment of Shaybani Khan's forces invaded Khorasan, reaching Meymaneh and Faryab.

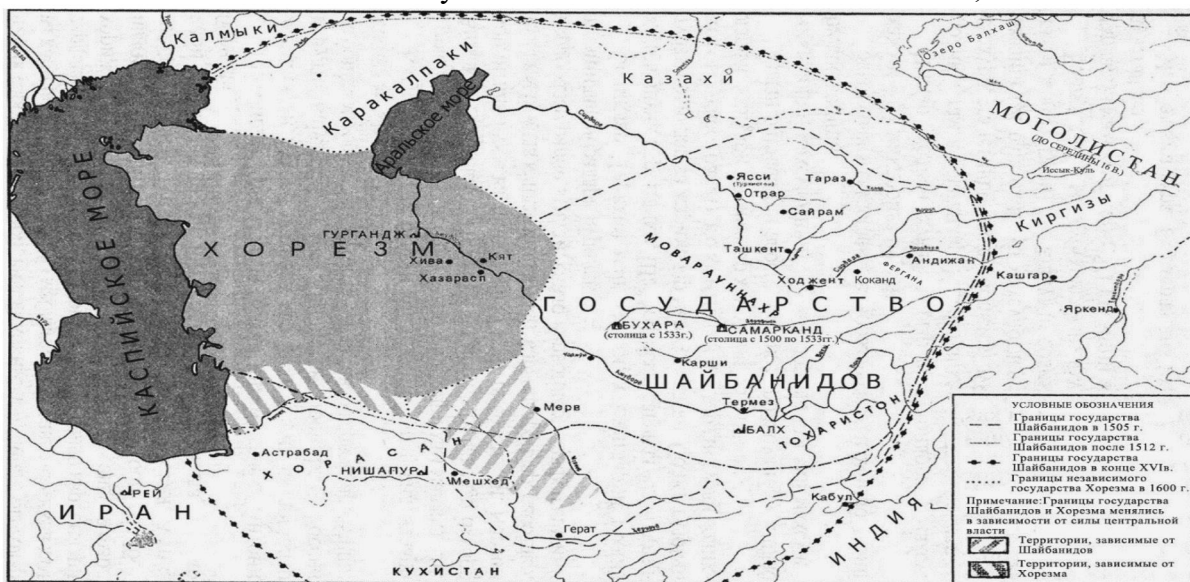
Shaybani Khan's rear was constantly threatened by Kazakh sultans ruling in the Dasht-i-Kipchak. In 1504, during the siege of Balkh, he received news of a Kazakh invasion into Transoxiana, forcing him to lift the siege and campaign into the Kazakh steppes. The Kazakh sultans retreated but were not defeated. In 1506, while Shaybani Khan was in Khorasan, the Kazakhs again invaded Transoxiana, engaging in plunder. Shaybani Khan was forced to return and expel them. In 1508, the Kazakhs resumed their incursions while Shaybani Khan was in Afghanistan, preparing to confront Babur, who had taken Kabul. The Kazakh sultans reached Bukhara and Samarkand, capturing many prisoners and spoils before retreating to the steppes. In 1508, Shaybani Khan returned to Bukhara to prepare for a decisive confrontation with the Kazakh sultans. In early 1509, a large Uzbek tribal army marched into the Dasht-i-Kipchak and, in March, captured the lands of Sultan Janish – Kara Abdal. This was followed by an advance on the domain of the most powerful Kazakh sultan, Burunduk Khan. Hearing of Shaybani Khan's approach with a large army, Burunduk Khan and Sultan Kasim retreated deep into the steppes. Despite prolonged pursuit, Shaybani Khan could not catch or decisively defeat them. These campaigns led to the reconquest of the cities of Sighnaq, Yassy, and Sauran.

Simultaneously, Shaybani Khan continued his war against the Timurid state in Khorasan. The death of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in 1506 created favorable conditions for this. At that time, two princes, Badiuzzaman and Muzaffar Mirza, were appointed to the Herat throne. Shaybani Khan began the siege of Balkh. By autumn 1506, the Timurids managed to muster a large force to relieve Balkh, joined by Babur and his troops from Kabul. However, before the Timurid forces could reach Balkh, the city, exhausted by famine, surrendered to Shaybani Khan.

In early 1507, Shaybani Khan advanced on Herat. In a fierce battle, the Herat forces were defeated, and in 1507, Herat submitted to Shaybani Khan. He later captured several other cities in Khorasan and defeated the Timurid army near Jam. In the spring of the following year, he launched another campaign into Khorasan, where Badiuzzaman, who had taken refuge in the Astarabad region, was forced to flee to Azerbaijan. He later died in Istanbul.

Shaybani Khan became the ruler of a vast state stretching from the Syr Darya to central Afghanistan.

His further advance was halted by the forces of the Iranian Shah Ismail I, who had formed an



The Shaybanid State and Khwarezm in the 16th century.

army known as the Qizilbash (“redheads”) due to their turbans adorned with twelve purple stripes in honor of Shiite imams. With this army, Ismail subjugated Shirvan, Azerbaijan, and Persian Iraq in 1502, assuming the title of Shah. By 1504, his eastern territories bordered those of the Timurids, while his western borders reached Diyarbakir and Baghdad.

After seizing the Timurid territories in Transoxiana and Khorasan, Shaybani Khan secretly began preparing to conquer Iran. In April 1509, he gathered his army in Karshi and led it toward the Amu Darya crossing near Burdalik (near modern-day Chardzhev-Turkmenabad). However, he sent the Uzbek sultans’ troops back to their uluses, likely to maintain political stability in Transoxiana and prevent Kazakh invasions. After occupying Merv, Shaybani Khan launched a campaign into the interior of Iran, capturing the cities of Mashhad and Tus.

In 1510, Shah Ismail entered Khorasan and advanced rapidly. Shaybani Khan, heading to Khorasan, sought refuge behind the walls of Merv to await reinforcements from Transoxiana. The Qizilbash, besieging Merv, employed a military ruse, feigning a retreat to lure the Uzbeks out of the city. Shaybani Khan pursued the Shah, but a bridge left behind was destroyed, and Ismail’s 17,000-strong army encircled Shaybani Khan’s forces. The ensuing bloody battle was marked by extreme ferocity: nearly all Uzbek emirs perished, and Shaybani Khan himself was killed.

The news of Shaybani Khan’s death caused great turmoil in the khan’s court. There was no unity among his sultans. In 1510, a new khan was chosen – Kuchkunji Khan (1510–1530), the senior representative of the khan’s family. He was Shaybani Khan’s uncle, the son of Abulkhair Khan, and a Timurid through his mother, Rabia Begim, the daughter of the renowned scholar and Timurid ruler Mirza Ulugbek.

Meanwhile, Shah Ismail continued his advance into Khorasan. His vanguard occupied Herat without a fight. The Uzbek khan's representatives, led by Shaybani's son Temur Sultan, submitted to the Shah and sent gifts, requesting that he not invade Transoxiana. A peace agreement was concluded, under which all territories on the left bank of the Amu Darya were ceded to Iran. The capture of the border strongholds of Meymaneh, Faryab, Balkh, and others secured all of Khorasan for Ismail.

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