

ZAHIRIDDIN MUHAMMAD BABUR'S EXPEDITIONS TO INDIA: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON MILITARY TACTICS AND THE ART OF WAR

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Abstract: This article analyzes the military-political activities of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur between 1520 and 1526 and the processes of the formation of the Babur dynasty. The study examines the chronological breaks in the work "Baburnama" based on the scientific views of such scholars as Stephen Dale, Annette Beveridge and Radhey Shyam Chaurasia. It also provides a comprehensive analysis of Babur's military leadership and his studies in the international arena.

Keywords: Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, Battle of Panipat, Baburnama, Mughal Empire, military revolution, artillery, tulughma tactics, Timurid military tradition, Ibrahim Lodi, conquest of India, political strategy.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada Zahiriddin Muhammad Boburning 1520–1526-yillar oralig'idagi harbiy-siyosiy faoliyati hamda Boburiylar saltanatining tashkil topish jarayonlari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda "Boburnoma" asarida uchraydigan xronologik uzilishlar Stephen Dale, Annette Beveridge va Radhey Shyam Chaurasia kabi olimlarning ilmiy qarashlari asosida o'rganilgan. Shuningdek, Boburning harbiy sarkardalik faoliyati va uning xalqaro maydonda o'rganilishi kompleks tahlil etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur, Panipat jangi, Boburnoma, Boburiylar saltanati, harbiy inqilob, artilleriya, to'lg'ama taktikasi, temuriy harbiy an'ana, Ibrohim Lodiy, Hindistonni zabt etish, siyosiy strategiya.

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируется военно-политическая деятельность Захириддина Мухаммада Бабура в период с 1520 по 1526 год и процессы формирования династии Бабуридов. Исследование рассматривает хронологические разрывы в работе «Бабурнама» на основе научных взглядов таких ученых, как Стивен Дейл, Аннет Бевэридж и Радхей Шьям Чаурасия. Также представлен всесторонний анализ военного руководства Бабура и его деятельности на международной арене.

Ключевые слова: Захириддин Мухаммад Бабура, битва при Панипате, Бабур-наме, Империя Бабуридов, военная революция, артиллерия, тактика тулугма, тимуридская военная традиция, Ибрахим Лоди, завоевание Индии, политическая стратегия.

INTRODUCTION:

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur is not only a great commander and statesman, but also an encyclopedic scholar who left an indelible mark on medieval Eastern literature and historiography. His masterpiece, "Baburnama," is considered the most reliable primary source for studying the history of the peoples of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India in the late 15th and first quarter of the 16th centuries. However, the existence of certain chronological gaps in the copies of the work that have reached us creates the necessity of reconstructing the events of this period based on other historical sources and modern research.

The relevance of the topic. The period of Babur's activity between 1520 and 1526 is considered the peak of his personality and military strategy. During these very years, he transformed from the ruler of the small Kabul emirate into the founder of the vast Indian empire.

The objective of the research. The main objective is to analyze Babur's expedition to India, his tactical victory in the Battle of Panipat, and the chronological gaps in the "Baburnama" based on the research of scholars such as Stephen Dale and Annette Beveridge. Additionally, the article



examines the role of firearms in Babur's military successes and his psychological determination (the "safar" concept).

Babur's legacy has been at the center of attention in world Oriental studies for centuries. Indian historians such as R.S. Chaurasia have analyzed the impact of Babur's victory on the internal political climate of India. This research, by summarizing the views of these scholars, attempts to highlight Babur's path toward India as a single integrated system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's *Baburnama* portrays the capture of Bajaur fortress as one of the most significant military episodes within the framework of his initial Indian campaigns. In the work, Babur describes the process of taking the fortress step by step, explaining the division of troops into wings, the precise determination of attack directions, the use of ladders and mantelets, and the psychological and practical superiority of firearms (*tufang*). In particular, it is noted that the defenders of Bajaur encountered firearms for the first time, which quickly caused them to lose the initiative in battle. Babur explains the rapid capture of the fortress by emphasizing military discipline, coordinated assault, and the superiority of military technology.¹

In the *Baburnama*, after the capture of Bajaur fortress, a new phase of military campaigns—territorial expansion and strategic movements directed toward India—is described in detail. The author notes that after consolidating control over Bajaur, he undertook measures to redeploy troops, relocate the population to the fortress, and strengthen communication with the central forces. For instance, the relocation of the inhabitants of Bi-siit to Bajaur fortress and the order sent to the Kabul troops to join Babur demonstrate a policy aimed at maintaining long-term control over the region. The work emphasizes that after Bajaur, Babur's attention shifted to rapid raids against the Sawad, Yusufzai, and Muhammadi Afghans. These campaigns were carried out not through open battles but through surprise attacks, reconnaissance, and psychological pressure. Crossing the Sawad River, advancing through mountainous routes, and dispersing Afghan groups demonstrate Babur's skillful use of maneuver warfare. In some cases, prisoners were taken and livestock was seized from the enemy, increasing the economic and military significance of these raids.

In the next stage, Babur entered Indian territory for the first time by crossing the Indus River. In the *Baburnama*, this event is recorded with particular importance, and Bhira (Bhera) and its adjacent territories are interpreted as the starting point of Babur's long-term strategy toward India. The author considers these lands as territories formerly under Turkic control and writes about his determination to reclaim them either through peaceful means or, if necessary, by force. The capture of Bhira city is distinguished in the work by being accomplished without battle, based on political and financial agreement. Negotiations were conducted with the city's elders and officials, and a payment of 400,000 shahrukhis as "protection money" (tribute for peace) was determined, demonstrating Babur's diplomatic approach. At the same time, in order to maintain military discipline, looting was strictly prohibited, and punishment was imposed on soldiers who disobeyed orders, confirming the existence of centralized military command.

Additionally, Babur sent an envoy to Sultan Ibrahim Lodi, the ruler of India, demanding the peaceful return of territories formerly under Turkic control. This indicates that Babur's campaigns in India were not solely military conquests but were also conducted on a legal and diplomatic basis. The failure of this diplomatic mission later became an early sign of the political conflicts that led to open military confrontation.

¹“ The Babur-nama in English (Memoirs of Babur) : Babur, Emperor of Hindustan, 1483-1530” Annette Susannah tarjimasi. 382-384 pages.

<https://archive.org/details/baburnamainengli01babuuoft/page/72/mode/2up?q=samarkand+1497>



According to Stephen Dale's *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan & India, 1483–1530*, after the death of the Badakhshan ruler Vays Mirza in 1520–1521, a power vacuum emerged in the region. To prevent this strategic territory from falling into the hands of the Shaybanids, Babur appointed his eldest son, Humayun, who was only 13 years old at the time, as governor. According to the memoirs of Gulbadan Begum, Babur and his wife Mahim Begum accompanied Humayun to Badakhshan. This event reveals Babur not only as a statesman but also as a family-oriented ruler with a human dimension.² The work also highlights that before continuing his Indian campaigns, Babur paid particular attention to the issue of Kandahar. The Kandahar question had been a long-standing "unfinished matter" for Babur. Stephen Dale describes this process as a complex diplomatic and military game. While Babur was negotiating with the Safavids in Herat over the fate of the city, he was simultaneously besieging Kandahar. The Arghun dynasty, which held the city, eventually surrendered. At the end of 1522, the city's governor handed over the keys to Babur. Babur entrusted Kandahar to his son Kamran Mirza. This victory secured Babur's western borders against threats from the Safavids and the Arghuns. The capture of Kandahar demonstrates Babur's mature strategic thinking.

After consolidating his position in Kabul, an unexpected opportunity arose from within India. The governor of Punjab, Daulat Khan Lodi, fearing Ibrahim Lodi, proposed an alliance to Babur and sent his son Dilawar Khan to Kabul. This alliance opened both a legal and military path for Babur to the very heart of India—Delhi and Agra.

In the autumn of 1523, Babur set out from Kabul and defeated the Lodi forces sent from Delhi. In January 1524, he captured Lahore. However, his ally Daulat Khan Lodi, realizing that Babur intended to remain permanently in Punjab, turned against him. At this time, Babur temporarily returned to Kabul. In his absence, a struggle for control of Punjab broke out between Daulat Khan and Alam Khan. Defeated, Alam Khan fled to Kabul to seek refuge with Babur.

It is stated in the work that on November 17, 1525, Babur departed from Kabul for the last time and never returned there during his lifetime. He referred to this campaign as a determined expedition (sifar) directed toward Hindustan. Thus, after spending more than 20 years in Kabul, Babur had now decisively resolved on conquest. In April 1525, Babur carried out two campaigns in India. First, he secured control over Lahore and its surroundings, then he advanced against Ibrahim Lodi, leading to the historic Battle of Panipat on April 21, 1525.³

In Radhey Shyam Chaurasia's *History of Medieval India: From 1000 A.D. to 1707 A.D.*, the Battle of Panipat is described, noting that upon hearing of Babur's approach, Ibrahim gathered a large force of approximately 100,000 troops to confront him. Babur's army, however, consisted of only 12,000 men, though they were experienced, disciplined, and equipped with modern artillery. The two armies clashed on April 21, 1526, on the historic field of Panipat. Babur arranged his forces in a highly scientific formation and used his artillery to great advantage. His two great generals, Ustad Ali and Mustafa, employed the artillery so skillfully that the enemy army fell into panic and was forced into mass retreat. Babur's cavalry then attacked from the rear,

² Stephen Dale "The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan & India, 1483–1530". 318-320 pages.

https://archive.org/details/gardenofeightparadisebaburcultureofempireincentralasiaafghanistanindia14831530s_745_c/page/321/mode/2up?q=Qandahar

³ Stephen Dale "The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan & India, 1483–1530". 321-324 pages.



delivering a devastating blow. Ultimately, Babur's military leadership proved successful, and the enemy army fled, leaving approximately 15,000 soldiers dead on the field. The Lodi dynasty ruler Ibrahim also met his death. This was a decisive victory for Babur and made him the unrivaled ruler of Delhi and Agra. In his memoirs, Babur wrote of this victory:

“By the grace of Almighty God, this difficult task was made easy for me, and the great army was laid low within half a day.”

As a result of this victory, Babur captured Delhi and Agra, laying the foundation of the Mughal dynasty in India.

The work emphasizes Babur's military leadership abilities and the technical superiority of his army. Radhey Shyam Chaurasia writes that the Indian army was unfamiliar with the use of artillery, and when Babur's forces employed it, Ibrahim Lodi's troops were utterly astonished and fled in panic. Moreover, Babur's army was disciplined, fully prepared, and equipped with modern weapons. His soldiers were well acquainted with contemporary warfare tactics, particularly the effective use of the tulughma strategy, and knew how to create panic among the enemy. In contrast, the Indian army was inexperienced and poorly organized. Ibrahim's war elephants, instead of being a strength, became a source of weakness against Babur's scientifically organized combination of cavalry and artillery. Babur was a commander of strong will, power, and courage. He was an experienced general who enjoyed the full trust and loyalty of his soldiers. On the other hand, Ibrahim is described by the author as a young and careless commander who was unable to manage his army effectively.⁴

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a number of general scientific and specialized methods were employed in order to analyze historical and political processes on a scientific basis. The research is aimed at examining the military-political activities of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur between 1520 and 1526 and the process of the establishment of the Mughal Empire. The following methods were used in the study:

1. Historical-Comparative Analysis

As the main method of the research, a comparative analysis of historical events was selected. In particular, the primary information presented in Babur's "Baburnama" was compared with the modern historical analyses found in Stephen Dale's "The Garden of the Eight Paradises." The chronological gaps in the "Baburnama" for the years 1520–1525 were reconstructed with the help of other secondary sources.

2. Source Studies and Textual Analysis

The article examined the English translation and commentaries prepared by Annette Beveridge. In the research:

Primary sources: Various editions of the "Baburnama" in different languages.

Secondary sources: Radhey Shyam Chaurasia's "History of Medieval India: From 1000 A.D. to 1707 A.D." and Stephen Dale's "The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan & India, 1483–1530," as well as scholarly studies and chronological notes by Western orientalist, were analyzed.

3. Chronological Sequence

Babur's campaigns to India, particularly the events between November 1525 and April 1526, were examined within a continuous temporal framework. The political causes and consequences of each military campaign were analyzed step by step.

4. Military-Strategic Analysis

⁴ Radhey Shyam Chaurasianing “ History of Medieval India: From 1000 A.D. to 1707 A.D.”



Using the example of the Battle of Panipat, Babur's military tactics (the use of artillery and firearms, the "tulughma" tactic) and the factors that ensured his superiority over the enemy were systematically analyzed.

5. Biographical Method and Psychological Analysis

Special emphasis was placed on the biographical analysis method applied by Stephen Dale. Within this framework, Babur's personal experiences described in the "Baburnama" (his illnesses, letters written to his son Humayun, and his passion for nature) were used to reassess his profile as a ruler. Based on Dale's approach, Babur's military decisions were analyzed in connection with his personal character and the concept of "Timurid legacy." Unlike traditional dry historical chronology, this method made it possible to interpret historical processes through the prism of the "human factor."

Table 1

Method Name	Purpose and Objective of Application	Sources Used
Historical-Comparative Analysis	Comparing Babur's personal memoirs with modern historiography (Stephen Dale's analyses).	"Baburnama", S. Dale, "The Garden of the Eight Paradises"
Source and Textual Analysis	Analyzing Annette Susannah Beveridge's translation and her scholarly commentaries; identifying chronological gaps in the text.	"Babur-nama in English", translator's notes
Chronological Method	Studying the step-by-step development of campaigns from 1519 to 1526.	Historical chronicles, manuscripts
Biographical Method	Revealing Babur's leadership profile and psychological condition through his personal reflections in his memoirs.	"Baburnama", S. Dale's approach
Military-Strategic Analysis	Scientific evaluation of tactical superiority (artillery, tulughma) and army structure in the Battle of Panipat.	Military history sources, maps of the Battle of Panipat

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Analysis of the 1520–1525 Gap in the "Baburnama"

The research findings indicate that the gap in the "Baburnama" text after 1520 does not signify Babur's inactivity; rather, it represents the most intense period of geopolitical preparation. The results demonstrate that during this period, before undertaking his final campaign to India, Babur fully consolidated his "rear front" (Badakhshan and Kandahar). As Stephen Dale notes, Babur's capture of Kandahar (1522) protected him from direct confrontation with the Safavids and created a secure base for the Indian campaign.

2. Military Power: Firearms and Tactics

The results of the Battle of Panipat confirm that the decisive factor in victory was not numerical superiority, but technological and tactical advantage.

Table 2

Technological and Tactical Superiority of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's Army

ZFeature	Babur's Army	Lodi's Army
Technology	Integration of artillery and firearms.	Traditional war elephants and archers.
Maneuver	"Tulughma" tactic (flanking and encirclement maneuver).	Frontal mass assault (outdated method).



Outcome	Absolute victory with minimal casualties.	More than 15,000 soldiers killed and the death of the Sultan.
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According to the findings, although Babur's army was numerically inferior, it achieved superiority due to discipline, centralized command, and a clearly planned strategy. In particular, the coordinated use of artillery and cavalry rendered Ibrahim Lodi's traditional methods of warfare ineffective. The research confirms that the Lodi army's reliance on war elephants proved to be a serious weakness in the face of modern weaponry.

During the discussion, the view advanced by some historians that "Babur's victory was primarily the result of internal crisis within the Lodi state" was analyzed. While the findings partially acknowledge this argument, they demonstrate that Babur's personal military leadership and innovations were the decisive factors. Ibrahim Lodi, as a sultan, was not politically popular, and his rigid style of governance intensified dissatisfaction among the army and the nobility.

3. Semantic and Strategic Analysis of the Concepts of "Safar" and "Campaign"

The research revealed that the word choice used by Babur to describe his departure from Kabul in November 1525 carries particular significance. In his memoirs, Babur refers to this movement not as a conventional military "campaign," but as a "safar." The terminological choice suggests that the word *safar* does not merely imply a raid for plunder and return, but rather conveys the intention of reaching a specific destination and settling there permanently.

According to Stephen Dale's analysis, this reflects Babur's perception of Kabul as a temporary base, while viewing India as his true "Timurid inheritance" and the future center of his empire. Before embarking on the 1525 expedition, Babur mobilized all his resources, including his son Humayun, for this objective. The term *safar* symbolized, in his mind, a farewell to Kabul and the intention to lay the foundation of a new political domain. Before setting out on this "safar," Babur impressed upon his army that this was not an ordinary invasion, but a sacred journey toward the establishment of a great state. This, in turn, strengthened the soldiers' morale and loyalty.

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive historical analysis of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's political and military activities between 1520 and 1526 demonstrates that his victory in India was not an accidental military success, but the logical outcome of long-formed strategic thinking, careful political planning, and a set of military innovations.

The examination of the chronological "gap" in the Baburnama for the years 1520–1525 reveals that this period did not represent political passivity on Babur's part, but rather his most active phase of strategic consolidation. The full control of Kandahar in 1522 and the transfer of Badakhshan to Humayun's administration created a strong "rear base" for Babur, which became one of the key geopolitical factors ensuring the success of the Panipat campaign.

Military analysis confirms that Babur's victory cannot be explained solely by artillery superiority. The "tulughma" tactic characteristic of the Central Asian military tradition, strict Timurid discipline, and the systematic use of firearms played a decisive role in the Battle of Panipat. Although Ibrahim Lodi's army was numerically several times superior, its reliance on traditional methods led to defeat against Babur's disciplined and well-coordinated force of 12,000 troops. This event marked a fundamental turning point in the military history of South Asia and initiated a process often described as a "military revolution."

The research also shows that the roots of Babur's success in India can be traced back to the 1519 Bajaur campaign. The capture of Bajaur fortress represented a revolutionary stage in Babur's military career, as it was there that he first extensively tested firearms and gunpowder weapons. The experience gained at Bajaur proved that the combination of artillery and Central



Asian cavalry tactics constituted the principal strategic formula behind the great victory at Panipat.

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