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**A Human Whirlwind**

Although he has been dead for nearly six hundred years, the name Timur continues to bring about feelings of both fear and respect in people throughout Afroeurasia. The word Timur is Turkic for “iron,” an appropriate name for one who in his lifetime rose from ruling a small tribe to ruling an empire.

During his long military career, Timur and his armies crossed Eurasia from Delhi (India) to Moscow (Russia). From 1370 until his death in 1405, Timur engaged in almost constant warfare in order to grow and maintain his vast territory.

Born in 1336 in Samarkand, a city in Central Asia, Timur was said to be tall and strongly-built. An injury in his twenties left him with a slight paralysis in his right leg and arm. He always made light of his disability. Ahmad ibn Arabshah, Timur’s biographer, described the conqueror in his sixties as:

*…steadfast in mind and robust (strong) in body, brave and fearless, firm as rock. He did not care for jesting (joking) or lying; truth, even were it painful, delighted him. . . . He loved bold and valiant soldiers, by whose aid he opened the locks of terror, tore men to pieces like lions, and overturned mountains. He was faultless (never wrong) in strategy, constant in fortune, firm of purpose and truthful in business.*

Timur was a man of curious contradictions. He spoke two or three languages, enjoyed having histories read to him, and supported the arts. While he destroyed cities across Eurasia, he took great care to protect teachers and skilled workers, sending them to Samarkand to aid in the improvement of his capital.

First and foremost, Timur was a ruthless (showed no mercy) and ambitious warrior who commanded a devoted following. Those who saw his army described it as a huge mixture of different peoples. Mongol nomads, Muslims, Christians, Turks, Arabs, and Indians all fought at the conqueror’s side.

Around 1371, Timur proclaimed himself ruler of the Chagatay Khanate. Between 1381 and 1405, he and his army swept with whirlwind speed through the Hindu Kush and the Caucasus Mountains, the Persian deserts, the southern Russian steppes, Anatolia, and Syria, sacking cities along the way and slaying (killing) their inhabitants. By 1395, Timur had defeated the rival Mongol empire of the Golden Horde. His army went into India, destroying Delhi and murdering most of its residents.

In 1400, Timur and his troops stormed through the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Damascus, burned down Baghdad, and destroyed the port city of Smyrna in Turkey. In 1402, he succeeded in defeating the Ottoman army and capturing the Ottoman sultan. In the process, Timur unwittingly (not on purpose) saved Byzantium temporarily from Ottoman conquest.

Next, Timur made preparations for what was to be his greatest accomplishment, the conquest of China. In 1368, as he was beginning his rise to power, the Mongol Yuan Dynasty was overthrown and the Ming Dynasty established (as you have read previously). Timur was determined to prove that he, not the Ming emperor, was the greatest power in Asia. The Ming government was well aware of the threat and poured resources into the defense of China’s western frontiers. However, in 1405, Timur fell ill and died.

Timur’s empire collapsed quickly after his death and the invasion of China never took place. Nevertheless, his actions had a lasting impact on Afroeurasia. Southwest Asia, which faced the worst of Timur’s brutality, was slow to recover from the chaos.

**Source:** National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA. "Landscape Teaching Unit 5.5: Calamities and Recoveries: 1300-1500." World History for Us All. San Diego State University, n.d. Web. 1 Aug. 2014. <http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu/units/five/landscape/Era05_landscape5.php>

**Use the form below to analyze the italicized paragraph on the previous page for bias. Remember, Ahmad ibn Arabshah was Timur’s personal biographer (person in charge of writing about him).**

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| **Does the author use any loaded words or exaggerations? List them below:** | **Does the author make any statements that are an opinion? List them below:** |
| **Does the author leave out any parts of the story? If so, list them below:** | **Are there any perspectives missing from this account? If so, list them below:** |

**And, finally, answer the following question:**

**(Sourcing): Why might Ahmad ibn Arabshah have felt it was necessary to write a biased account of Timur’s life?**