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AMIR TEMUR'S MILITARY SKILL: BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF HIS BATTLES AGAINST TOKHTAMYSH

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Abstract

This article examines the historical lessons of the campaigns conducted by our great ancestor, Sahibqiran Amir Temur, against Tokhtamysh Khan, as well as his military art, methods of warfare, and battle tactics.

Keywords: Military art, battle, maneuver, combat formation, combat operations. Amir Temur clearly understood the threat that the Golden Horde, a neighboring state to the north, posed to his state. When Movarounnahr was faced with a threat from the north, Amir Temur could not undertake military campaigns in another direction.

Introduction

In the late 1380s, Tokhtamysh Khan began openly attempting to distract Amir Temur from affairs related to Iran and provoke a confrontation with him. In 1387–1388, taking advantage of Amir Temur's absence on campaign, Tokhtamysh Khan launched an attack on Movarounnahr and, at the same time, began inciting the ruler of Khorezm against Amir Temur.

Having learned of this, Amir Temur hastened to assist his subjects and sent troops against Tokhtamysh Khan by the shortest possible routes. He himself proceeded

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toward Samarkand with the main forces. Learning of the approach of Amir Temur's army, Tokhtamish Khan, after plundering the northern regions of Movarounnahr, retreated with part of his army toward Khorezm and with another part across the Syr Darya into his own territory [1].

Of the three campaigns undertaken by Amir Temur against the army of Tokhtamysh Khan, the 1391 campaign, which brought Amir Temur victory near Kunduzcha, and the 1395 campaign, which ended with the destruction of Tokhtamysh Khan's army on the banks of the Terek River, stand out for their particular significance from the perspective of the development of military art.

An army of 200,000 men (a strategic troop formation) faced the task of conducting a long-distance march across the steppe. It was necessary to cover approximately 2,500 km across the steppe. Amir Temur carefully studied the operational-strategic situation, assessed it correctly, and selected routes that protected the army from a possible surprise attack by the enemy while also ensuring that the movement of his forces remained concealed until contact with the enemy [2].

Amir Temur's army moved through Yassa (modern Turkistan city, Kazakhstan), Qarachi, and Sabran, and subsequently reached the Sariuzan area (along the banks of the Sarysu River). From there, it reached the foothills of the Small and Great Mountains (the area of the modern Qarsakpay open-pit mine at the foot of the modern Oltincho'qqi Mountains).

In May 1391, the army reached the Tobol River. Until reaching this point, Amir Temur succeeded in concealing the movement of his army from the enemy. This demonstrates that the requirements of operational concealment were strictly observed during the army's march. Until reaching the Tobol River, Amir Temur had not obtained any new or more precise information about the enemy. The river crossings had been destroyed by Tokhtamish Khan's forces, but they were restored by Amir Temur's troops, particularly engineering units, after which the army crossed the river. Following the long and difficult march, the troops were

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allowed to rest and hunt. After recovering their strength, the army moved toward the Ural River.

Tokhtamish Khan's army was waiting on the opposite bank of the river, having prepared ambushes in advance opposite the three existing crossing points. As a cautious commander, Amir Temur decided not to use these crossings. Instead, the army crossed the river upstream by swimming. As a result of reconnaissance, Amir Temur learned that Tokhtamish Khan had organized ambushes and was with his army, while reinforcements from the Golden Horde tribes that migrated during the summer from the shores of the Sea of Azov, Crimea, and other regions were expected to arrive. The territory between the Volga (Itil) and Ural (Yayiq, also known in some sources as Yoyiq) rivers, where Tokhtamish's forces were stationed, was particularly suitable for organizing ambushes and conducting small-scale warfare, thereby exhausting Amir Temur's army [3].

Therefore, Amir Temur's army crossed the Samara River not downstream, but upstream, near the point where the Samara River flows into the Ural River. The vanguard, **Manglay**, crossed the river first by bridge, followed by the center, **Qul**. Other elements of the army's operational formation—the **Barong'or** and **Javong'or** (right and left wings)—crossed the river by swimming.

On June 18, 1391, a battle took place between the armies of Amir Temur and Tokhtamish Khan on the banks of the Kunduzcha River (in the territory of the present-day Samara Region of the Russian Federation). Approximately 400,000 warriors participated on both sides, making this battle one of the largest battles in the world at that time.

The seven-element operational formation of the army was personally developed by Amir Temur and had not previously been used by any commander. Historians later referred to this operational formation as the “**Seven Hands**.” In the center of the “Seven Hands” formation were three units, while two units were positioned on each of the right and left wings. The center, consisting of the main forces, was

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protected from the front by the **Manglay (vanguard)**, while the reserve forces—the **Chag‘dovul (rear guard)**—moved behind the center together with the headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Amir Temur. The Chag‘dovul played a decisive role in resolving the battle in Amir Temur’s favor [4].

The battle lasted for three days. First, the **Qunbul** of the right wing attacked Tokhtamish Khan’s **Javong‘or** and forced it to retreat. Other units of the Golden Horde army then moved against Amir Temur’s right Qunbul and began to put it under pressure. Recognizing the enemy’s intentions, Amir Jahonshoh, through active and determined actions by his forces, forced the left wing of Tokhtamish Khan’s army to halt.

Amir Temur’s **Javong‘or** attacked the enemy’s **Barong‘or**. Although the situation was favorable for Tokhtamish Khan, he did not dare to strike Amir Temur’s center, or **Qul**. Instead, he decided to attack the left wing and personally led the assault. Toward the end of the battle, the Golden Horde army succeeded in breaking through Amir Temur’s left wing, creating a threat that the enemy might take up a position behind the rear of the Movarounnahr army.

According to the battle plan, under the operational situation that had developed, Amir Temur’s Javong‘or attacked the enemy’s Barong‘or. Neither Tokhtamish Khan nor his commanders were able to make an effective decision in response to the changing situation.

At this critical moment, Amir Temur committed the reserve forces of his army—the **Chag‘dovul**—to the battle and directed their main striking force against the enemy troops that had broken through the right wing. The success achieved by this element of the operational formation ensured that the battle was decided in Amir Temur’s favor. After his striking force had been destroyed, Tokhtamish Khan realized that he had been defeated. At the height of the battle, Tokhtamish Khan’s standard was brought down, causing his army to flee.

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Amir Temur detached seven men from every group of ten in his army and sent them to pursue Tokhtamish Khan's forces. The pursuit continued as far as the Volga (Itil) River and was carried out at such a high speed that Tokhtamish Khan's army became scattered, and a large part of it was destroyed. Some of Tokhtamish Khan's troops were killed by weapons, while others drowned in the river. Tokhtamish Khan himself managed to hide in the vast steppe. The battlefield was covered with the bodies of the fallen.

Thus, one decisive battle determined the outcome of the entire campaign. Having crushed the enemy and captured enormous spoils, Amir Temur returned to Samarkand with his army at the end of October 1391. However, the fate of the Golden Horde had not yet been decided [5].

Tokhtamish Khan possessed sufficient resources and reserves to restore his strength. The decisive struggle was still ahead. Amir Temur's 1391 campaign against the Golden Horde and his victory over Tokhtamish Khan ensured peace and security in northern Movarounnahr only for a short period.

At that time, Amir Temur's most dangerous enemy, Tokhtamish Khan, relied on the main economic bases of Sarai and Hajji Tarkhan in the lower reaches of the Volga (Itil) River, as well as other economic resources in the North Caucasus, Crimean Peninsula, and along the shores of the Sea of Azov. With these resources, he was able to restore his former power in a short period. By the end of the fourteenth century, he had once again become an uncompromising enemy of Amir Temur.

Amir Temur attempted to resolve the problem peacefully and sent a letter to Tokhtamish Khan through an envoy. In the letter, Amir Temur called upon Tokhtamish Khan to act thoughtfully and gratefully and to honor the agreement that had been made. Tokhtamish Khan appeared to agree to all the conditions. However, taking into account the fact that Tokhtamish Khan had repeatedly violated Amir Temur's trust in the past, Amir Temur inspected his troops through a military review, ensured their readiness, and began the campaign.

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After passing through the city of Derbent, Amir Temur allowed his army to rest in the vicinity of Tarki (near the present-day city of Makhachkala). Tokhtamish Khan sent his **Manglay (vanguard)** to defend the crossing over the Qoysuv (Obi Qoysu) River. Amir Temur personally led the forces that broke through the river crossing's defenses and seized the crossing. After crossing the river, the army entered the territories of modern Chechnya and Ingushetia (republics of the Russian Federation).

At the point where the Sunzha River flows into the Terek River, Amir Temur allowed his troops to rest. At the same time, his forces reached designated positions along the riverbank in order to seize suitable crossing points over the Terek River without delay.

Tokhtamish Khan's troops succeeded in crossing the Terek River before Amir Temur's army arrived. They constructed defensive fortifications there and strengthened the left bank with wagons, trees, and other natural and artificial obstacles.

When Amir Temur reached the Terek River with his army, he became fully aware of the operational-strategic situation. Since the enemy was strongly guarding the crossing points, he ordered his army to move along the right (southern) bank of the river. In response, Tokhtamish Khan's army also moved along the left (northern) bank, parallel to the Movarounnahr forces, carefully observing their movements.

Both sides continued moving along the river for three days. On the third day, Amir Temur employed a distinctive military deception that had not previously been used in practice. He ordered the women following the army to put on helmets, armor, and protective equipment and imitate the movements of the soldiers. At the same time, the soldiers were ordered to take two horses each and move rapidly in the opposite direction toward the crossing points. Amir Temur's troops reached the crossing point after three days and, finally, on the ninth day of direct confrontation, crossed the Terek River [6].

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On April 15, 1395, Amir Temur's 200,000-strong army engaged in a decisive battle with Tokhtamish Khan's 200,000-strong army on the banks of the Terek River. As in the battle at Kunduzcha, Amir Temur's army was organized into a seven-element operational formation. The center consisted of three units, while the right and left wings consisted of two units each. The main **Manglay (vanguard)** was positioned in front of the center, while the **Chag'dovul (rear guard)** was positioned behind it.

Vanguards were also assigned to the front of the right and left wings. The main Manglay moved ahead of the wing vanguards and was responsible for breaking through the enemy's battle formation. The Chag'dovul performed reserve functions and, at the same time, protected the headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

Thus, Amir Temur's army's operational formation consisted of three lines. The first line—the Manglay—was intended to disrupt the enemy's battle formation and create disorder, confusion, and panic within its ranks. The second line—the main forces—was equipped with heavy weapons and was tasked with repelling enemy attacks. The third line was the reserve, which remained ready to perform various operational and tactical tasks that could arise during the battle.

Units equipped with lighter weapons were mainly positioned in the first line. All elements of the operational formation were capable of conducting combat operations independently and were directly subordinate to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

Having become convinced through his own experience of the advantages of Amir Temur's operational formation during the 1391 battle at Kunduzcha, Tokhtamish Khan organized his army according to the same formation this time.

The battle began with a powerful attack by the right wing of Tokhtamish Khan's army against the left wing of the Movarounnahr army. This attack achieved tactical success. Taking into account the difficult situation in the left wing, Amir Temur sent reinforcements from the reserve. The arriving forces, acting together

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with the defending troops of the left wing, repelled the enemy attack, forced the enemy to retreat, and began pursuing them.

Some of the units involved in the pursuit moved far away from the battlefield. Taking advantage of this, Tokhtamish Khan restored his army's operational formation, dispersed the pursuing forces, and attacked the flank of the unit personally commanded by Amir Temur. The enemy's fierce attack was halted by reserve units of Amir Temur's army. Amir Temur organized an all-round defense around himself. The situation was stabilized by committing the center of Amir Temur's army to the battle [7].

The second day of the battle began with an attack by Tokhtamish Khan's left wing against Amir Temur's right wing. Some of the troops in the right wing dispersed, while the remaining forces continued to offer strong resistance to the enemy. These forces were supported by several reserve units of the Movarounnahr army. Neither side achieved victory on the second day.

The final, third day of the battle again began with pressure from the Golden Horde forces. Tokhtamish Khan strengthened the center and wings of his army and launched a frontal attack along the entire front. Recognizing that the enemy's left wing had become weakened, Amir Temur directed his main attack precisely against that wing.

The left wing of Tokhtamish Khan's army was completely destroyed. Amir Temur's army then launched a decisive and comprehensive offensive in all directions. Unable to withstand the intensity of the attack, Tokhtamish Khan's forces began to retreat and suffered a painful defeat. Tokhtamish Khan managed to escape from the battlefield surrounded by his bodyguards and hide in the forests of Volga Bulgaria.

This time, Amir Temur was not satisfied merely with his victory in the battle. He decided to destroy the sources of the Golden Horde's military power. The road was now open to the Volga region and to Sarai Berke, the capital and heart of the Golden Horde [8].

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Continuing to pursue the enemy, Amir Temur's army reached the Dnieper River, from where it turned toward Rus and advanced as far as the city of Yelets. The lands of the North Caucasus were subsequently conquered, after which the army moved toward Hajji Tarkhan and Sarai, the main bases of the Golden Horde.

These cities, which were among the largest and wealthiest cities of their time, were soon captured, and enormous quantities of booty were taken from them. After capturing these cities, Amir Temur proceeded through Derbent to Georgia, and from there through Baku, Ardabil, Sultaniyya, and Hamadan toward Samarkand.

During this campaign, numerous cities and fortresses were besieged and captured. Furthermore, sufficient military units were detached and sent to subdue numerous countries in Kurdistan and along the Persian Gulf. It should be noted that these forces fulfilled their assigned combat missions on time and accurately.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the perspective of the development of military art, the battles against Tokhtamish Khan can be characterized by the following features:

- Through the effective use of appropriate military deception, Amir Temur ensured that his army and its combat-support formations crossed the Terek River safely and without being detected by the enemy.
- Before the decisive battle, both armies were organized into similar seven-element operational formations. However, Amir Temur's operational formation was structured in greater depth, which ensured the stability of the defense as well as the intensity and maneuverability of the offensive.
- Amir Temur's decision to direct the main strike of his army against the enemy's weak point at the most appropriate moment of the battle played a decisive role in determining the outcome of the battle in his favor.
- In terms of the number of forces involved and the geographical scale of the military operations, this campaign and its final decisive battle were among the

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largest military engagements not only in Asia but also in the world at that time, and they continue to retain their historical and military significance.

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