

THE BATTLE OF ANKARA AND THE ROLL OF BOYAZID I AND TIMUER IN IT

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**Annotation:** Battle of Ankara, military confrontation on July 20, 1402, in which forces of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I, “the Thunderbolt,” victor at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396, were defeated by those of the Turkic ruler Timur (Tamerlane). Bayezid’s humiliating loss came close to destroying the Ottoman Empire.

**Key words:** Ankara, Bayazed I, Timer.

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Bayezid I, who came to the throne in 1389, spent much of his early reign expanding the Ottoman domain to both the east and west, campaigning against numerous Turkish emirates, or *beyliks*, in eastern Anatolia, lands in which Timur also took strategic interest. Bayezid was at the height of his power, besieging the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, when he was drawn away from fighting the Christians by the threat of Timur’s army advancing from Iraq, where he had besieged and devastated Baghdad the year before. Recruiting Turkish allies from those emirates along the way, Timur advanced quickly. Bayezid marched his army across Anatolia in the summer heat to face Timur, but Timur outmaneuvered him. As Bayezid marched eastward, Timur cut behind him and besieged the vital Ottoman city of Ankara with an army that by some estimates comprised as many as 140,000 fighters.

Thirsty and exhausted, Bayezid’s troops, estimated to number about 85,000, had to turn back to attempt the relief of the city. Timur drew up his forces in battle order, taking a defensive stance and forming a line with cavalry corps on either flank and war elephants in the center. In preparation for battle, the Mongol forces dammed a stream that provided the only water for Bayezid’s troops. This forced Bayezid to attack the Mongols’ center in order to capture the heavily defended stream. Serbian cavalry, fighting as auxiliaries of the Ottomans, opened the battle with an effective charge, but Timur’s mounted archers and flanking cavalry took a heavy toll on Bayezid’s army. Thousands of Ottoman infantry were slaughtered, even as thousands more Anatolian troops deserted to join the *beyliks*. Bayezid’s Tatar regiments also crossed over to Timur’s side, leaving him virtually without an organized army. Bayezid fled from the battle with a cavalry force, but Timur pursued and surrounded him.

Bayezid became the only Ottoman ever to be captured by an enemy. He died in captivity in 1403, after allegedly being kept by Timur in a golden cage as a trophy. Timur advanced to the Aegean, forcing Bayezid’s sons to flee Anatolia. Yet ultimately Timur’s army were only raiders; they established no permanent presence, and after spending the next year pillaging the countryside, they returned to the east. The Timurid Empire declined rapidly after Timur’s death in 1405. For the Ottomans, decline was only temporary; Bayezid’s sons engaged in a war of succession in the ensuing 11-year period known as the Ottoman interregnum until Mehmed I finally gained full control of the throne in 1413, a year that marks the beginning of the Ottoman Empire’s rise to status as a world power.

**Bayezid I** (born c. 1360—died March 1403, Akşehir, Ottoman Empire) was an Ottoman sultan in 1389–1402 who founded the first centralized Ottoman state based on traditional Turkish and Muslim institutions and who stressed the need to extend Ottoman dominion in Anatolia.

In the early years of Bayezid's reign, Ottoman forces conducted campaigns that succeeded in controlling vast Balkan territories. Later, Venetian advances in Greece, Albania, and Byzantium and the extension of Hungarian influence in Walachia and Danubian Bulgaria compelled Bayezid to blockade Constantinople (1391–98), to occupy Tirnova, in what is now Bulgaria (July 1393), and to conquer Salonika (April 1394). His invasion of Hungary in 1395 resulted in a Hungarian-Venetian crusade against the Ottomans. Bayezid inflicted a crushing defeat on the crusaders at Nicopolis

To build a strong Islāmic and Turkish base for his domain, Bayezid began to widen Ottoman suzerainty over the Turkish-Muslim rulers in Anatolia. He annexed various Turkmen emirates in Anatolia and defeated the Karaman emirate at Akçay (1397). These conquests brought Bayezid into conflict with the Central Asian conqueror Timur (Tamerlane), who claimed suzerainty over the Anatolian Turkmen rulers and offered refuge to those expelled by Bayezid. In a confrontation between Bayezid and Timur in Çubukovaşı near Ankara (July 1402), Bayezid was defeated; he died in captivity.

**Timur** (born 1336, Kesh, near Samarkand, Transoxania [now in Uzbekistan]—died February 19, 1405, Otrar, near Chimkent [now Shymkent, Kazakhstan]) was a Turkic conqueror, chiefly remembered for the barbarity of his conquests from India and Russia to the Mediterranean Sea and for the cultural achievements of his dynasty.

Timur was a member of the Turkicized Barlas tribe, a Mongol subgroup that had settled in Transoxania (now roughly corresponding to Uzbekistan) after taking part in Genghis Khan's son Chagatai's campaigns in that region. Timur thus grew up in what was known as the Chagatai khanate. After the death in 1357 of Transoxania's current ruler, Amir Kazgan, Timur declared his fealty to the khan of nearby Kashgar, Tughluq Temür, who had overrun Transoxania's chief city, Samarkand, in 1361. Tughluq Temür appointed his son Ilyas Khoja as governor of Transoxania, with Timur as his minister. But shortly afterward Timur fled and rejoined his brother-in-law Amir Husayn, the grandson of Amir Kazgan. They defeated Ilyas Khoja (1364) and set out to conquer Transoxania, achieving firm possession of the region around 1366. About 1370 Timur turned against Husayn, besieged him in Balkh, and, after Husayn's assassination, proclaimed himself at Samarkand sovereign of the Chagatai line of khans and restorer of the Mongol empire.

For the next 10 years Timur fought against the khans of Jatah (eastern Turkistan) and Khwārezm, finally occupying Kashgar in 1380. He gave armed support to Tokhtamysh, who was the Mongol khan of Crimea and a refugee at his court, against the Russians (who had risen against the khan of the Golden Horde, Mamai); and his troops occupied Moscow and defeated the Lithuanians near Poltava. In 1383 Timur began his conquests in Persia with the capture of Herāt. The Persian political and economic situation was extremely precarious. The signs of recovery visible under the later Mongol rulers known as the Il-Khanid dynasty had been followed by a setback after the death of the last Il-Khanid, Abu Said (1335). The vacuum of power was filled by rival dynasties, torn by internal dissensions and unable to put up joint or effective resistance. Khorāsān and all eastern Persia fell to him in 1383–85; Fars, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Georgia all fell between 1386 and 1394. In

the intervals, he was engaged with Tokhtamysh, then khan of the Golden Horde, whose forces invaded Azerbaijan in 1385 and Transoxania in 1388, defeating Timur's generals. In 1391 Timur pursued Tokhtamysh into the Russian steppes and defeated and dethroned him; but Tokhtamysh raised a new army and invaded the Caucasus in 1395. After his final defeat on the Kur River, Tokhtamysh gave up the struggle; Timur occupied Moscow for a year. The revolts that broke out all over Persia while Timur was away on these campaigns were repressed with ruthless vigour; whole cities were destroyed, their populations massacred, and towers built of their skulls.

In 1398 Timur invaded India on the pretext that the Muslim sultans of Delhi were showing excessive tolerance to their Hindu subjects. He crossed the Indus River on September 24 and, leaving a trail of carnage, marched on Delhi. The army of the Delhi sultan Mahmud Tughluq was destroyed at Panipat on December 17, and Delhi was reduced to a mass of ruins, from which it took more than a century to emerge. By April 1399 Timur was back in his own capital. An immense quantity of spoil was conveyed away; according to Ruy González de Clavijo, 90 captured elephants were employed to carry stones from quarries to erect a mosque at Samarkand.

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