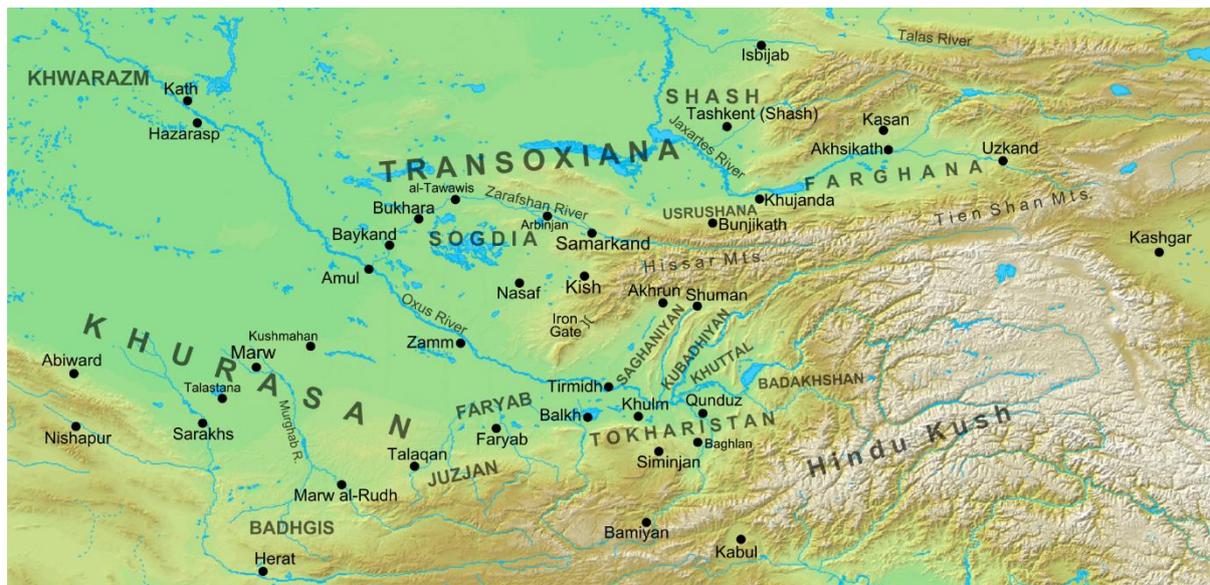


# BABUR

**Born** 1483 Fergana (modern-day Uzbekistan)  
**Died** 1530 Delhi

## Life

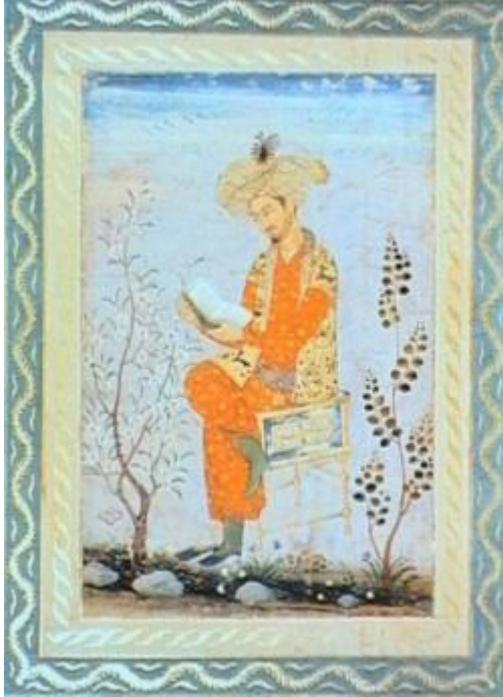
Babur (born as Zahir al-Din Muhammad) came from the Barlas tribe of Timurid and Mongol origins, although they had become Turkish after long residence in Turkish-speaking areas of Central Asia. Babur's family belonged to the Chagatai clan of the Barlas tribe, who spoke a language also known as Chagatai (in which he wrote his memoirs). It is said that Babur himself was removed from Timur (Tamerlane) by five generations and from Genghis Khan by thirteen generations. Babur's father, Umar Shaykh Mirza, ruled the small principality of Fergana (Farghana on the map below) to the north of the Hindu Kush mountain range. This region, often called Transoxania, was subject to constant small-scale warfare as different tribes and rulers tried to establish control over neighbours in a fluid political system of fast-changing alliances. Babur, like his father and their Timurid ancestors, spend his life trying to recapture Samarkand, which was regarded as their ancient capital.



Babur took over the rule of Fergana after his father's death, when he was only twelve years old. He spent the first few years fighting against other Turkish groups, winning and losing Samarkand on two occasions. Then, in 1503 after some heavy losses, he and a small band of men took refuge in the harsh mountains of Transoxiana. Aided by another local chieftain he then made his first major conquest by seizing Kabul in 1504. He fortified and held Kabul against a number of rebellions, assaults and sieges, and then began to spread his influence through conquest and alliances. In 1508, his son, Humayun, was born (and would succeed him as Mughal Emperor in Delhi). A second son, Kamran Mirza, was born the following year from another wife, which set up a rivalry between the two brothers. A third brother, Askari, was born in 1516 and a fourth, Hindal, in 1519.

A final attempt to take Samarkand resulted in defeat in 1511-12 and persuaded Babur to seek expansion in another direction. South, toward the Indian subcontinent was the most logical route, and he slowly began to move in that direction. By 1520, Babur had penetrated as far as Kandahar, in Afghanistan, and then conquered Lahore, in modern-day Pakistan, by the close of 1524. From there, Babur launched a series of raids on the Sultanate of Delhi and their Rajput allies, although none succeeded. Two years later, in 1526, after obtaining matchlock guns and learning new battlefield

tactics from the Ottomans, he renewed his assault on Delhi and defeated the Lodi king Ibrahim. Babur then occupied the capital and moved swiftly to establish the foundations of the Mughal Empire. By his death in 1530, the Mughals controlled most of the Gangetic plain, all of modern-day Pakistan and most of present-day Afghanistan. It was merely a third of what would become the Mughal Empire at its height in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it was a significant achievement for a young man who began ruling an isolated mountain region at the age of twelve.



(Portrait of Babur, from the Mughal illustrated edition of *Baburnama*)