

## MARLOWE'S TAMBURLAINE (1587) AND ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

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**Abstract.** Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1589) is a great Elizabethan Oriental play. Marlowe's reference to the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad is remarkable in two parts of the play. Marlowe calls it the 'Turkish Alcoran' to attack the Turkish pride in affronting it. However, to burn the Qur'ān, Marlowe denigrates it, and unfairly falsifies the Prophet Muhammad. Marlowe's hero *Tamburlaine* identifies the Qur'ān as an enemy of the Elizabethans. *Tamburlaine's* burning of the Qur'ān is a sign of Christian power and victory. The Qur'ānic biblioclasm on London stage was bizarre. The huge flames and vaunting speeches of *Tamburlaine* show an earthly hell for Muslims in the East with no limits. *Tamburlaine* asks the Prophet Muhammad to take his revenge just to mock him. The Qur'ān has been frequently and badly misunderstood in Europe. This derogatory treatment betrays Marlowe's lack of understanding Islam. Though several performances of the play, recently, replace the copies of the Qur'ān by irreligious books, the English Christian *Tamburlaine* is literarily known as the Qur'ān burner in the English literature.

**Keywords:** Christopher Marlowe, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1589), religion, theology, Qur'ān, Islam

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### 1. Introduction

The Qur'ān is the first and most authentic source of Islam. As a book, it is arranged in 114 *Suras* or chapters. Every chapter is divided into rhymed prose verses in Arabic. The verses of the Qur'ān are, stylistically, to be recited in a perfect and inimitable way. As the Qur'ān was gradually revealed to Prophet Muhammad (570–632), the Prophet began to challenge the polytheistic beliefs that abounded in Mecca and the Arabian Peninsula. His new teaching that there is "No God but Allah (God), Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" led the cities of Mecca and Medina to war – Muhammad and his followers finally triumphant. The Qur'ān's theology is monotheistic, and it is considered by believers to be the source of the one true religion which reckons among its previous prophets, such as

David, Moses, and Jesus. The Islamic doctrine of the Unity of God is in disagreement to the Christian belief of Trinity. God ordered Muslims in the Qur'ān: "Say, we believe in Allah, and that which has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and to the Other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit" (3:83). There is a continual insistence upon Unity or monotheism in the Qur'an, and may be said to be the distinctive theology or the foundation-stone of the faith of Islam.

The image of the Qur'ān is distorted in European literature in general and English literature in particular. For centuries, English Christians regarded Mohammed as a false prophet and the Qur'ān as human. Robert Boyle summarizes this popular attitude in his frequently published book in Britain, *The Religions of the World* (1886). The English consider the Qur'ān as Muhammad's own composition with full plagiarisms from the old heaven scriptures (Maurice 1886:16). From this allegation, wide-ranging historical, theological, literary and linguistic judgments are portrayed with absolute recurrences which have promoted these statements to facts in the Western legacy.

## 2. The representation of the Qur'ān before Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)

The famous medieval Latin ink drawing of the Prophet Muhammad with a curved sword of tyranny in his right hand and the Qur'ān in the left hand is a factual representation of Islam in the European Dark Ages.<sup>1</sup> The same image of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'ān is depicted in the Modern American frieze of the stone sculptures of eighteen lawgivers, from Hammurabi to John Marshall, which is in the U.S. Supreme Court. Unfortunately, the same Machiavellian image of the Prophet Muhammad is reproduced in the prominent medieval writers as spread by sword, though the sword of Islam abolished the oppression of tyrant rulers who were carrying on against the faithful Christians and Jews.

Islam was antagonistically reported by the fanatic Western medieval authors. For instance, Michael the Elder, a Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch in Syria, writing in the second half of the twelfth century, approved the attitude of his antecedents at the advent of the Islamic armies in the seventh century. He describes the change of history as the power of God in 'His Arab conquests', even after the Eastern Churches had had five centuries of experience with the Islamic laws which were inspired from the Qur'ān. After narrating the discriminations carried on by Heraclius against his 'coreligionists', Michael the Elder remarks:

*This is why the God of vengeance – who alone is All-Powerful and changes the empires of mortals as He will, giving it to whomsoever He will, and uplifting the Humble-beholding the wickedness of the Romans, who, throughout their dominions, cruelly plundered our churches and our monasteries and condemned*

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<sup>1</sup> It is Bibliotheque Nationale, MS Latin 16274, f. 10 verso; see also Daniel 1960:134.

*us without pity – brought from the region of the south the sons of Ishmael, to deliver us through them from the hands of the Romans... It was no slight advantage for us to be delivered from the cruelty of the Romans, their wickedness, their wrath and cruel zeal against us, and to find ourselves at peace* (Arnold 1986:54–6).

Thus, in the hands of the Western scholars, the Qur'ān became a text which could easily be subjected to semantic shifts to suit their own ideological purposes. The scholarly source of the Qur'ān which took its place in the Western churches was the translation of Qur'ān by Robert of Ketton (1110–1160) in the twelfth century. Robert of Ketton was an English medieval theologian, astronomer and Arabist. He received a church scholarship and support from the French Abbot Peter the Venerable, to translate several other Islamic texts as well as the Qur'ān into Latin in 1143, entitled *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*, 'Law of Muhammad, the False Prophet' (Burman 1998:703). This first translation of the Qur'ān into a European language remained the standard well into the sixteenth century. The translation is not viewed by modern scholars as faithful, but rather includes some passages with distortions or exaggerations of the original Arabic. Additionally, Peter rejected Muhammad as a prophet and denied the Qur'ān's divinity. Peter gives the impression to sort Islam as heresy or paganism:

*I cannot clearly decide whether the Mohammedan error must be called a heresy and its followers heretics, or whether they are to be called pagans. For I see them, now in the manner of heretics, take certain things from the Christian faith and reject other things... For in company with certain heretics (Mohammad writes so in his wicked Koran), they preach that Christ was indeed born of a virgin, and they say that he is greater than every other man excluding Mohammad... They acknowledge that he was the Spirit of God, the Word-but not the Spirit or the Word as we either know or expound. They insanely hold that the passion and death of Christ were not mere fantasies, but did not actually happen... They hold these and similar things, indeed, in company with heretics* (Kritzeck 1964:167)

The Qur'ān is counted among gods of Muslims. Saracen literary characters vow by Greek mythical gods, by Muhammad, by 'Alcoran' (the Qur'ān), or even by Jesus. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2007), the term 'Saracens,' is used by the ancient Romans to refer to people living in the desert, around the Roman province of Arabia. In the medieval Ages, Saracens in Europe included all Arabic-speakers and all Muslims. During the Crusades, Saracen is synonymous with 'Muslim.' Smith remarks that the medieval people believed that the Saracen idols, made of gold, silver and precious stones, were 'being kept in temples or synagogue where Saracens come to adore them in rituals and seeking aid before battle' (1977:2). Like other Saracen idols, the pictures of idols are usually made "off gold gaily gilte" (Aljubouri 1972:207). Therefore, Norman Daniel remarks that in general 'the use of false evidence to attack Islam was all but universal' (1960:267).

The medieval writers envisaged the Prophet Muhammad as an idol adored by Eastern people in their mosques. Many thought Muslims worshipped the Messenger Muhammad – but that is not true. Muhammad is not a deity. Instead, Muslims believe he is the last messenger of Allah. The *Songs* depict him as a god or a demigod. Furthermore, the *Chansons de Geste* has a crusading propaganda. There is an unconscious association of ideas by means of which Muslim's beliefs and practices were often assimilated to Christian ways. Just as in Christianity, Jesus is both divinity and man, so medieval writers thought Muhammad was a being to the Muslims. But while Jesus was the incarnation of God, Muhammad, they reasoned, was the incarnation of the devil or Anti-christ (Rudwin 1977:21). In *Otuel and Roland* romance, it is related that the souls of the dead Saracens were carried off to dance with the devils in hell (2463-4). Indeed, such vernacular romances represented devil images of Muhammad's idol, which are repeated in the use of the term 'mammet' in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Ben Johnson.<sup>2</sup> In the *Beues of Hamtoun* romance, Beues reports on his visit to Damascus, a zealous hero meets a crowd of Saracens who have just offered their devotion to Muhammad:

*What devil do ye?  
 Why make ye Mahound this present  
 And so dissprice god omnipotent?  
 I shall wytt, so haue I roo,  
 What Mahound can say or doo!"  
 Beueslepe to Mahoun  
 And pullidhym right to the ground  
 And caste hym in myddus the myre  
 And he bad hem take her syre.  
 The Sarzins, that be Beuesstode  
 For Ire and tone waxid wood  
 And they swore all, he sholdabye  
 For' dissypsinge of their mawmentrye (Beues of Hamtoun, 1162–74).*

Mandeville's account about 'Alkaron' says: 'on the day of doom, God shall come to doom all sorts of folk. And the good he shall draw on his side and put them into bliss, and the wicked he shall condemn to the pains of hell' (1967: 101–2). On the other hand, the accounts reported by Mandeville about the Saracen paradise are wonderfully echoed in medieval literature. In Paradise, men shall find all sorts of fruits in all seasons, and rivers; and that Muslim Paradise, Arabic Qur'ānic *Firdaws*, the garden of delights with its gushing and running canals of milk and honey, and of wine and of sweet water, thornless shady trees, fair houses and noble, every man, after his desert made of precious stones and of gold and of silver and fair beautiful damsels (Arabic *Houris*), with wide lovely eyes like unto hidden pearls, as the Qur'ān describes them (56:12–40) find little or no expression in the romances of medieval England. Mandeville, however, provided his con-

<sup>2</sup>See *Parson's Tale*, 745–49; *Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 184; and *Alchemist*, 5.5.128.

temporaries with a brief description of Muslim's relation with Qur'ān. From his popular *Travels*, the medieval reader learned something about the Muslim's conception of the Qur'ān. He praises them, saying: 'For Sarazines ben gode and feythfulle, for theike penentierly the commandment of the holy book Alkaron that God sente hem by his messenger Machomet' (1967:101–2).

This medieval conception was a wider literary practice in the early fourteenth century and was in transmission until the seventeenth century. Chaucer talks of 'mammatte' that had turned into a fable in *The Man of Law's Tale*. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* refers to a concealed idol in the holy temple of the Saracens (Aljubouri1972:84). As a literary tradition, Saracen characters after being overwhelmed, they curse, abuse, and haul their gods on the ground of the stage. They are even smashed to a waste and dealt as bogus gods (Smith1977:2). In Asia and the Far East, Marlowe talks about two idols of Samarkand as Asiatic deity. His *Tamburlaine* swears 'by the love of Pyllades and Orestes/ whose statures we adore in Scythia'(Part I, I.ii.244). Wolf notes that this image might be related to ancient religions in Central Asia before Islam. On the other hand, the burning of the bodies of the Captain of Basra and his son by the Arab Muslim Olympia is a Hindu ritual of cremation, not Islamic (Part II, III.iv.71–72). Elizabethan plays, too, represented Muhammad on London stages in the shape of a stone head that speaks to infidels, Christians or Muslims.

### 3. Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)

Unlike Robert Greene, Marlowe was a member of the school of Alkeism and the school of Night. Sir Walter Raleigh assumes that the influence of these schools is noticeable in the religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas of the dramatist (Raleigh 1957:80). Robert Greene, Marlowe's friend, reports in his *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) that Marlowe's irreligious perception is atheistic (Kocher 1962:112). In Robert Greene's epistle in the prose romance *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (1588) describes Marlowe's atheism: "I could not make my verse upon the stage in tragic buskins ... or take God out of heaven with that Atheist Tamburlaine, or blaspheming with the mad priest of the scourge" (Kocher 1962:23). Gaskell declares that the focal point of Part II of *Tamburlaine* is Marlowe's 'rhetorical assault' on religious convictions (Kocher1962:xxiii). Richard Baines has the similar opinion of Paul Kocher that Marlowe wanted to produce a new religion in *Tamburlaine* (Kocher 1962:99).

The first and the second parts of *Tamburlaine* were written and performed in 1587–1588 and were the only published works in Marlowe's lifetime in 1590. The theme of *Tamburlaine* is the achievements and bloodiness of his acts written on the title page of the play: '*Tamburlaine the great, who, from a Scythian shepherd, by his rare and wonderful conquests became the most puissant and mighty monarch, and for his tyranny and terror in war was termed the scourge of God*'. It held the stage right into the middle of the seventeenth century till the Puritans

closed the theatres. Since then *Tamburlaine* has been revived in two shortened parts in 1951 at the Old Vic Theatre in London (Henderson 1972:11–12). Philip Henderson concludes that ‘Marlowe achieves a height of idealism he never reached again, for in *Tamburlaine*, he embodied the free poetic imagination of the Renaissance’ (1972:28). The poet wishes to astonish his audience with a drama full of power, novelty, interest, and variety. The play was greatly appreciated by the common Elizabethan people. Mr. Rogers reports the popularity of ‘*Tamburlaine the Great* as well as an epoch-making play’ (Maclure 1886:171).

Marlowe chose as the subject the career of the Tatar conqueror Timur the Lame, son of Muhammad Taraghay (1336–1405) as he found it reported by the Renaissance historians. The two available, well-known Renaissance accounts of Timur are the Spanish scholar Pedro Mexia’s book *Siva de Varia Leccion* (1543) and the Italian historian Petrus Perondinus’s *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris* (1553), and Lamb Harold’s *Tamerlane the Earth Shaker* (1929).<sup>3</sup> Western analysis of the Qur’ān has focused less on the theological meaning and impact of the text. In 1541, Theodor Biblander was almost imprisoned for his translation of the Muslim Holy Book. Despite all such religious and secular avenues from which the Qur’ān is approached, Muslim and Western analysts agree that the Qur’ān is a beautiful, lyrical, and powerful work (Lewis 1962:223). Marlowe has established the text of *Tamburlaine* with the help of Qur’ānic vocabulary.

Such a fictional character could hardly exist in the Islamic world but is instead an invention of corruption and destruction as rampant in the Middle Ages. Thus, the Islamic colouring of *Tamburlaine* is merely decorative and used to amuse the Elizabethan audience rather than to boost an idea about Islam. Marlowe just identified the threat that Turks posed to Western Europe, and had no reason to interpret the characters and events of *Tamburlaine, Part II* in anything but a literal way. *Tamburlaine* is a realistic episode. Marlowe is aware of the Turkish map from Anatolia in Europe to Batumion the Black Sea in Minor Asia. Orcanes, the selected king of Natolia, accurately describes this boundary when he says: ‘My realm, the centre of our Empery, \Once lost, All Turkey would be overthrown’ (Part II, I, I, 34–5).

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<sup>3</sup> Tamerlane or Timur (born 1336 in Kesh, near Samarkand in modern Uzbekistan, Transoxania – died February 19, 1405, in Otrar near Chimkent), Turkic conqueror of Islamic faith whose conquests spanned from India and Russia to the Mediterranean Sea. Timur took part in campaigns in Transoxania with Chagatai, a descendant of Genghis Khan. (Timur Lenk, or Tamerlane, means Timur the Lame, reflecting the battle wounds he received.) Through machinations and treachery he took over Transoxania and proclaimed himself the restorer of the Mongol empire. In the 1380s he began his conquest of Iran (Persia), taking Khorāsān and eastern Iran in 1383–85 and western Iran as far as Mesopotamia and Georgia in 1386–94. He occupied Moscow for a year. When revolts broke out in Iran, he ruthlessly suppressed them, killing the populations of whole cities. In 1398 he invaded India, leaving a trail of carnage. Next he marched on Damascus and Baghdad, deporting the artisans of the former to Samarkand and destroying all the monuments of the latter. In 1404 he prepared to march on China but died early in the march.

The distress of Europeans under the Turkish Empire is undertaken in the context of the role of *Tamburlaine* to reprimand the Turks. Wolff notes that in creating *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe was striving to come up with a textual figure who, instead of coming across as a character built around the prevailing mood of European distress viz-a-viz the Turkish threat, would strike the audience as a paragon of a robust Western force of resistance against the Turks. G. H. Hunter describes the Turkish threat to Europe in *The Oxford History of English Literature 1586–1642: The Age of Shakespeare*:

*The first play of Marlowe is a greater unease about how Tamburlaine's destructive power allowed him to govern the world in a spark reference to a Christian God who organizes things to allow heathens [Muslims] to destroy one another in order to prevent their terror from reaching the West* (1997:50).

Accordingly, the play indicates the ongoing threat of Turkey to Christendom which finally succeeded in capturing Constantinople in 1453. The thorny and superior *Tamburlaine* gains the admiration of his audience when he spoils the Turks. Oueijan comments: "Marlowe presented to his Elizabethan audience a picture of the East they desired to see, an Orient filled with treachery, cruelty and false doctrine, an Orient that was being destroyed by its rulers" (1996:17).

The Elizabethan playwrights show Muhammad as the only divinity of Muslims. Marlowe, for instance, show in *Tamburlaine the Great* that Eastern people adore Muhammad's tomb. Marlowe primarily introduces the Prophet Muhammad in the first part of *Tamburlaine* as 'holy', 'heavenly' and 'sacred'.<sup>4</sup> Dena Goldberg observes that it is a Christian tradition to describe the Prophet Muhammad so. She says: 'the paralleled structure emphasizes the echo between 'the Son of God' and 'The Friend of God' (Ibrahim 1996:40). The character of *Tamburlaine* concludes that 'In vain, I see men worship Mahomet' (Part II, V.i.177). In spite of this account, idolatry or paganism was not [and is not] in the Qur'ān or in Muslims' practice. Nor is it a ceremony in the Islamic world. However, some educated medieval and Elizabethan writers did not pre-empt the perception of paganism in Islam. Byron Porter Smith remarks that it 'did not exist among the learned English' (1977:2). Nevertheless Elizabethan dramatists, like Greene and Marlowe, launched this polemic issue in their depiction of Muhammad.

*Tamburlaine* becomes visible as a terrorist belonging to a demonic dogma and a sect of violence. E. M. Waith describes *Tamburlaine's* fury; "anger is the passion most frequently displayed in his looks, his words, and the red, scarlet and black colours of his tent" (1964:78). Usumcasane, Techelles and Theridamas are *Tamburlaine's* aides. They are bully warriors, perpetrating barbaric and heinous deeds of terrorism. *Tamburlaine* has killed 'millions of Turks' in Syria and in Babylon (Part II, V.iii.24): 'Men, women and children had been thrown' in Asphaltis Lake (Part II, V.i.202). Yet at the end of the play *Tamburlaine* died.

<sup>4</sup> Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*, (Part I, III.iii.75), (Part II, I.IV. 98–9), (Part II, IV.i. 95–6) and (Part II, IV.i, 69–71).

Right through both parts of the play, he is stood as a scourge of God. He is employed to punish the sins of his enemies, the Muslims.

#### 4. Marlowe's resources and his understanding of Islam

Marlowe was ill-informed about the Islamic institutions. He had an interest in Turks and their religion since he referred to the Islamic Holy Scriptures, prayers, almsgivings, and faith declaration. Reading about Islam in Elizabethan Oriental library was significant for Marlowe's thought and reaction in writing *Tamburlaine*. According to Jeff Dailey, in order to write *Tamburlaine* Marlowe used about thirteen published sources in Latin, as well as in English, which describe the beliefs of the Turks (Maclure 1979:20). The Turkish Company was licensed in 1581 to explore trade with the Turkish Empire. Like Samuel Chew, Nabil Matar reports that there were a lot of accounts about Islam and its people from Englishmen being captured by Turks, travelogues by both adventurers and religious pilgrims to the Holy Land, accounts of battles, and trade or diplomatic communications (Chew 1937:110 and Matar1999:21). T. A. Wolff refers to Marlowe as highly knowledgeable about Oriental history, events and facts because his reading of many books on the Orient and the relevant travel literature in composing *Tamburlaine* (1964:16). Travel sources were not very reliable, e.g. William Lithgow's account of the Prophet's tomb hanging in mid-air upon the Ka'aba's roof in Makkah. Marlowe in *Tamburlaine* makes one of the characters, Orcanes, a sincere Muslim and captain in the Turkish forces, swear by holy Muhammad. He describes his death-place in the grand mosque of Makkah, with his body hung in a coffin on the roof of the holy Ka'aba in Mecca between the earth and the sky. Orcanes says:

*By sacred Mahomet, the friend of God,  
Whose holy Alcaron remains with us,  
Whose glorious body when he left the world,  
Closde in a coffin mounted up the air,  
And hung on statey Mecca's Temple roof,  
I swear... (Part II, 1.2.60–65)*

All of these resources, along with references to the Qur'ān in medieval literature and plays, not only provided sources for Marlowe, but also allusions for his audience. Sandy's portrayal of the Qur'an may be taken as a typical Renaissance opinion: "Besides the positive doctrine (to itself contradictory), it is farced with Fables, Visions, Legends, and Relations"; therefore, Smith believes that 'most of the statements on the Prophet in and before Renaissance are all unjust' (Smith 1977:4).

Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'ān stayed well in use in the sixteenth century. This twelfth-century Latin translation was reprinted in Basle in 1542 (Bald 1998:140). Carleen Ibrahim confirms that Marlowe makes a cautious deliberation in his use to some expressions from the Qur'ān in *Tamburlaine*, Part I



and II. In Majorie Garber's opinion Marlowe's understanding of the Islamic Scripture is significant (Ibrahim 1996:31–32). Carleen Ibrahim claims that in the first Part of the play, *Tamburlaine* is portrayed as a Muslim, not as a Christian (1996:47). He used some verses, metaphors and words from the Holy Qur'ān. For example, after the death of the defeated King Sigismund, the Turkish chief officer Orcanes reports that the punishment of Christians and Sigismund is to be fed from a tree with bitter leaves, 'Zoacum,' which can only be found in hell. Marlowe uses the same name of the tree as in the Qur'ān, the tree of 'Zaqqum' whose branches are like the heads of devils. Marlowe portrays the tree relatively to the place of criminals in hell as it is in the Qur'ān. Marlowe formulates the same depiction:

... feeds upon the baneful tree of hell,  
That Zoacum, that fruit of bitterness,  
That in the midst of fire is ingrafted,  
Yet flourisheth as Flora in her pride,  
With apples like the heads of damed fiends. (*Tamburlaine*, P II, II.iii.16–20)

To compare this allusion with the Qur'ānic verses, it looks as if Marlowe fully copied from the original copy of the Qur'ān in chapter 37:62–65; Allah says:

62. *Is that the better entertainment?  
Or the Tree of Zaqqum?*
63. *For We have truly  
Made it (as) a trial  
For the wrong-doers.*
64. *For it is a tree  
That springs out  
Of the bottom of Hell-fire:*
65. *The shoots of its fruit-stalks  
Are like the heads  
Of devils. (Ali 1997:1350–1351)*

The Prophet Muhammad is established with the focus on the Muslim characters' faith in him. *Tamburlaine's* soul is full of worship, of power, which has been immortalized in many splendid passages and scenes like those of Hercules (Waith 1964:89). *Tamburlaine* is primarily hedonistic. He has an enormous appetite for power and violence. His immorality denies and breaches all human and religious teachings. His evil nature is clear when he laughs at the suffering of his victims. Mass killings and violations are unacceptable to a simple man. *Tamburlaine* has a vision of greatness denied by earthly and heavenly laws. He seeks freedom by being a king above the law. Marlowe's conception is aided by opportunities for the stage spectacle which seems to have been as much to his taste as his audience's. In *Tamburlaine*, the concept is a royal pageantry and colourful and bloody displays of sovereignty.

Ambition is a characteristic feature in Marlowe's portrait of *Tamburlaine*. *Tamburlaine* is a workaholic. He enjoys no rest. He is voraciously greedy for glory. He tests himself in furious, fanatic and bloody deeds, and dreams of his own

empire. He bestows his lieutenants to leave some kingdoms in Africa and Arabia unconquered. Tamburlaine says: “Shall I die, and this unconquered” (Part II, V.iii.150). Tamburlaine’s pride and his accomplishment are in ironical contrast. In an early scene Usumcasane says: “To be a king, is half to be a god”, and Theridamas replies, “A god is not so glorious as a king” (Part I, II.V.51–61), but soon enough Tamburlaine turns from the scourge of god to greater than god. Theridamas, by act IV, is amazed by Tamburlaine’s speech:

*And thou shall see a man greater than Mahomet,*

.....

*And makes the mighty god of arms his slave. (Part II.III.iv.46–53)*

Subsequently, Marlowe himself shows Tamburlaine as a demigod. Tamburlaine’s riches help create the illusion that he is godly (Burnett 2004:128). It is only his death that shows he does not control his fate. He threatens the world, earth and heaven, with his conquering sword and sheer flamboyance. Afsour Mohammed Hussain’s judgment is that “in choosing the story of *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe was capitalizing on public sentiment” (Oueijan 1996:13).

Tamburlaine’s speedy ascent to power shows his smart exploitation of the rivalries at the decadent Persian court. He achieves the apex of his power by his conquest of Bajazeth, the Great Turk whom he employs, literally, as his footstool and carries about in an iron cage. Moreover, as Chew says: “the story became one of the most popular incidents in European accounts of the legendary Scythian conqueror” (Chew 1937:470). When Tamburlaine trod on Bajazeth’s throne to ascend it, Marlowe made the fall greater, grim and humorous. He reminds Elizabethans of the affair of 1402. Like this event, Norman Daniel finds that Elizabethan drama contained a European response to the Turkish danger (Daniel 1960:499). Bajazeth and his wife bitterly insult his fortunes by attacking his deity, represented in the Prophet Muhammad – ‘O Mahomet! O *sleepy* Mahomet!’ Sultan Bajazeth and his wife Zabina viciously curse the Prophet ‘Mahomet’ (Part I, III.iii.270).

Numerous Muslim characters, such as Zabina in *Tamburlaine*, retract against Islam declaring: “there left no Mahomet, no God” (Part I, IV.iv, 290–2). In this image, they come out as unfaithful and defiant and shaky worshippers. Bajazeth pronounces the doubts of other ordinary characters in the play. This helps to underline in the production the barbarous cruelty in the scene. “Dost thou think that Mahomet will suffer this?” And “If his highness would let them be fed it would do them more good” (V, ii, 176). This and Bajazeth’s suicide by beating his head against the bars of the cage, was obviously regarded as the culmination of the first part. In *The Jew of Malta*, the epithet of Ithimore about the Turks is significant because it shows the tendency to connect the conventional evilness of Turks with a damage of European Machiavellianism (Chew 1937:142). It is evident when Ithimore depicts his evil deeds in burning Christian villages and his ill-treatments with Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem.

Tamburlaine’s love for Zenocrate spares her father from death and being added to the pile of corpses in Tamburlaine’s over-lordship in the Orient. His cruelty is

recognized by Zenocrate whose love excuses his massive destruction. Similarly, when she laments over the bodies of the emperor and empress, she acknowledges Tamburlaine's pride, but prays to Jove and Mahomet to pardon him. This source of Jove as the god of Muslims is medieval. There is also a royal fight between the two queens, Zabina and Zenocrate. With the death of her husband, King Bajazeth, Zabina is anguished to the core and eventually ends her own life by banging her head against the bars of the cage in which her husband was kept. She, like her husband, insults the Prophet Muhammad. She depicts him as a drowsy god called 'Mahomet'. In portraying Mohammad as the God of Muslims, Marlowe subscribed to the wilful ignorance of the Western scholars of the medieval era who, out of gross disregard for genuine information about Islam, maintained and propagated that Muslims took Mohammad as their God. The speeches of Zabina and Bajazeth against 'Mahomet' seem funny to spectators. The expressions are hopeless and blasphemous for Islamic faith. It is a convincing evidence that supports the Christian opinion on Islam. Marlowe has perfectly exhausted the historical theme of *Tamburlaine*. The same picture is echoed from the medieval epic *The Song of Roland*, written by Cretien de Troyes around 1130. It is a crusaded scene of a holy war between the Christian Franks and the Muslim Saracens. A Spanish Muslim Saracen soldier says:

*Now may Mahound that ruleth us, and Apollo our good lord  
And Termagant protect the King, and the Queen watch andward.  
Said Bramimonde:  
Great folly now do I hear thee say.  
Our gods are knaves. At Roncevaux most evil deeds did they.  
They let of our true Paynims be slaughtered many a knight.  
And my own dear Lord Marsile, they failed him in the fight. (CXCIV, 7–12)*

Marlowe draws the image of crusades in *Tamburlaine* but this time from the East. In the *Song*, the Muslim King of Marslie lost hope in Mahomet to save his authority from the Christian Emperor Charlemagne. He expresses his hopelessness saying:

*And now the day was over, and on the night time came.  
And clear the moon was shining, and the stars were flashing flame.  
The King had ta'en Saragossa. A thousand men around  
He bade march through town and temple and the mansions of Mahound.  
With the axes that they carried, and with the iron maul.  
They smote Mahound, and shattered his idols one and all.  
That sorcery and falsehood, no longer might remain.  
The King loved God. His service to accomplish was he fain. (CCLXVIII, 1–8)*

In the *Song of Roland* the scene is one of Muhammad's fellows, the Paynims, who cried:

*Mahomet aid! Our gods on Charlemagne  
Wreak vengeance for the villains he marshalled into Spain.  
Rather than yield the battle-field unto us, will they die. (CXLIV, 21–23)*

The deformed image of Islam is already established in the European mind. The public sources habitually prefer literary authority on the ideas of Islam, derived from superstitious Muslim proletariat, rather than men of education. Such ideas may have been interchanged orally on a very large scale. As a result, Islam was often misinterpreted by Christians. The masses always tend to be aggressive and xenophobia in their social attitudes. In spite of this, the basic tenets of Islam were well understood by a great number of writers. There is a common appreciation for some Islamic information, e.g. about fortune, written on the forehead of man. This information opposed other European writers' view and was still not presented as absurd in *Tamburlaine* (Part I, II.i.3). Throughout the Middle Ages there was a wide awareness of the Islamic conception of Muhammad who was nothing more than a prophet. The Latin treatment of Islam contains a number of mistakes that had already been passed from one writer to another. Wolf states that Marlowe's quotations from the Qur'ān are explicit quotations from one or another medieval version (1964:227). Marlowe's reference to Termagant and Apollo as in the *Songs* Marsile worships them saying in the 'holy laws we keep always – Apollo and Mahound' (XXXIII.5).

The true religion for Marlowe is not Islam. For instance, the obeisance of Orcanes to Mahomet precisely reflects Marlowe's ambivalent attitude to heavenly influences in the play. Although Wolf thinks of 'Orcanes' scorn of Christians' in *Part II* as 'an expression of Marlowe's atheism,' it depicts the faith of the Turks about Christians (1964:31). Carleen Ibrahim portrays Marlowe as a man on 'a spiritual quest' (1996:32). Marlowe is firm on religious themes, the oneness of deity in particular, although he usually expresses harmony with Christian faith.

Marlowe attempts to draw a theological parallel between Christianity and Islam when he equates the concept of Trinity with the concept of Prophethood, arguing in effect that the way Christ is his God, Mohammad is theirs. The statement of Orcanes to King Sigmund: 'He by Christ and I by Mahomet,' proposes a striking distinction over the divinity of both and the inspiration of 'the chiefest God' or one deity (Part II, V.i.181). *Tamburlaine* refers to the place of his God in heaven saying: "God sits in the heaven whom I only obey" (Part II, V.i.184). Muslims consider the divinity of Muhammad, Christ or any creation as polytheism. Orcanes echoes this idea with notable linguistic eloquence after his victory in a battle:

*Christ or Mahomet hath been my friend  
Yet in my thoughts shall Christ be honoured,  
Not doing Mahomet an injury.* (Part II, II.iii.33–34)

Marlowe underlines Muhammad's effectiveness in the scene when the King of Amasia looks at the sky to see Muhammad, armed and prepared to support Callapine in his combat with *Tamburlaine*: "Mahomet is therefore able to come to earth and interact with humans, but is unable or unwilling to stop *Tamburlaine*'s affront" (Part II, V.ii.30–35). Marlowe's statements display his lack of understanding Islam.

### 5. The public biblioclasm of the Qur'ān

Inspired by the success of the first part, Marlowe came to write the second part – *The Second Part of the Bloody Conquests of Mighty Tamburlaine*. The main theme is the cruelty of Tamburlaine with no sympathy. Marlowe imaginatively invents his own Timur. The second *Tamburlaine* is a degenerate character. His lofty and arrogant tone demonstrated his hostility towards deity and mankind. He sets “black streamers [of fire] in the firmament” after his madness because of the death of his Queen, Zenocrate, “to signify his slaughter of the Gods” (Part II, 3.2.1–18). Though Tamburlaine’s love for Zenocrate’s earthly beauty was a human source for “more courage to my [i.e. Tamburlaine] conquering mind”, it was a heavenly curse upon him which drives him to burn the city. The death of Zenocrate is, as every critic has recognized, the first real setback and end of Tamburlaine. In view of her association with the city in Part I, it is appropriate that Tamburlaine makes a city suffer for her death, by setting fire to it. The drumming muse of a furious war against heaven means the spoiling of the town together with its residents where his queen died. Tamburlaine goes on the extent of killing his own son who has his own grievances against his father. This murder constitutes a more vivid and shocking example than even the treatment of Bajazeth. Marlowe’s emphasis on terror is consistent with the entire depiction of Tamburlaine. He shoots everybody before him. He asks his officer, Techelles, to “drown them all, man, woman, and child; \Leave not a Babylonian in the town”. Tamburlaine becomes increasingly cruel. His fury can only be appeased by blood and the Empire. For a spectator these horrible actions are not divine. They are ambitiously extreme outputs of human inspiration. Marlowe attempts to locate more bloody-drenched words and expressions to portray Tamburlaine as an image of “the Scourge of God” to Muslims in particular and other religions in general.

The expression of “the scourge of God” is a Marlovian phrase for the counter-action of aggressive forces persists in *Tamburlaine*. Gorley Putt remarks this title as “a thrilling theatrical ogre a decorous defence of orthodox Christian theology” (1981:42). As with Tamburlaine’s astounding progress of mass destruction, the spectators collaborate readily in this vicarious experience of infinitely extended violent power by blood, which affords a conscious exhilaration and a sense of non-stop release. Since Marlowe was deeply sceptical about the credentials of Christianity as an organised religion, a perspective that made him detest the claims of Christianity, he had a burning desire to make his ideas known. But in the Renaissance England, attacking Christianity was simply unthinkable. Therefore Marlowe chose to pick up a soft target: Islam. By attaching Islam on stage, he accomplished the twin objectives of attacking organised religion and endearing himself to his native audience. Paul H. Kocher says, “Tamburlaine’s creed is what Marlowe himself believes” (1962:79).

As the drama proceeds, he reaches the peak in killing, but he finds no victim. Hence, he challenges “the settlers of the sky” to fight him. So far Tamburlaine claims his affinity to heaven and dislike to earth whose dominion may not be

enough for him. To be the terror of the world is his special aim. In the last Act of Part II, Tamburlaine publicly burns the Qur'ān. Harry Levin says that "it is a peculiarly Marlovian twist, an antireligious fascination with a ceremony, which animates Tamburlaine's burning of the Koran... and culminates in the ritual of excommunication" (Jump 1967:148). It is a scene of both a literary and ideological communication with his audience. He has described it as Turkish which means Islamic for Elizabethan writers. Along with copies of the Qur'ān, he includes other Islamic books. Marlowe knows other Islamic religious books, probably about the Prophet's tradition, since they contain news about future which Tamburlaine calls 'superstitious'. The description of books in 'heaps,' refers to the Islamic architecture of mosques and their libraries. Gorley Putt adds that "Bible too, if they had been handy in Babylon, would surely have been tossed onto the same bonfire" (1981:42). Nevertheless, Henry Morley thinks some twentieth century attitudes about Marlowe's orthodoxy as the blaspheming Tamburlaine, are not the work of a blaspheming poet (Putt 1981:20). His attack on Islam is regarded as a natural attack on the infidel enemy and his theology. The Qur'ān, Muhammad and God are not Christian. On the other hand, a simple Christian spectator, rather a critic, will not accept if the same happened to the Bible. Tamburlaine directs his friend and soldiers to collect the copies of the Qur'ān from the Islamic temples. He says:

*Now, Orcanes, where's the Turkish Alcoran,  
And all the heaps of superstitious books  
Found in the temples of that Mahomet  
Whom I have thought a god? They shall be burnt. (Part II, V.i.171–74)*

The spiritual outlook of the Turks as depicted in 'the Turkish Alcoran' is interpreted with prejudice, and even facts are modified as being Islamic Qur'ān, to suit the interpretation. In describing the Qur'ān as 'Turkish', Marlowe means that it is highly respected by the Turks. Therefore, he identifies that this book is a real enemy of Elizabethans. Tamburlaine's burning of the Qur'ān is a sign of Christian power and victory. The Qur'ānic biblioclasm on London stage was bizarre. Irving Ribner identifies the Qur'ān burning and the mockery of the Prophet Muhammad as "the greatest statement of the classical humanist conception of history" (1968:92).

Christians who deny the Qur'ān must have their reasons. Everything around them says that Islam is a heresy and the Qur'ān is full of errors. They are convinced of the error of Islam. Subsequently, they attack the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad. They have been taught that Muhammad is an imposter because he was a robber, a murderer, a traitor and an adulterer. Muhammad wrote the Qur'ān from the old holy books secretly. Therefore, sacrilege and misusing the Qur'ān is normal for Elizabethan audience since it scores for Christendom. When the Islamic books are collected, Tamburlaine orders his soldiers to set fire to the heap of Qur'ān copies, which raises a huge flame. The scene is in Bagdad. It remarks the anniversary of the Tatar invasion to the city of six centuries ago. At

the command of Genghis Khan, the Tatar army burnt and threw all the Islamic books including the Qur'ān into Euphrates (Hitti 1953:484–9). The same burning action was repeatedly carried out by the Christian crusaders during the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in Palestine (Hitti 1953:645–6). After burning the holy books of knowledge, he burns people of those mosques as well. Along with this scene Tamburlaine sees things evil, and he himself becomes a barbarous and blood-thirsty devil. He continued killing off all Prophet's kinsmen and scholars, men, women, and even children. Tamburlaine has now slain all Muslims. Tamburlaine produces an earthly hell for Muslims in the East with no limits. It seems the end of the Islamic world. In a remarkable pause for a moment in the scene, he comments that he is alive and 'untouched by' the Prophet Muhammad. Harry Levin quotes a Marlovian concept that is not mentioned in other works, although in the speech of "Orcanes, the noble infidel (renegade) used a similar expression to affirm a belief in a god who is not circumscribable" (Jump 1967:98). This Marlovian concept is perfectly Islamic.

*There is a God, full of revenging wrath,  
From whom the thunder and the lightning break,  
Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey.  
So, Orcanes; fling them in the fire. (Part II, V.iii.147–150)*

When they burn the books, the blaspheming Tamburlaine defies the Prophet Mahomet. His monologue with Muhammad is as a divine entity. It shows Marlowe's knowledge about the miracles of a prophet. Marlowe is aware that historically the Prophet Muhammad triumphed over his enemies. It is a triumphant moment for Tamburlaine to mock the Prophet Muhammad: "Now Mahomet, if thou have any power:\ Come down thyself and work a miracle" (Part II, V.i.185–6). He falsifies his prophecy in the mind of the audience with evidence that he saw "in vain... men worship Mahomet:\ My sword hath sent millions of Turks to hell." (Part II, V.i.193–5). Again, there is no answer from Muhammad. Tamburlaine speaks about Muhammad as a godlike person. He refers to him repeatedly. This technique of argument shows the medieval tradition in a dialectic treatment. It establishes an implication of heresy and orthodox Islam which looks alien to the audience. Tamburlaine loudly speaks, "Thou art not worthy to be worshipped\ That suffer'st flames of fire to burn the writ." (Part II, V.i.187–8).

Tamburlaine's defiance of the Prophet gives the impression of his superiority to other competent warriors, rulers, and deities. Chew criticizes Marlowe's thoughts. He depicts him as 'the enemy of all religion' (1937:397). Tamburlaine calls 'Mahomet,' to send a tornado to blow his Qur'ān up to his throne in heaven, as it is his own proof as a prophet. He defies the Prophet through his barbarous way of treatment to the Qur'ān, as well as describing it as 'foolish laws'. Tamburlaine's speech is hostile to everything celestial. The Elizabethan material written about Islam is largely and wholly concerned with Islam and some dealt with the Islamic subject accidentally. For Elizabethan community, the Qur'ān is made up from the Old and New Testaments which is absent in *Tamburlaine*, but it

is frequently noted by Marlowe that Muhammad is like Christ and the Qur'ān is like the Bible, despite the fact that the nature of Muhammad is not like that in Islamic belief. The teachings of the Qur'ān are laws. Norman Daniel asserts this idea in the past as Ramon Lull “spoke of the Qur'ān as containing the law” (1960:33). Greenblatt imagines “when he burns the Koran! The one action which the Elizabethan churchmen themselves might have applauded seems to bring down a diving vengeance” (2005:202). For revenge to this silence, Tamburlaine attacks the Qur'ān, especially the holy book for Turks and source of laws. He defies the Prophet saying:

*Wherein the sum of thy religion rests:  
Why send'st thou not a furious whirlwind down,  
To blow thy Alcoran up to thy throne. (Part II, V.i.189–191)*

Havelock Ellis says that “Tamburlaine is a divinely strong and eager-hearted poet, and these words are the key of his career” (Maclure 1979:165). He expresses the hostility of Tamburlaine which, subsequently, has become a war psychosis (neurosis). In the scene, there is no response from Muhammad or his god. Muhammad is ignored as he is incapable and seems to be a devil. Tamburlaine is too upset about Muhammad's silence. This makes the audience to expect Muhammad to rise and save his followers. Tamburlaine looks at the sky and examines the account that Muhammad is a bosom friend of God himself. If so, Tamburlaine calls Muhammad to fight and shake the sword of Tamburlaine for revenge. Tamburlaine says:

*Where men report thou sitt'st by God himself?  
Or vengeance on the head of Tamburlaine  
That shakes his sword against thy majesty,  
And spurns the abstracts of thy foolish laws? (Part II, V.i.192–5)*

Roy Bathenhouse understands the event as the personification of Marlowe's hero as a “flouting of Divine Law” and as “a bold proclamation or religious antinomianism, even though the Qur'ān, of course, is not a Christian scripture” (Ibrahim 1996:43). Marlowe's response to Islam is conservative. He denies the report that describes Muhammad's glory as high as God's. It is a survival concept of medievalism which is obvious in Elizabethan literature. For example, the Christian medieval depiction of the false Qur'ān and the false Prophet belonging to hell is cited in *Alphonsus* (IV.I.1410–11). It smacks of the Elizabethan orthodox Christianity. On the Elizabethan stage the tradition has not changed and it is still alive. The points about the difference between Islam and Christianity have not altered, hence the Christian polemics have always tended to make the same criticism. However, Marlowe, as a secular writer, self-consciously tried to liberate himself from Christian attitudes, but he generally fails. He discloses specific information of some verses from the Qur'ān and early history of Islam.

The nature of God in the Qur'ān is essentially described in order to show the superiority of Elizabethan church. Tamburlaine's voice about the Prophet Muhammad is full of criticism. It provides an irresistible opportunity for facetious-



ness. The challenges of Tamburlaine to Muhammad to take revenge, and his illustration in heaven “to bring fortune”, or he “remains in hell”, show a weak understanding of Turkish faith of Islam. Marlowe's Qur'ān-burning hero is not censored to avoid Muslims' anger. He proudly informs his followers that he remains alive and “untouched by Mahomet” (Part II, V.i.180). Muhammad cannot do anything, so he does not deserve any appreciation. However, Marlowe successfully presents his evidences for the falsification of Islam. He frankly asks his own followers who still might have little faith in Islam to find other god:

*Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell;  
He cannot hear the voice of Tamburlaine:  
Seek out another godhead to adore.* (Part II, 5.1.196–8)

Cunningham and Warren look at the presentation of Turkish commander Callapine's prayer to Mahomet in the previous scene as anticipation for the audience to wish a response from Muhammad, to take a revenge on the head of Tamburlaine (Chew1937:484). Subsequently, an important conclusion is drawn in Tamburlaine's words. The ethical code vanishes in *Tamburlaine* under the excitement and pride of conquest. Unlike the Christian God, Tamburlaine pictures an Islamic theology about Allah. The term Allah means the oneness in deity. Marlowe recalls the description of Allah in the Qur'ānic verse of *Al-Kursi*, the throne. It is a mistranslation, but it is not a deliberate misrepresentation. The verse was quoted by Marlowe. He admirably and distinctly uses Qur'ānic language. During the book burning, Tamburlaine summarizes the verse in saying:

*The God that sits in heaven, if any god,  
For he is God alone, and none but he.* (Part II, 5.1.199–200)

The verse of *Al-Kursi*, the throne, is represented accurately in the same meaning, which Marlowe conveys thus:

*He that sits on high and never sleep,  
Nor in one place is circumscribable,  
But everywhere fills every continent,  
With strange infusion of his sacred vigor.* (Part II, 2.2.49–52)

Marlowe recites Qur'ānic verses about the oneness of God. As well, Orcanes says: “He that sits on high and never sleeps”. Marlowe refers to ‘He’ as Allah, the almighty, in the verse of *Ayat Al-Kursi* (Throne), a blessing verse in the Holy Qur'ān. The verse means that the throne of God in the sky includes all things, world, planets and skies:

*Allah! There is no god but He, – the Living, the Self-Subsisting Supporter of all.  
No slumber can seize Him, nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what (approaches His creatures) before or after or behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory) (Qur'ān 2.255).*

The theme of this quoted verse seems to be a clarification message from Marlowe to his Protestant Christian audience. Marlowe appears less academic, less discreet and more obviously prejudiced against religion. On the other hand, Marlowe has not much freedom to express his views about Christianity. Yet he has used his wide experience of the Eastern world history to attack Theology. To tackle an Islamic theology, the available Latin translation of Robert of Ketton is a great source for Marlowe. To show a picture of Islamic deity, Marlowe derives his idea of the nature of God from an interpretation of the Qur'ān. This account could not more closely or faithfully record the Muslims' idea of how Muhammad received the revelations. Marlowe's intention is likely to provide information, and thus based on authentic and Muslim sources. Marlowe was not very close to Islam, nor well-informed, but he had learned more about general problems of comparative religion. Norman Daniel states that "the Qur'ān has no parallel outside Islam. Christians have, sometimes, seen it as equivalent to the Bible. They have not always realised that the Qur'ān describes itself, though not word for word as copied from a heavenly prototype, so that it is really unlike anything known to Christianity" (Daniel 1960:33). Marlowe represents the Qur'ān as the destruction of the Bible and Muhammad of Jesus.

This rationalistic argument had a strong appeal, particularly for a certain type of school-trained mind of atheism. Since Marlowe himself was charged of atheism, the key verses of Tamburlaine appear a great mouthpiece for his author. Although some critics emphasize on Tamburlaine's defiance of Mahomet, as well as the burning of the Qur'ān, Kocher focuses on the significance of the existence of god in the line "The God that sits in heaven, if any god" (Part II, V. i. 199), as it is "more blasphemy for a Christian than does the whole incident of the Koran" (Kocher 1962:89). To try to deduce Marlowe's religious position from these speeches is a hopeless undertaking, and to try to decide on the basis of theological evidence, which of them Marlowe might endorse, is risky and finally inconclusive. Yet, even this question of God's existence is only one of the changes of attitude just cited from the questions already raised by Tamburlaine. It is apparent that his attitude toward God changes continually. He boasts of His favours, or defies Him to take away his conquests. He likens himself to Him, and executes his will. To the desecration of Muhammad's divinity, he threatens to conquer Turkish monarchs.

Ian Gaskell goes on to describe the act as a manifestation of the unreliability of Islam. He holds this attitude since "Tamburlaine identified himself with the Christian cause", although his deed "seems to be championing their beliefs" (Ibrahim 1996:43). Tamburlaine shows that Islam is powerless. But, in spite of the parade of horrors, Marlowe's word were outspoken. His words are evangelically re-echoed in the play as the language of a wrathful God. Kocher explains that this expression of "the Scourge of God" is a Renaissance language to punish the wicked oppressors who maintain themselves "to be ministers of God". All 'these points appear in Christian literature' to address the Turks (Kocher 1972:80). More clearly, Hunter states that it is "to scourge those whom 'Heaven abhors,' particularly shown to be Europe's traditional enemy, the Turks" (1997:50).

Tamburlaine advises his soldiers to turn from this heretical faith, which relies on a prophet who is now in Hell, and to turn to another god like himself. Tamburlaine says:

*Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell;  
He cannot hear the voice of Tamburlaine,  
Seek out another godhead to adore.* (Part II, 5.1.196–198)

Marlowe's hero is a master of his fate. He is a different figure of morality. More recent scholars such as Emily Bartels and Mark Thornton Burnett have downplayed the idea of Tamburlaine as a morality play.<sup>5</sup> Tamburlaine's and other characters' speeches, who labour to describe him, abound in allusions to the rebels and the usurpers of classical legends. Irving Ribner adds that Tamburlaine "conquers the world in opposition to gods" (1968:87). Marlowe moulds Tamburlaine in order to challenge the deity. Tamburlaine selected the Prophet Muhammad as a divine figure to revolt against his Tamburlaine's acts. However, Tamburlaine says:

*Now Mahomet if you have any power,  
Come down thy self and work a miracle,  
Thou art not worthy to be worshipped.* (Part II, 5.1.185–187)

Marlowe unmistakably establishes a stand of blasphemy for Tamburlaine to violate the Qur'ān. He devotes a whole grim landscape to a public burning of the Qur'ān. Gorley Putt remarks that "in the context, the destruction of the Qur'ān is hardly a pledge of allegiance to the Christian God" (1981:42). Marlowe tries to display the idea of pseudo-prophecy which is wholly traditional. His suspicion is natural in which a Christian lives. Consequently, he deeply felt that this Book causes a conflict with the Christian Scripture. Marlowe challenges the Qur'ān at its holiness with no apparent doubt or hesitation. He insists constantly that it is totally impossible that the Qur'ān should be true or that Muhammad should have been a Prophet. Muhammad and the Qur'ān are the most fatal enemies of Tamburlaine. Marlowe presupposes to discuss the differences between European and Islamic traditions. It is a way to show his style to convince the Muslim Turks to turn Christian. Tamburlaine attempts to force Muslim characters to accept the Bible by recalling a medieval tradition of Islam on Elizabethan stage. This portrayal depicts the Elizabethan defiance over the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'ān. By burning it and mocking its Prophet, he has brought down the pride of the Turks in his time. Tamburlaine says: O Muhammad, I do not at all believe that you have received this Qur'ān from God (Part II, V.i.185–187). Tamburlaine treats the Qur'ān in the second part as alien to the Eastern life. Marlowe, psychologically, gave a pace or

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<sup>5</sup> Bartels, Emily Carroll. "East of England: Imperialist Self-Construction in *Tamburlaine*, Parts 1 and 2." *Spectacles of strangeness imperialism, alienation, and Marlowe*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P, 1993), pp. 53–81.; Thornton Burnett, Mark. "Tamburlaine the Great Parts One and Two." *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*. Ed. Patrick Gerard Cheney. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004.) pp. 127–143.

pause for preparing the audience in the scene to an argumentative answer by Muhammad but there was no answer. The theme suits the Elizabethan audience in which it goes deep to the Western tradition of falsifying Muhammad's book.

Tamburlaine pronounces his end as natural before his confronting scene with Muhammad by burning the Qur'an. This end is not a divine damnation which might be interpreted as a victory of heaven over him. Ribner notes that "There is certainly nothing of divine retribution in the death of Tamburlaine" (Ibrahim 1996: 47). Tamburlaine's hell on earth is a challenge for Heaven. Marlowe says, "For Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die" (Part II, V.iii.248). Marlowe was not liberal enough to allow Tamburlaine, as his hero, finally to escape fate to death, though at the thought of vaster delights has ceased to care for finite splendours of an earthly crown. As Marjorie Garber remarks that the scene might reasonably have been thought gratifying to a Christian audience likely to enhance rather than to worsen the hero's prospects for salvation and survival (Ibrahim 1996:43). The inevitable death of Tamburlaine does not make the play a tragedy, though it is a tragedy of ambition. The destruction of Islamic symbols and objects is a presentation of hatred to Turks in England.

The last act is a final challenge when he threatens to march against the powers of heaven and "set black streamers in the firmament". There is nothing here of Christian recognition of sin and repentance before death. He turns the colour of massacre into the man of war, sacrifice into peaceful men to oppose the attitudes towards death. The last moments of the play appeal to the spectator's pity insisting on the tragic limitation of Tamburlaine as a human being. "For Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die" is a classic traditional paradox. The death approaches Tamburlaine as a judgment to burn the sacred text of the Qur'an.

## 6. The impact of *Tamburlaine*

The Elizabethan play, *Tamburlaine*, remains for the English readers as a great masterpiece. Elizabethans' reaction to Tamburlaine's defiance grew in time in plays other than *Tamburlaine*. Its immense success influenced the famous Elizabethan playwrights, such as Robert Greene, who imitated Marlowe in *The Tragedy of Alphonsus King of Arogose* (1592); other plays were George Whetstone's *The English Myrror* (1586), Dekker's *Shoemaker Holiday* (1600), Jonson's *Edward Hoe* (1605), Shakespeare's *II Henry IV* (1596), Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), and the Victorian, Christopher Row's *Tamburlaine* (1702). They used to recite the line: "Holla ye pampered jades of Asia" which is in *Tamburlaine* (Part II, 4.3.1). However, they were of less merit.

T. S. Eliot states that the cultural heritage of a nation has a great value and impact over the construction of literature through ages (1915:12–13). In the twentieth century, some authors repeat the same image. For instance, Hilda Hookham's *Tamburlaine the Conqueror* (1964) is the most detailed and up-to-date work addressed to the general reader. The fourteenth-century Arabic work of

Ahmed ibn Arabshah's *Tamerlane*, translated by J. H. Sanders (1936), and Harold Lamb, *Tamerlane, the Earth Shaker* (1928) are sources of the legends of Tamburlaine in the English library. Relevant and excellent chapters on the history of Tamerlane are displayed in René Grousset's *Empire of the Steppes* (1939), translated into English in 1970, Richard N. Frye's *Iran* (1954), Sir John Glubb's *The Lost Centuries* (1967), and the *Cambridge History of Iran* (2010).

The monster of Tamburlaine was used in London to frighten the foreign Protestant refugees from Europe. Some of the terrorists left a note on a church door in 1593, promising to murder all refugees and their children. It's signed 'Tamburlaine.' This note goes on like that for dozens of lines from Tamburlaine:

*Since words nor threats nor any other thing  
Can make you to avoid this certain ill,  
We'll cut your throats, in your temples praying  
Not Paris massacre so much blood did spill.*<sup>6</sup>

For Orientalists, the Qur'ān is Muhammad's own composition. Ziauddin Sardar analyses this hypothesis, saying: "From this assertion far-reaching historical, theological, literary and linguistic judgments are drawn which by sheer repetition are elevated to dignity of facts" (1999:52). To examine the allegation that the Prophet Muhammad wrote the Qur'ān, the Orientalists must examine how an illiterate man sat down in the first half of the seventh century "in his study to consult and 'quote' previous authors for the composition of the work known as the Qur'ān" (Sardar 1999:52). Nevertheless, without a fair scholarly investigation, the Orientalists proceed to place the origin of the Qur'ān in Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Thus, in *the Life of Muhammad*, A. Guillaume affirms that Muhammad makes allusions to the Gospel. Montgomery Watt, too, in *Islam and the Integration of Society* puts forward that early Muslim works are infused with "quotations from the Bible" (1953:56). How is this possible, states Tibawi, "when there was no Arabic Bible to 'quote' from?" (1964:11).

Tamburlaine captures the audience of the play. He is represented as a Christian like his Englishmen. The English Christian Tamburlaine is historically and literarily entitled as the Qur'ān-burner in the English literature. The demonstration of Marlowe's Qur'ān-burning hero has been performed on London stages several times. On November 24th, 2005, audiences at the Barbican in London did not see the Qur'ān being burnt, as Marlowe intended in this play. David Farr, who directed and adapted the play, was frightened that it would irritate the Muslims in Britain. Simon Reade, artistic director of the Bristol Old Vic, said that if they had not modified the original it "would have unnecessarily raised the hackles of a significant proportion of one of the world's great religions".<sup>7</sup> It would really be awful to represent the Qur'ān-burning scene again in London. Nowadays,

<sup>6</sup> See Doctor Cleveland 9/9/2010 – 7:34 pm Ask Tamburlaine: Burning Korans Is a Bad Idea. <http://dagblog.com/node/3588>

<sup>7</sup> Dalya Alberge, Arts Correspondent, Christopher Marlowe – Marlowe's Koran-burning hero is censored to avoid Muslim anger. See <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article595311.ece>

Marlowe's hero is heavily censored to avoid Muslims' anger. In the Barbican theatre, the burning of the Qur'ān was smoothed over. It became just the burning of a heap of books. The key references to the Prophet Muhammad had been deleted, particularly in the passage where Tamburlaine says that he is "not worthy to be worshipped." In the original play, Muhammad "remains in hell."<sup>8</sup> Today, the audience looks at Tamburlaine differently. They have closely explored the Islamic culture. Clifford Leech affirms that the English "interpretation of Tamburlaine, may partly depend on what they have learned about conquest, living in the twentieth century" (1964:7). Doctor Cleveland, a university professor, states on his page: "Who on Earth is crazy enough to burn the Koran?"

At the Barbican 2005 in London, the censorship over the Qur'ān-burning provoked criticism from British senior figures in the theatre and scholars, as well as religious leaders. For them, the story is of a shepherd-robber who defeats the king of Persia, the emperor of Turkey, and assuming himself as the "scourge of God", burns the Qur'ān.<sup>9</sup> The current meaning of the play defies the past criticism over the calm for the Qur'ān-burning scene. Terry Hands, director of the performance of *Tamburlaine* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992, said, "I don't believe you should interfere with any classic for reasons of religious or political correctness".<sup>10</sup> Tamburlaine's appreciation of God's holiness has worried one director, Peter Hall, in his production for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1976, modified the content to read: "The God that sits in heaven, if any god, Sits there alone, on earth there is none but me." (Simkin 2000:95). Doctor Cleveland remarks that Western students know very well that the Qur'ān-burner is Tamburlaine the Great in Marlowe.<sup>11</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

To sum up, the body of representation and misrepresentation of Muhammad and the Qur'ān is treated as a valuable indication of the Elizabethan attitudes. When Marlowe omits and asserts deliberate information from the Qur'ān, he might have rejected accurate knowledge about God, or shown a preference for the absurd. Marlowe's fantasies are embodied with ignorance or partial ignorance of Islam. In fact, the use of the authentic information would have contributed towards more unawareness of Islam.

English writers remain sceptical in their impression over a possible peaceful contact with the East up to the end of the life on earth. Rudyard Kipling (1865–1937) in *The Ballad of East and West*, asserts that the East cannot understand the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Alberge, *op cit*, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article595311.ece>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Cleveland, *op cit*, <http://dagblog.com/node/3588>.

West at all. This pessimism holds true for centuries since the colonial West wants to be the superior:

*Oh, East is East, West is West and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand present by at God's great Judgment Seat,  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, Nor Bread, nor Birth,  
When two Strong men Stand face to face, Though  
They come from the ends of earth* (1892:1–5).

Many important Western academic and opinion-makers have articulated the West's attitude towards Islam. In 1993 a controversial article, "The Clash of Civilizations", Samuel Huntington noted that a "clash of civilizations will dominate global politics" (1993:22). Huntington, like many others today, portrayed Islam and the West as age-old enemies. He claims that "Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1300 years" (1993:31).

Muslims believe in the Qur'ān as a divine guidance. Marlowe degrades the Qur'ān and makes Tamburlaine misrepresent the Prophet Muhammad and burn it. In his 1821 play, *Almansur*, the German writer Heinrich Heine refers to the burning of the Qur'an, during the Spanish Inquisition. He writes, "Where they burn books, so too will they in the end burn human beings".<sup>12</sup> The public Qur'ān-burning attempt in Florida by minor churches in 2010 recalls the scene of the historical Western mindset. For educated people and politicians, it was a hard task to convince the crazy or religious people and kids to stop burning copies of the Qur'ān publicly. It only leads to trouble. Fictional characters, of course, have their way of influencing real people.

In the spring of 2011, Terry Jones, pastor of the Dove World Outreach Church in Gainesville, said that the Qur'ān inspired violence and therefore by having a mock trial, Jones, the judge and his jury found that the Qur'ān was guilty and must be burnt. This burning of the Islamic book seems to be the same as conducted by Tamburlaine in the sixteenth century. It seems that the public burning of the Qur'ān will be repeated in history as long as the West believes that the East is inferior. Some of Tamburlaine's admirers are so thrilled by him that they set out to be little Tamburlaine themselves. However, if Tamburlaine was a gigantic hero by killing so many Asians to prevail, many dictators made bloody massacre of their innocent citizens.

The spread of accurate information about Qur'ān and Muhammad helps to understand Islam and Muslims. Western researchers need to understand Islam from its own sources. Given the 1400-year Christian-Muslim legacy of an almost unbroken sequence of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, the task of simply being honest with each other and about each other's faith is itself a monumental challenge.

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<sup>12</sup> See Wikipedia on 27 September 2011 at 12:32. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_burning](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_burning)

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