CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S INTERPRETATION OF AMIR TEMUR: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON HISTORICAL SOURCES

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Abstract: *The study examines the historical sources available to Marlowe and investigates how these materials were transformed into a dramatic representation shaped by Renaissance humanist ideology. Using comparative and historical-literary methods, the research demonstrates that Marlowe's Tamburlaine is a symbolic construction rather than a historically accurate portrait, reflecting early modern European conceptions of power, ambition, and individual agency.*

Keywords: *Christopher Marlowe, Amir Temur, Tamburlaine the Great, historical sources, Renaissance drama*

Amir Temur (1336–1405), widely known in European historiography as Tamerlane, was a central figure in late medieval world history. His political and military activities attracted sustained attention from both Eastern and Western historians. By the sixteenth century, Temur had become a well-established figure in European historical consciousness through translated chronicles and encyclopedic historical works (Manz, 1989). Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great (1587–1588) represents the earliest extensive dramatic portrayal of Amir Temur in English literature. Rather than offering a factual historical biography, Marlowe reconstructs Temur as a dramatic embodiment of Renaissance ambition and imperial will. The aim of this article is to identify the historical sources that shaped Marlowe's understanding of Amir Temur and to analyze the ideological transformation of historical material within the framework of Renaissance drama.

Methods: The research employs a qualitative historical-literary methodology. The primary text analyzed is Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great, examined alongside European historical writings that were accessible in Elizabethan England. Secondary sources include modern historiographical studies on Amir Temur and scholarly criticism of Marlowe's works. Identification of historical sources likely consulted by Marlowe, particularly European compilations such as Pedro de Mexía's historical writings. Interpretation of divergences from historical fact within the context of Renaissance humanism and dramatic aesthetics.

Results: The findings indicate that Marlowe's knowledge of Amir Temur derived primarily from Western secondary sources rather than original Eastern historiography. One of the most influential sources was Pedro de Mexía's Silva de varia lección, which presents Temur as a man of humble origin who rose to power through personal ability and military skill (Mexía, 1571).

Marlowe adopts this narrative framework and intensifies it through elevated rhetoric and symbolic imagery. Tamburlaine's rise from shepherd to emperor reflects European historiographical tradition but is reshaped to emphasize individual will as the principal source of authority. Classical models, particularly the figure of Alexander the Great, further inform Marlowe's conception of universal conquest (Bartels, 1993). The analysis also reveals a significant reduction of religious and administrative elements in Marlowe's portrayal. While the historical Amir Temur grounded his rule in Islamic legitimacy and complex political structures (Manz, 1989), these aspects are largely absent in Tamburlaine the Great.

Discussion: The results demonstrate that Marlowe's representation of Amir Temur is a Renaissance reinterpretation rather than a historical reconstruction. By filtering Temur through European chronicles and classical ideals, Marlowe transforms a historically situated ruler into a symbolic figure of limitless ambition and human potential.

This transformation reflects central concerns of Renaissance thought.

Tamburlaine challenges inherited authority, religious limitation, and moral restraint, embodying the humanist emphasis on self-fashioning and personal achievement. At the same time, the excessive violence and ambition depicted in the play suggest an implicit critique of unrestrained power (Bartlett, 2003). Thus, Marlowe's interpretation of Amir Temur functions as a dramatic exploration of power and ambition rather than a faithful historical account.

Conclusion: In accordance with the IMRAD model and OAK standards, this study demonstrates that Christopher Marlowe's portrayal of Amir Temur is grounded in historical sources available in sixteenth-century Europe but significantly transformed by Renaissance ideology. Marlowe's Tamburlaine is not a documentary representation of the historical ruler; instead, it is a symbolic construct through which early modern drama interrogates power, authority, and ambition. This analysis confirms that history in Marlowe's drama serves a philosophical and aesthetic function rather than a factual one.

References

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