



## EUROPEAN CONCEPTION OF ISLAM THROUGH *THE DIVINE COMEDY* AND *TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT*

Aydın GÖRMEZ\*

Zehra EKİNEKER\*\*

### ABSTRACT

This paper has been prepared in an attempt to evaluate European conception of Islam in Medieval and Elizabethan periods through the analysis of two prominent literary works. One of them is *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri and the other one is *Tamburlaine the Great* by Christopher Marlowe. While the first one is a work written in medieval ages by an Italian poet, the second one was written in Elizabethan period by an English playwright. Before the analysis of these two works the relationship between Europe and Islam will be presented for a better understanding of the issue. And later the details of the works as regard to European conception of Islam will be handled. By studying the works of two European writers of different origin and periods it is aimed to present a comprehensive analysis of the European conception of Islam.

Key Words: Europe, Islam, Medieval Period, Elizabethan Period, Divine Comedy, Tamburlaine the Great.

## İLAHI KOMEDYA VE BÜYÜK TIMUR OYUNLARINDA AVRUPA'NIN İSLAM ANLAYIŞI

### ÖZ

Bu çalışma iki önemli eser ışığında Orta Çağ ve Elizabeth dönemlerindeki Avrupa'nın İslam anlayışını değerlendirmek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Eserlerden biri Dante Alighieri tarafından yazılan *İlahi Komedy*, diğeri de Christopher Marlow'un *Büyük Timur* adlı eseridir. Birinci eser Orta Çağ'da İtalyan bir şair tarafından yazılmış, ikincisi ise Elizabeth döneminde bir İngiliz oyun yazarı tarafından yazılmıştır. Bu iki eserin analizinden önce konunun daha iyi anlaşılması için Avrupa ve İslam arasındaki ilişki ele alınacaktır. Daha sonra ise oyunların ayrıntıları Avrupa'nın İslam anlayışı açısından irdelenecektir. Farklı kökenlere sahip ve farklı dönemlerde yaşamış olan iki Avrupalı yazarın eserleri üzerinde çalışarak Avrupa'nın İslam anlayışına dair daha kapsayıcı bir analiz ortaya koymak amaçlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa, İslam, Orta Çağ Dönemi, Elizabeth Dönemi, İlahi Komedy, Büyük Timur.

\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı,  
[aydingormez@hotmail.com](mailto:aydingormez@hotmail.com)

\*\* Okutman, Bingöl Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, [zehraekineker@hotmail.com](mailto:zehraekineker@hotmail.com)



## Introduction

With this paper we aim to focus on literary aspect of Orientalism by examining two different European works in terms of their way of handling Islam. One of them is Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri and the other one is Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe. While the first one is a work written in medieval ages by an Italian poet, the second one was written in Elizabethan period by an English playwright. By studying on works of different European writers and periods, comprehensive analysis of the European perception of Islam will be provided. Before moving onto the details of the works, we think that it is of utmost importance to understand how Islam was perceived by the Europeans during the periods in which these works were produced.

Orient has been regarded as the complimentary opposite of the West since ancient times and as an integral part of and closely associated with European civilization and culture in the sense that “the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said, 1979: p. 1). The Orient has come to be an integral part of Europe for several other reasons. Firstly it is closely associated with the birth of three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And of course in European realm it is with regard to the birth of Christianity, and therefore to Biblical revelation since Jesus was born in Palestine and his message spread from there. Secondly the mutual military interactions between the West and Islamic East helped the issue to gain a new and broader dimension. The European rush into the Islamic and holy lands during the Crusades and Islamic conquests reaching as far as Spain during the period of Umayyad Caliphate and later in Ottoman period as far as East Europe constituted a significant part of that military interaction. As Daniel puts it: “Violence had a double significance in the relations of Islam and Christendom: force was used by Islam and against it” (2000: p. 131). During all this turmoil Islam was on stage as a part of this relationship between the East and the West. The heavy cost of Crusades on the side of Europeans and traumata caused by it along with the rapid expansion of Islam especially in Ottoman period resulted in European fear and hatred of Islam. It was regarded a threat to Christendom as put by Bernard Lewis: “For more than 1,400 years, since the advent of Islam



in Arabia and then into the Islamic empire and civilization of the formerly Christian eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, Islam and Christendom have lived side by side—always as neighbours, often as rivals, sometimes as enemies” (1993: p. vii).

Islam was regarded as a threat to Europe not only for military reasons but also for a more subtle reason which was based on prejudices against Islam. For the Christians Islam was something new and distant in nature, which made them to end up with creating a “median category” for Islam, “a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing” (Said, 1979: p. 58). As a result it was judged that Islam was a manipulative new version of Christianity named as Mohammedanism since it was believed to have been created by a former Christian who renounced his religion and ended up with being labelled as infidel, fraudulent and schismatic. In that sense the polemic name “Mohammedanism” was given to Islam. For the Christians “Islam was at best a heresy, more usually a false doctrine, founded by one who was variously depicted, at different stages in the evolution of European consciousness, as a heretic, an impostor, and later, in the age of the Enlightenment, an Enthusiast” (Lewis, 1993: p. 7).

The echoes of above mentioned misconceptions can be seen in a plethora of European literary works throughout history. In accordance with the context of this study the European misconception of Islam is aimed to be specified based on Middle Age and Elizabethan period.

In the context of medieval literary works the term “Saracen” came to refer to the Muslims and Prophet Mohammed was represented as the devil or Antichrist and he was assumed to be an idol of his followers. “Like in polytheistic practice a Saracen is introduced as a pagan who swore first by Muhammad as his powerful god and then God, The Almighty” (Al-Olaqi, 2012a: p. 65). For Europeans, the Muslims came to be associated with violence, lust and fraud. In *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Norman Daniel discusses the place of self-indulgence in the attack on Islam and concludes that “In general sexual licentiousness, whether with women or extended to various unnatural forms of indulgence, was associated with Islam” (2000: p. 168). According to this tradition of anti-Islamic polemic “sexuality and violence were the characteristic marks of Islam” (2000: p. 169).

As for the Elizabethan period the attitude was not different. For Al-Olaqi, the Elizabethan dramatists “treated the Muslims unkindly as foreign to the English life. Hostility is obvious in Marlowe, Shakespeare, Greene, Massinger,...” (2012a: p. 66). As a result of the



Ottoman superiority and threat on Elizabethan England, their perception of Islam was mainly Turkish. The Turks were so closely associated with Islam that someone who converted to Islam was depicted as “turned Turk” instead of “turned Muslim” as it is put by Lewis, “Turk, the name of by far the most powerful and important of the Muslim states, even became a synonym for Muslim, and a convert to Islam was said to have “turned Turk” wherever the conversion took place” (1993: p. 7). The European response to Ottoman threat was reflected in Elizabethan plays and it was also a way of attacking on Islam. However at the same time “Christian authors witnessing the Islamic conquests had scant interest in the learning high culture, and frequent magnificence of the Muslims” (Said, 1979: p. 59). This interest of the Elizabethan playwrights in Orient accompanied with the curiosity and appreciation of the audience led to a high amount of plays produced in that period. Louis Wann, in “The Oriental in Elizabethan Drama”, identifies a corpus of 47 Elizabethan plays written between 1558 and 1642 dealing with Oriental matter and covering events that took place since the rise of Ottoman Empire in the Thirteenth Century (1915: p. 423-426). According to Linda McJanet there is no any consensus among scholars as to the historical accuracy of these plays (2009: p. 182), which is also confessed by Wann: “In brief, the characterization of Oriental matter is fairly accurate considering the fact that the great majority of dramatists very likely never saw one of them (those from the Orient such as Turks, Jews, Africans, Persians, Tartars, Arabs, and Egyptians)” (1915: p. 182). On the other hand, according to McJanet, Warner Grenelle Rice, in her unpublished dissertation, *Turk, Moor, and Persian in English Literature from 1550–1660 with Particular Reference to the Drama*, and Samuel C. Chew, in *The Crescent and the Rose* don’t see the representations of Orient as fairly accurate and focus on plays’ prejudice towards the Orient and artistic failure by arguing that the representations of Islamic characters are examples to “monstrous cultural stereotypes” (2009: p. 183). For example in *Tamburlaine the Great*, the grave of Prophet Mohammed is quite incorrectly presented to be in Kaaba’s roof in Makkah (Marlowe, 1966: p. 107).

The tradition of Oriental playwriting and naturally accompanying disinformation about Islam continues for later periods as well. Theatregoers find the opportunity to see on London stage large number of matters about Islam and to learn playwrights’ opinions on elaborations of it.



### Islam in *Divine Comedy*

It has been a controversial issue among Dante scholars whether or to what degree oriental influences had an inspiring role in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In more specific terms the debate focused primarily on the influence of Muslim eschatology, namely the very nature of Islamic tradition of mi 'raj as a source for *Divine Comedy*, in which Dante starts out a spiritual journey to inferno, purgatorio and paradise, which bears in certain ways similarities with that of Prophet Mohammed. What is aimed in this paper is however to show the attitude adopted by Dante towards Islam and its constituents in *Divine Comedy* rather than to be a part of the controversy. In his journey, Dante the pilgrim meets Prophet Mohammed in inferno's 28th canto, which is a reversal of what is actually in Mi'raj. Of nine circles of the Hell, Prophet Mohammed is located in the eighth circle, which is the circle of fraud, the gravity of which is expressed by Virgil, who accompanies Dante throughout his journey of infernal places and purgatorio as in follows:

But because fraud is an evil proper to man, it is  
more displeasing to God; and therefore the  
fraudulent have a lower place and greater pain  
assails them. (1996: p. 171)

In the context of Dante's inferno fraud is divided into two, simple fraud and treacherous fraud taking their parts in the eighth and ninth circles respectively. So after Prophet Mohammed come only those treacherous sinners. Before Dante reaches the eighth circle, in which Prophet Mohammed and other sinners are assumedly located, he encounters various inhabitants of the previous circles, which are the circles of lust, gluttony, avarice-prodigality, anger and heresy. Moreover he is also located in the ninth bolgia of the eighth circle, the disgusting mode of which, for Dante, can be compared to nothing in the Hell. Considering all into account, it is easy to see the fact that he belongs to a rigid hierarchy of evils and he has a disgusting punishment: "he is endlessly being cleft in two from his chin to his anus like, Dante says, a cask whose staves are ripped apart" (Said, 1979: p. 69). The fact that the punishment takes place in the second deepest part of Hell means, for such critics as Otfried Lieberknecht, "a more severe condemnation. And this more severe condemnation does not imply an exculpation from the less grave sin of heresy, because according to the general rule each soul is punished at the place of his (or her) gravest sin" (1997: p. 3). The encounter with Prophet Mohammed is depicted as follows:





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Between his legs dangled his intestines; the pluck  
was visible, and the wretched bag that makes shit  
of what is swallowed.

While I was all absorbed in the sight of him, he,  
gazing back at me, with his hands opened up his  
breast, saying: "Now see how I spread myself  
See how Mohammed is tom open! (Alighieri, 1996, p. 433-435)

This circle of Hell belongs to people who are accused of schism and Prophet Mohammed is assumed to be one of them since he is believed to have invented a new religion against Christianity and that is why he is cloven like every sinner in that circle. Actually the idea that Bible is not the last revelation of God to human beings but Qur'an, and Jesus the Christ is not the last messenger of God but Prophet Mohammed is, in its very sense, a very provocative one for the Christians, causing one fourth of the world population to have faith in what is called heresy.

Another aspect of the situation is that the last four circles of the Hell, which include the heretics, violent, fraudulent and treacherous, are located in the city of Dis, which is named as ruddy city by Dante. The city of Dis first appears in the eighth canto as a place containing weighty sinners and described by Dante as "Master, [here Dante addresses to Virgil] already I discern its mosques there clearly within the moat, as red as if they had just come out of the fire" (Alighieri, 1996: p. 131). The existence of mosques, which is something closely associated with Islam, in the city of Dis, where weighty sinners are located, is a deliberate attempt by Dante to distort the image of an Islamic element. In this way "Dante is repeating the common medieval Christian slander that Islam was a form of devil worship and that the characteristic architecture of the mosque and minaret was inspired by the devils" (p. 136). Upon Dante's question to Virgil as to why the inhabitants of the previous four circles too aren't punished in the city of Dis as the last four, Virgil puts the last touches on the conversation with a striking answer by saying self indulgence, which in this realm covers lust, gluttony, avarice-prodigality and anger, offends God less and acquires less blame.

In the fourth canto the reader comes across the first circle of the inferno which is called Limbo. Limbo hosts those people who weren't sinful but lived before Christianity and thus were deprived of baptism, which is, in Virgil's terms, "the gateway to the faith" (p. 73). Limbo previously hosted Adam, his son Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, Israel and his father and children along with Rachel (Israel's wife) and many others until the time Jesus the



Christ descended into the Hell and honoured them with heaven. The inhabitants of Limbo are different from those of subsequent circles because they aren't exposed to any torture, living in desire without hope being their only punishment. It is the desire of being blessed by God. The fact that those aforementioned people were originally put into the first circle of Inferno by Dante is loosely based on the in Christian belief that there is a place for baptised children and people having lived before Christ and having faith in his prospective prophecy. However it is between Hell and Purgatory not in Inferno as Dante presents. Moreover the salvation of souls starts with the birth of Christ. What is interesting in this part however is the existence of some Muslims in Limbo when we think that in the context of Divine Comedy, they should have been in the subsequent circles like Prophet Mohammed and Ali. The situation is explained by Edward Said as follows:

Earlier in the Inferno, a small group of Muslims turns up. Avicenna, Averroes, and Saladin are among those virtuous heathens who, along with Hector, Aeneas, Abraham, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, are confined to the first circle of the Inferno, there to suffer a minimal (and even honourable) punishment for not having had the benefit of Christian revelation. Dante, of course, admires their great virtues and accomplishments, but because they were not Christians he must condemn them, however lightly, to Hell. (1979: p. 69)

The existence of those “virtuous heathens” in Limbo proves the European mentality that Prophet Mohammed and his partisans are seen as the source of all evil to such a degree that a high number of people along with those virtuous ones are drawn away from the true faith which is Christianity. According to Professor Annemarie Schimmel “More than any other historical figure, Muhammad has aroused fear, hatred, and even contempt in the Christian world. Dante, in his Divine Comedy, only expressed what innumerable medieval Christians felt when he condemned Muhammad to the lowest pit of hell” (qtd. by Hoffmann, 1996: p. 90). Dante's poetic perception of Islam is an example to the European misconception of Islam. In this way it can be argued that Islam and its representatives are designated creatures of Western vision based on the perceptions of Europeans rather than any empirical data.

### **Islam in *Tamburlaine the Great***

*Tamburlaine the Great*, the two-part play by Christopher Marlowe is based on the life of the Timurid emperor, Timur as an account of his achievements and cruelty summed up at the very beginning 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” (1966: p. 1). Tamburlaine is a good example to have a better understanding of the attitude adopted by Elizabethan Europeans towards Islam and Ottoman Empire as it is very strikingly expressed by Cemil Meriç: “Even if we burn all Qur’ans and destroy all mosques we are still Ottoman for Europe; Ottoman, that is to say Islam. A dark, dangerous and hostile mass” (1979: p. 9). Tamburlaine’s battles against and his successive victories over the Turks along with an intolerable degree of humiliation of them make up a significant part of the play. Tamburlaine doesn’t humiliate sultans of other defeated countries as much as he does Turkish Bajazeth and his wife and Orcanes and other governors in the first and second parts of the play respectively. After the first defeat of Ottomans, (because Ottomans are defeated by Tamburlaine’s army three times in the play), Tamburlaine puts emperor Bajazeth into a cage and takes him wherever he goes. Moreover Tamburlaine uses him as a footstool so that he can rise into his royal throne. As a result of this extraordinary assault Bajazeth ends up with committing suicide by crashing his head against the cage. Similarly in the second part of the play Orcanes and other Ottoman governors are made to drag the chariot of Tamburlaine and later executed. For Hamit Çalışkan “Assuming Tamburlaine as a figure sent by God in order to punish humans and evil deeds is a prevalent perspective. However there is also a second one in which Tamburlaine is seen as a beauty lover pagan who protects Christian Europe against Islam” (1996: p. 21). The issue can be handled with an integration of these two perspectives. Firstly Tamburlaine declares himself as scourge and wrath of the pagan god Zeus. However while carrying out that supposedly spiritual (God-given) mission, he doesn’t make any discrimination between good and evil, which he calls “war’s justice” (1966: p. 123). In the first part of the play during the conquest of Damascus, four virgins of the city are sent to Tamburlaine for appeal which aims to “through the eyes and ears of Tamburlaine, convey events of mercy to his heart” (1966: p. 59). However their attempt ends up with failure and they are killed to be hanged on Damascus walls. Again in the second part of the play after the conquest of Babylon, Tamburlaine orders that all inhabitants of the city - men, women, children - are drowned in the lake so that no living being remains. That is why those exposed to his tyranny think he has been sent from Hell to be an overall trouble for the world. Secondly, Tamburlaine seems to have a sort of sympathy for the Christians who have been downtrodden under the Ottoman menace. At one point in the play Tamburlaine proves that clearly:





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Tamburlaine: I that am term'd the scourge and wrath of God  
The only fear and terror of the world,  
Will first subdue the Turk, and then enlarge  
Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves,  
Burdening their bodies with your heavy chains,  
And feeding them with thin and slender fare,  
That naked row about the Terrene sea,  
And, when they chance to breathe and rest a space,  
Are punish'd with bastones so grievously  
That they lie panting on the galley's side  
And strive for life at every stroke they give. (p. 39)

At this point it is possible to get the impression that Tamburlaine is the one sent by God against the Ottoman Empire to defend the rights of these downtrodden Christians. Another example to Tamburlaine's sympathy for the Christians is the statement of one of the (Muslim) citizens of Babylon who requests the Governor of Babylon to send the Georgian Christians living in the city to make an appeal for mercy since he thinks they have always been helped and sympathized by Tamburlaine.

Despite the fact that there was a long distance between England and Ottoman Empire Marlowe, like other Elizabethans, was aware of Turkish threat on Western Europe. With the character of Tamburlaine who spoils and defeats Turks, Marlowe tries to diminish the distress of Europeans. According to Oueijan "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" (qtd. by Al-Olaqi, 2012b: p. 183).

As for Islam, Marlowe's reference to Quranic God, Prophet Mohammed and Qur'an throughout the play is remarkable in quantity with 23 references to Prophet Mohammed making up the most of the total. In most of these references Prophet Mohammed and Qur'an are depicted holy and spiritual. The Muslims in the play swear by Prophet Mohammed and by the holy Qur'an. Even Tamburlaine swears by his name twice in the play. Yet there exist some misconceptions in the way Prophet Mohammed is presented by Marlowe. First of all as a result of European misconception of regarding Prophet Mohammed as the creator of a manipulative version of Christianity, which is Islam, and thus as the idol of the Muslims, Muslim characters are presented as praying to him for the forgiveness of their sins not to God. That is a European misconception in that the Muslims acknowledge the spirituality of Prophet Mohammad but not his divinity as the Christians do for Christ. Similarly in the accounts of Muslim characters Prophet Mohammed is presented to play an intermediary role between God



and the Muslims, which is again against Islamic faith because the Muslims want directly what they want from God. There is no need for any kind of intermediary to get the message across. The following example in the play will be of great benefit to understand the issue.

Olympia: Ah, sacred Mahomet, if this be sin,  
Entreat a pardon of the God of heaven  
And purge my soul before it come to thee. (Marlowe, 1966: p. 112)

Secondly Muslim characters are depicted inconsistently in the way they worship. First of all at one point in the play we see Orcanes swearing by Sacred Mohammed in order to confirm his alliance with Sigismond, the King of Hungary. Yet in some other time, when Sigismond and his other generals prove to be unfaithful to their alliance by taking arms against Ottomans, the same Orcanes is depicted to be praying to both Islamic God and Jesus Christ to help the Ottomans defeat “the treacherous army of Christians” (Marlowe, 1966: p. 95).

Orcanes poetically demands Cynthia, which was originally an epithet given to Artemis, Greek goddess of the moon, to open its veil so that God beholds the treachery of the Christians and punishes them:

Orcanes: Open, thou shining veil of Cynthia,  
And make a passage from the imperial heaven,  
That he that sits on high and never sleeps,  
Nor in one place is circumscribable,  
But everywhere fills every continent  
With strange infusion of his sacred vigour,  
May, in his endless power and purity,  
Behold and venge this traitor’s perjury! (Marlowe, 1966: p. 96)

Marlowe seems to have made use of Quranic vocabulary in Orcanes’ depiction of God, because the way God is depicted here is very similar to the one in Ayat al Kursi. After demanding God’s punishment Orcanes makes an appeal to Christ too:

Orcanes: Thou Christ that art esteem’d omnipotent,  
If thou wilt prove thyself a perfect God,  
Worthy the worship of all faithful hearts,  
Be now reveng’d upon this traitor’s soul,  
And make the power I have left behind  
(Too little to defend our guiltless lives)  
Sufficient to discomfort and confound  
The trustless force of those false Christians.  
To arms, my lords! on Christ still let us cry:  
If there be Christ, we shall have victory. (Marlowe, 1966, p. 96)



At the surface level Marlowe may seem to have included an anti-Christian element in the play by depicting the treachery and defeat of these Hungarian Christians. However as Jeff Dailey argues, in his article “Christian Underscoring in Tamburlaine the Great, Part II”: “the theme of the sub-plot is not an anti-Christian message, but rather a moral one” (2005: p. 149). Those, whether the Christians or the Muslims, are bound to receive their deserved punishment if they break a holy oath. That is also acknowledged by Sigismund as a “mortal well-deserved wound” (Marlowe, 1966: p. 96) and Orcanes, who attributes their victory to the justice of Christ and to the power of God. “There is also a more covert theological message in this speech. By calling on Christ to help, Orcanes acknowledges Jesus' divinity, and, by extension, the Trinity” (Dailey, 2005: p. 149). The Muslims believe in the prophecy of Jesus Christ but don't believe in his divinity and also the Trinity as they do the same for Prophet Mohammed. Later at a particular point in the second part of the play, when Orcanes and other Ottoman governors are kept as the captives of Tamburlaine, we see Orcanes making a desperate appeal to the pagan god of underworld for help, which remains unanswered.

Thirdly, another misconception in the play is with regard to the place of Prophet Mohammed's grave, which is actually in Medina not in Kaaba's roof in Makkah as quite incorrectly presented in the play.

Al-Olaqi argues that “Marlowe has established the text of Tamburlaine with the help of Quranic vocabulary. Thus, the Islamic colouring of *Tamburlaine* is merely decorative and used to amuse the Elizabethan audience rather than to boost an idea about Islam” (2012b: p. 182). The assault on Islam reaches a climactic point in the second part of the play when Tamburlaine burns Quran and insults Prophet Mohammed. Marlowe's hero, Tamburlaine orders his soldiers to collect the copies of the Quran and other superstitious books from the Islamic temples,

Tamburlaine: Now, Casane, 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. (1966: p. 137).

Marlowe calls it the “Turkish Alcoran” as he feels the Ottoman threat to Christendom. And in the subsequent lines he reveals his pride with the power of his sword which sent “millions of Turks to hell, slew all his priests, his kinsmen, and his friends, And yet [he still] live[s] untouch'd by Mahomet” (1966: p. 137). He also thinks Prophet



Mohammed as the idol of Muslims saying “In vain, I see, men worship Mahomet” (1966: p. 137).

In the burning Quran scene Tamburlaine challenges and mocks Prophet Mohammed to come and prevent Tamburlaine from burning it by showing a miracle. Moreover he depicts Prophet Mohammed as being in hell and unable to hear his voice:

Tamburlaine: Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power,  
Come down thyself and work a miracle:  
Thou art not worthy to be worshipped  
That suffer'st flames of fire to burn the writ  
Wherein the sum of thy religion rests:  
Why send'st Tamburlaine thou not a furious whirlwind down,  
To blow thy Alcoran up to thy throne,  
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?—  
Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell;  
He cannot hear the voice of Tamburlaine:  
Seek out another godhead to adore;  
The God that sits in heaven, if any god,  
For he is God alone, and none but he. (Marlowe, 1966: p. 138)

As Dailey argues “This is actually an intensely Christian moment” (2005: p. 153). Marlowe attacks Islam, Prophet Mohammed and his theology with the characterization of Tamburlaine and his attack can be regarded as natural when we take the historical process into consideration. Here Tamburlaine's burning of the Quran and humiliation of Prophet Mohammed seems to symbolize Christian power and victory over Islam and Ottoman Empire and the powerfulness of Mohammedanism.

The fact that there is some sort of controversy as to Marlowe's religious or nonreligious affiliations can pave the way for different interpretations of the complex religious themes of the play. And it is not certain to say whether Marlowe was really an atheist or Arian or Trinitarian in his life. However what is for sure is that there is an extraordinary attack on Islam and its representatives. Even when we take it for granted that Marlowe was really an atheist as some critics have argued he uses Islam and Prophet Mohammed as a means to attack all divine and holy entities including Christianity. If Marlowe believed in Trinity or held anti-Trinitarian views, which doesn't necessarily mean the same thing as atheism, again the attack is on Islam with a remarkable Christian emphasis.



## Conclusion

Based on what has been presented above, it becomes possible to conclude that European conception of Islam in the Medieval and Elizabethan periods was a mixture of fear and prejudice, which can also be seen in modern times. The source of these impressions about Islam was due to the fact that Christendom saw Islam as a manipulative version of Christianity and Prophet Mohammed as infidel. Secondly the widening of Islamic boundaries took place in a way so that it became a constant threat on Europe. Consequently they ended up with reflecting their impressions of Islam through their literary works in a way to control the threat exposed by the Islam and its representatives. In that sense the main attack is on Prophet Mohammed and both Dante and Marlowe put Prophet Mohammed into Hell.

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