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**“A warre ... commodious”: dramatizing Islamic schism in and after**

*Tamburlaine*

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this essay is to show how the *Tamburlaine* plays, by dramatizing intra-Islamic conflict between an insistently Persian Tamburlaine and his Turkish enemies, and Tamburlaine's extraordinary military successes and imperial gains, engage intensely and provocatively with religious schism and imperial sovereignty, two abiding and interlocked political concerns of late-Elizabethan London. And they do so in full consciousness of their domestic relevance and interest, I argue. Marlowe's exploration of Tamburlaine's imperial drive thus articulates and tests his contemporaries' interest in classical Persian models of empire and in the contemporary Persian schismatic stance within the Islamic world. Finally, my essay considers the surprisingly muted legacy of Marlowe's dramatization of Islamic schism on the early modern stage. The essay concludes by focussing on the single play of the era that responds most strongly and sensitively to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays: *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607). Here, once again, we find rehearsed their agenda to test English imperial fantasies mediated through the Persian model and facilitated in their dreaming by the schism dividing Persia from its more powerful Ottoman neighbours:.

In one of the best-known moments of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays the eponymous hero orders that copies of the "Turkish Alcoran" (2: 5.1.172) be burned. The play's spectators watch as his orders are carried out, to Tamburlaine's jeering dare: "Now, Mahomet, if thou have any power, / Come down thyself and work a miracle" (2: 5.3.186-87). The dare has no immediate effect, temporarily gratifying the Christian spectator's expectations. But a mere thirty-one lines later, Tamburlaine is suddenly stricken with "distemper", of which he will soon die – although not before his physician has also had a chance to give a convincing medical account of what ails him. This sensational scene has fuelled many a critical argument about Tamburlaine's self-understanding as the "scourge of God", and the grammatical double-speaking of that formulation: is Tamburlaine a scourge sent by God to the Muslim world, for the benefit of Christians, as John Foxe sees it? Or might he be the instrument of a wrathful Old Testament God's anger with Christians for their divisions and divergences from the true path, a Muslim scourge sent to punish them, as Richard Knolles viewed the mighty Ottoman emperors? Further questions arise given the Second Part's pronounced construction of Tamburlaine as a Muslim, or at least a certain stereotype of Muslim identity. From occasionally invoking pagan gods in Part One, Tamburlaine goes on to swear "by sacred Mahomet" (2: 1.3.109), and – killing his own son, torturing and humiliating those he has conquered, becoming increasingly obsessed with imperial expansion and with being "a terror to the world" (2: 4.2.201) – he seems to fall ever more closely into line with prevailing English stereotypes of the cruel Islamic despot.

<sup>1</sup> But what might a Muslim Tamburlaine understand himself to be doing in burning the Koran?

The answer, perhaps, lies in the complexities of Tamburlaine's own religious and political identity within Marlowe's plays (and their sources), as well as in the reciprocal understanding that Marlowe could have expected from his first audiences. And the answer, thus pursued, sheds light on important but hitherto neglected aspects of the play: its engagement with a more complex and varied idea of Islam than the "Turk" stereotype prevailing in most modern scholarship acknowledges, as well as the domestic subtexts of this exploration of intra-Islamic conflict and schism. This essay suggests that we must turn our attention to Tamburlaine's aspirational Persian identity, an identity upon which he insists both in words and actions throughout the two Parts, to understand his acts – and their interest for Marlowe's first audiences. Because Tamburlaine's aspirational Persian identity allowed him to be read by those first audiences as, among other things, a dissenting true believer like themselves (albeit within the Islamic tradition), and a timely surrogate for English Protestant imperial ambitions. It is the religious and political associations of Tamburlaine's Persian identity, and the intertexts that it evokes, that make sense – and substance – of the Koran-burning scene, as well as of the geopolitical purview of Marlowe's plays. In transforming the Mongol Timur of his sources to a Scythian shepherd-turned-Persian emperor, Marlowe brings his play right up to date with the domestic and international interests of his audiences, and charges his play with two topical but risky themes: religious schism and empire.

As the Persian king he repeatedly styles himself, I propose, Tamburlaine becomes readable to early English audiences familiar with classical and contemporary Persia (and

perhaps even with recent news of the 1587 accession of Shah Abbas) as a Shi'a Muslim ruler, opposed by belief as well as expediency to the Sunni Ottomans with whom he craves battle in both Parts. In burning the Koran, then, Tamburlaine expressly burns the "Turkish Alcoran", the Sunni Koran over which Persian Shi'ites traditionally had some doubts.<sup>2</sup> This may not have been the bizarre idea it seems today, in an age where agitators and agents or supporters of anti-Islamic states have been known to burn the Koran as a provocative action against the wider Muslim community.<sup>3</sup> In Marlowe's chief source for the *Tamburlaine* plays, George Whetstone's *The Englysh Myrror* (1586), immediately following the narratives of Usun Hasan (whose name he borrows for one of Tamburlaine's chief supporters), Marlowe could have found this very point, somewhat embellished but knowledgeably centred on the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Persia in 1501, and, of their institution of Shi'a Islam as the state religion:

In [Usun Hasan's] time, in *Persia* began the empire of *Sophy*: who is to this day a bridle to the *Turke*, & a hindrer of dammage to the christians: which *empire* [italics added] began by one *Ismael*, [tha]t named him self a Prophet, & published an *Alcoran* contrary to *Mahomets*, by which meanes he asse[m]bled many people, by whose aide he ouerthrew certaine *Bassas* of *Baiazet*, & made him selfe lord of *Pertia* & other prouinces (75).

(No such alternative Koran exists, but much of Ismail's authority came from his claim to trace his lineage to Ali, the first Shi'a Imam.)<sup>4</sup> In the Koran-burning scene, then, we see a typical Marlovian strategy: the amplifying of a critical tension to breaking-point in an

outrageous, shocking image. Thus, rather than being simply a hubristic, or blasphemous or even anti-Islamic act, the Koran-burning scene becomes a powerful if hyperbolic statement of the schism between Shi'a Persians and Sunni Ottomans that, through his consistent emphasis on the hostility between Persian Tamburlaine and the Ottoman Turks, Marlowe preserves throughout both Parts. And if the scene can be read in this way by his first audiences, modern scholars may need to re-appraise the Turk-centred critical narratives of English understandings and representations of Islam during this crucial period.

This interpretation rests, of course, on a stronger appreciation of Tamburlaine's self-fashioned identity as a Persian rather than simply as a Scythian "shepherd by my parentage" (1:1.2.35). Although aspirational, Tamburlaine's Persian identity is supported both by his friends, and by the larger structures of the two Parts; his enemies hurl insults about his Scythian origins, but Tamburlaine's achievements – and their own villainy – expose the poverty of these primarily pejorative expostulations. Rule of Persia is not Tamburlaine's first ambition in the plays, nor is it even his last. But it does prove to be the position from which his global ambitions can be most effectively and convincingly pursued, as well as the identity that most comfortably fits him. As a Scythian shepherd, Tamburlaine carries well-worn associations of barbarity, intransigence and incivility for early modern audiences, but his words and actions across both Parts – undeniably heroic, magnanimous, eloquent, even honourable and witty in his dealings with Mycetes over the Persian crown – exceed, and perhaps go so far as to belie this ethnic stereotype. Even his vices of cruelty and ambition are much more redolent of his adopted Persian identity (think of Alexander, or Darius) than of his original Scythian identity.

Tamburlaine himself stages his rejection of his original identity as Scythian shepherd in the famous “Lie here, ye weeds that I disdain to wear” scene (1: 1.2.41), for an as-yet vague but grander identity more suited to his aspirations: he and his companions “in conceit bear empires on our spears” (1: 1.2.64). He soon finds a focus for his ambition and his identity in Persia and the historical conceit of the Persian empire, in the catalytic scene where he contemplates the attractions of being able “To ride in triumph through Persepolis” (1: 2.5.49, 50 and 54), the city of the ancient Persian kings and emperors. It is specifically the “familiar Alexandrian image of Persian kingship”, as Javad Ghatta has pointed out, that Tamburlaine emulates, and which he finds both a repository and a stimulant for his global imperial ambitions.<sup>5</sup> As such, upon being crowned with Cosroe’s crown, Tamburlaine prompts his men to identify him as the heir to the Achaemenid (ancient Persian) kings and emperors: “Who think you now is King of Persia?” (1: 2.7.56), and he repeatedly insists on this identity in his oaths, threats and promises. Structurally, too, the plays support Tamburlaine’s privileging of his identity as King of Persia: Part One ends not with Tamburlaine’s victory over the “great Turk” (1: 5.1.533) Bajazeth or the Sultan of Egypt, but instead with Tamburlaine crowning Zenocrate Queen of Persia. Part Two ends with Tamburlaine’s dying moments when, viewing a map of the world allow he can emphasise his beginnings (“Scythia, where I first began” [2: 5.3.144]), but more importantly, his Persian destiny, the slightly reworked, preferred narrative of his career: “Here I began to march towards Persia” (2: 5.3.127). Tamburlaine’s adopted Persian identity, therefore, grounds the meaning of his words and actions far more than Scythia does, and it more accurately expresses the mixture of classical precedent and contemporary concerns that he embodies. Finally, his

self-styled Persian identity allows Marlowe's audiences, probably acquainted (as I will later show) with the relatively recent institution of Shi'a Islam as the Persian state religion under the Safavid kings, to read Tamburlaine as a Shi'a ruler, and to read his hostility to the Turks in both Parts of the play as the expression of both sectarian and more purely strategic hostility. In other words, Marlowe's plays evoke for his first audiences the all too familiar proliferation of schism – Islamic or Christian – as geopolitics.

The purpose of this essay, then, is to show how the *Tamburlaine* plays, by dramatizing intra-Islamic conflict between an insistently Persian Tamburlaine and his Turkish enemies, and Tamburlaine's extraordinary military successes and imperial gains, engage intensely and provocatively with religious schism and imperial sovereignty, two abiding and interlocked political concerns of late-Elizabethan London. And they do so in full consciousness of their domestic relevance and interest, I argue. Marlowe's exploration of Tamburlaine's imperial drive thus articulates and tests his contemporaries' interest in classical Persian models of empire and in the contemporary Persian schismatic stance within the Islamic world. Finally, my essay considers the surprisingly muted legacy of Marlowe's dramatization of Islamic schism on the early modern stage.

The kind of English political work performed by Marlowe's dramatic treatment of Islamic schism has rarely received much attention. And yet, the testing of Islamic beliefs and authority in the Koran-burning scene openly parallels the play's testing of Christian beliefs and authority earlier in Part Two. A Muslim character, victorious over perfidious Christians, remember that he had called on Christ to help avenge the betrayal of the Christians' vow in his name, leaving him with the troubling implication that "Christ *or*

Mahomet hath been my friend” (2: 2.3.11; italics added). In dramatizing moments of both Christian and Muslim religious doubt and dubiously-invoked authority in this way, Marlowe implies that it is not so much the relative power of Christ or Mohammed that is at issue, as it is the social and political bonds and commitments that religious belief facilitates and underwrites. Or does not underwrite: the Christians had decided not to honour their vow to Orcanes on the grounds that “with such infidels / In whom no faith nor true religion rests, / We are not bound to those accomplishments / The holy laws of Christendom enjoin” (2: 2.1.33-36). Marlowe leaves no moral high ground for his Christian audiences in showing the allied Christian forces scrabbling for theological justification for their self-serving political decisions. No mere equivocation, born out of the conditions and exigencies of early modern might schism, this. Marlowe’s parallel invites the stronger point that his audiences could more comfortably perceive as the political underpinnings of *Islamic* schism, as interpreted by English travellers and commentators: that “[t]he Sultans or Deputies of Persia, [...] used that their Schismaticall fancie, as they saw occasion, to their owne ambitious designes, vnder colour of Religion” (Purchas, 427).<sup>6</sup> The *Tamburlaine* plays close this gap between Islamic and Christian schism, showing that religious belief, like any other kind of belief, admits of startling flexibility. They further show that its social manifestations – and perhaps even origins – can be powered by politics as much as by any higher force. And this is the political hot potato that Marlowe addresses through his treatment of Islamic schism in the *Tamburlaine* plays. Small wonder, then, that those dramatists who seek to emulate *Tamburlaine*’s success prove less than keen to explore the topic of Islamic schism further.

The influence of the *Tamburlaine* plays on London theatrical culture in the 1590s has been much remarked upon. But it has also been notable for its neglect of the theme of Islamic schism in any but superficial ways, a neglect all the more surprising for its centrality to the *Tamburlaine* plays, but which has become reified within the critical narrative of the emergence of the “Turk” play (see Gurr 166-67; Berek 55-82). In fact, the most sensitive response to the central treatment of Islamic schism in the *Tamburlaine* plays comes not in the spate of “Turk” plays that began with *Selimus* (1594) and that regularly featured extravagant, barnstorming performances by Edward Alleyn (who had also played *Tamburlaine*). It came, instead, in a very different kind of play twenty years later: a heroic romance performed at the Red Bull theatre in 1607.<sup>7</sup> “Our sinnes are all alike, why not our God?”, one of the English heroes of *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607) asks of the Persian Sophy, and the play expends much energy in proving not so much the truth of that ecumenical claim as, in the spirit of *Tamburlaine*, the immateriality of certain kinds of religious difference when there are more politic (or lucrative) fish to fry. Although this later play arises out of the specific context of the Sherley brothers’ experiences in Persia, it shows strong debts to the treatment of Islamic schism in *Tamburlaine* in its positive weighting of Persian Shi’ism, in its evocation of the English imperial interests animating the protagonists, and in its heavy reliance on its audience’s familiarity with the sectarian differences dividing Ottomans and Persians. But the very fact that this is one of the most neglected plays of the Jacobean period also carries a historical lesson: the once-vibrant topic of Islamic schism and the “commodious” opportunities that it offered England – conceptually, politically, commercially – faded from view on the public and private stage, probably felled by its

sensitive domestic implications, and by the steady rise of pro-Ottoman interests at court and in the city.<sup>8</sup>

Until very recently, the *Tamburlaine* plays' engagement with issues of Islamic schism and empire, and their implications for Protestant England, have been obscured by the predominance of scholarly interest over the past decade in the literary and political figure of the "Turk". Ground-breaking scholarly work on English representations of Islam by Nabil Matar, Daniel Vitkus, Matthew Dimmock and numerous others has produced an influential critical discourse which has tended to flatten the known differences within the Islamic world (and across a spate of English plays that treat of the East) into the Ottoman-centred paradigm of the "Turk" play. By contrast, this essay argues for the profound, anti-Ottoman and domestic significance of Persia and Persians in early modern English drama, beginning with *Tamburlaine*, and for closer attention to the sensitive questions of schism and empire that the Persian material invite. In the next section of this essay, therefore, I develop my analysis of *Tamburlaine*'s Persian identity by taking a closer look at the 1580s and 1590s context of the hostilities between Ottomans and Persians, and the sources through which Marlowe and his audiences could have learned of the nature and progress of this conflict. This section also discusses the broader cultural significance of English commercial relations with the Ottomans in the 1580s, relations undertaken and shaped in full knowledge of Ottoman-Persian hostilities. But despite the beginnings of direct contact with Persia and the expanding body of accounts by English merchants and travellers there, classical authors remained the primary sources of English information about Persia in the late sixteenth century, and those with greatest cultural authority. The second major section of my essay thus argues

for Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as a vital intertext of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays, and the means by which the plays' interests in empire are often mediated. Finally, I look to the afterlife of the *Tamburlaine* plays, and the curious suppressing of their interests in Persia and in Islamic schism for the next twenty or so years, at least until *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607). My third section considers this fascinating play as it seeks to reanimate the Persian interests and imperial agenda first dramatized in the *Tamburlaine* plays. An appendix on the origins of the schism between the Shi'a and Sunni traditions concludes the essay.

### **1. Tamburlaine, Turks and Persians**

What, then, are the cues and sources for Marlowe's Persia, and how do they shape the plays? His principal source, George Whetstone's compilation of histories, *The Englysh Myrror* (1586), a distant translation of Pedro Mexia's *Silva de Varia Leccion* (1554), is a good place to start. The liberties that Marlowe takes with Whetstone are conspicuous and significant, and help to illuminate the nature of Marlowe's explorations of Islamic schism. Chief among them is the transformation of the physically debilitated Mongol ruler, Timur the Lame, into a striking figure of physical perfection, so naturally strong and "sovereign" as to be almost godlike. Whetstone's "poor labourer ... descended from the Part[h]ians" becomes a prepossessing Scythian shepherd. And, having used up most of the Whetstone material in Part One (the humiliation of Bajazeth [Bayezid] being the best-known feature), Marlowe invents new material for Part Two: the sub-plot involving the three sons, the continuation of the fate of the fictional Zenocrate, the burning of the Koran, the Ortelian map, and Tamburlaine's lament for the parts of the world left

undiscovered. Part Two also concerned itself with some of the key doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity: the interpretation of Jesus and his relationship to God, the authority of the Koran, the status of Mohammed as the final Prophet.

But Whetstone's account offered richer pickings than have hitherto been recognised. His main narrative of Tamburlaine (Book 1, chapter 12) closes with the observation of the enmity "(to the benefit of all christendo[m])" between the Persians and Turks. In the same section, he mentions a Persian ruler long after Timur, Usum Casan, "a mighty king of Persia", whose name Marlowe borrows for one of Tamburlaine's friends, as we have seen.<sup>9</sup> Whetstone also includes a section commending Tamburlaine's generosity to and good governance of his soldiers, which "made him both feared and loued" (Whetstone 80). Tamburlaine's strong identification with Persia is also vaguely suggested in Whetstone's articulation of his conquests, and Marlowe's comprehensive transposition of this Mongol warlord to the Persian milieu probably has its roots in Whetstone, although it may also have resonated with prevailing anti-Ottoman conceptions of Timur.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Whetstone's compendium contained all the materials and prompts that Marlowe needed to translate his narrative of a fourteenth-century Mongol warlord into the most topical contemporary terms: an exploration of contemporary religious schism and imperial ambition East and West.

As Protestant England well knew, the implications of religious schism are not just doctrinal and social, but also geopolitical. To early modern English eyes, Islamic schism manifests itself most visibly as ongoing conflict ("almost continuall warres") between the Ottomans and the Persians. A 1599 geographical compendium by the future Archbishop

of Canterbury, George Abbot, succinctly presents contemporary understandings of Islamic schism and its paralleling of Christian schism:

The Persians are all at this day Sarazens in religion, beleeuing on *Mahomet*; but as papists and protestants do differ in opinion concerning the same Christ, so do the Turkes and Persians about their *Mahomet*; the one pursuing the other as heretikes with most deadly hatred. In so much, that there be in this respect almost continuall warres betweene the Turkes, and the Persians. (Abbot C3v; see also Appendix).<sup>11</sup>

The sources of information about Islamic schism were diverse, ranging from the scholarly to the commercial, and the details of Shi'a contentions with Sunni Islam took root early on. Much of this information was synthesised in a 1595 English translation by Abraham Hartwell of Giovanni-Tommaso Minadoi's *Historia della Guerra fra Turchi, et Persiana* (1588), *The History of the Warres between the Turkes and the Persians* (printed 1595, but entered in the Stationers' Register in 1589).<sup>12</sup> Hartwell and Minadoi made a strong case for the potential benefits of Islamic schism to the Christian world, as they described Ottoman/Persian hostilities as

A warre not onely long & bloudie, but also very commodious and of great oportunitie to the Christian Common-wealth: for that it hath granted leisure to the Champions of Christ to refresh and encrease their forces, being now much weakened by warres both Forreine and Ciuill. A matter

in truth rather diuine then humane, there being now newly arisen among the *Turkes*, fresh hopes of victories, by meanes whereof (contrary to the custome of such contentions) the wrath of these two Princes was drawne in length, which if they had bene conuerted against *Europe*, might haue made our state most troublesome and turbulent. (Hartwell B3r).

A history written by an Italian doctor serving the Venetian merchant community in the Levant, this is not the specialist volume it might first appear. Englishmen such as Hakluyt, Purchas and Sir Thomas Cornwallis, who have interests in the Mediterranean trade and in English imperial enterprises, make ample use of it (see Scott-Warren). In any case, the idea that Islamic schism might be of benefit – even of providential benefit – to Christian states is a well-established one by 1595. Given the flourishing English trade with the Turks and their visibility in European affairs, Hartwell and Minadoi could be assured of an interested audience. Like Minadoi himself, Hartwell (secretary to Archbishop Whitgift, and a member of the Society of Antiquaries) plots his work somewhere between scholarship for its own sake and political exigency. As he tells it in his dedicatory epistle, his translation project has desultory beginnings and vague ambitions to include “certain aduertisementes and collections, aswell out of the old auncient writers both sacred and prophane, that haue written of the most stately & magnificent *Empire of the Medes and Persians in times past*” (italics added). These, however, are cut short as a sense of political urgency intervenes:

For ... wee see ... the power of the Turkes growe so huge and infinite, and their enemies so diuided and weakened, that vnlesse God come downe as it were out of an Engine, to protect the Gospell [sig. A4] of his Sonne Iesus Christ, and the Professors thereof, I feare greatly that the halfe Moone which now ruleth & raigneth almost ouer all the East, wil grow to the full, and breede such an Inundation as will utterly drowne al Christendome in the West. (Hartwell A3v-A4).

While this sense of scholarly idiosyncrasy combined with political immediacy is absolutely characteristic of the humanist philosophy of literature as counsel, it also reflects the perception of the relatively sudden emergence of the East as a player in European politics and commerce. Scholarship alone could not allay the popular interest in the East, in Islam, and, most of all, in empire. In a sermon printed in 1586 to mark (as the title has it) *The Baptizing of a Turke*, the clergyman and historian Meredith Hanmer strips away the pieties to reach the nub of the issue:

If wee were so desirous to haue our lights (I mean our fruits) so shine vp on the earth in these North partes of the world, where Christianitie is professed, as we are greedily bent to gette the earthly commodities of *Affrike*, *Asia*, and the hid treasures of the far *Indies*, we shoulde no doubt prouoke them out of the said cou[n]tries to seek after our God, and to bee rauished with the conuersation and steppes of the Christians, as they allure vs wyth fame of their commodities, to seeke after their forrain riches. And

wheras now one silly *Turk* is won, then thousands no doubt would  
receiue the faith. (Hanmer, A4v).

The strong political undercurrents of religious difference, whether within or between different religions; the overwhelming force of imperial ambition and its tendency to hide behind religious polemic; the ethics of empire and the politics of schism – Hanmer, writing at about the same time as Marlowe, covers similar terrain, concluding that far from gazing in wonder at evangelising Christian faith, “the heathens in far cou[n]tries do wo[n]der at the couetousnes of the christia[n]s” (Hanmer A4v).

In his careful geopolitical organisation of the *Tamburlaine* plays, consistently dividing Persianized Tamburlaine from the Turks, Marlowe built on a relatively wide and accurate awareness in England of both the original animus of Islamic schism and its geopolitical history. From historical and geographical compendia such as those of Whetstone, and Minadoi, and even from Protestant preachers and polemicists such as John Foxe and Meredith Hanmer, 1590s English audiences had access to accounts of the early struggles of Islam during the first four Caliphates and the burgeoning dissent by the “party of Ali” (later Shi’a). Closer still, they were likely to know of the establishment of Persia under the Safavids as the heartland of Shi’a dissent from the orthodox Sunni Islam of the countries on its western and eastern borders less than a century previously, a move bolstered by the Safavid claims to descent from Ali and the bloodline of Mohammed.<sup>13</sup> In repeatedly highlighting Tamburlaine’s Persian identity, therefore, Marlowe links religious schism and political ambition within the purview of his play, although the implications of this convergence are worked out more fully in Part Two.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the

burning of the Koran pairs the caging of Bajazeth within both the dramaturgical logic and the political and religious designs of the *Tamburlaine* plays. Wildly sensational, spatialised spectacles that make visible the sectarian differences between Persians and Turks, both expose the emphatically political underpinnings of those differences. And in one of various anachronistic manoeuvres, by rewriting (probably Sunni) Mongol Timur as Persian (implicitly Shi'a) Tamburlaine, Marlowe transforms a narrative of tribal warmongering into a more globally- and domestically-resonant one of religious conflict.<sup>15</sup>

The very earliest reports of English travellers to Persia, too, had noted the sectarian roots of the conflict between Persians and Turks, and probably helped to establish their topicality at home. In 1562 and 1563, the first English visitor to the Safavid court, Anthony Jenkinson, reported of the then Sophy's son Ismail (whom his father had imprisoned for fear of his usurping him), that

he professeth a kinde of holynesse, and saith that hee is descended of the blood of Mahomet and Murtezalli [Ali]: and although these Persians bee Mahometans, as the Turkes and Tartars bee, yet honoure they this false fained Murtezalli, saying that hee was the chiefest disciple that Mahomet had, cursing and chiding dayly three other disciples that Mahomet had called Muear [i.e., Omar], Vssan [Hussain] and Abebeck [Abu Bakr], and these three did slay the saide Murtezalli, for which cause and other differences of holy men and lawes, they haue had and haue with the Turkes and Tartars [Uzbek khanates] mortall warres. (Hakluyt 351).<sup>16</sup>

As Jenkinson explains, such tensions often turned into outright war, notably (for our purposes) in 1577-90 and 1602-12.<sup>17</sup> And it was commonplace for travellers to interpret the “mortall warres” between Turks and Persians as attempts to confront their sectarian differences rather than as simply the outbreak of boundary tensions: Purchas repeats the commonplace at least twice within twenty pages, noting that “in succeeding Ages [after the founding of Islam and the dispute about the succession of Ali, and so on] the Sword decided, who was rightfull successor, the posterity of each challenging to himselfe that right, according as they were able in the Fielde to maintaine it” (Purchas 440).<sup>18</sup> As one of the few constants across both Parts of *Tamburlaine*, Tamburlaine’s enduring enmity with the Turks and the religious terms in which this is voiced, thus places the issue of Islamic schism squarely under consideration. It may also help to garner audience sympathies for Tamburlaine, by invoking audience familiarity with the history and doctrines of Persian Shi’ism, which from a superficial acquaintance with it, could be seen as a dissenting (protestant) form of Islam that tests the authority of the texts and leaders of the established Church, and challenges the historical interventions into dogma and doctrine by institutionalised leaders.<sup>19</sup> But these subtle cues and connections with English Protestantism are more fully activated in concert with the classical sources and allusions of Tamburlaine’s Persian identity, as we will see.

The idea that the *Tamburlaine* plays emerge out of a context in which the conflict between the Turks and Persians is prominent is not a new one: for example, one of the recent healthy crop of scholars on Anglo-Ottoman relations, Matthew Dimmock, associates Marlowe’s Persianizing of Tamburlaine with John Foxe’s interpretation of

Tamburlaine as God's instrument specifically against the Turks (Dimmock 143). Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, in particular the expanded 1570 edition, included copious polemical material against the Turks, and besides its interest in Tamburlaine as a friend to the Christians in his enmity against the Turks, even included purported Persian prophecies of the imminent fall of the Turks (Foxe 771). Religious met popular polemic against the Ottomans, though it was somewhat contained in the 1570s and 1580s, Dimmock argues, by the emergence of the Turk as a romance hero in prose texts such as William Painter's hugely popular collection *A Pallace of Pleasure* (1566, and much reprinted thereafter) and Barnabe Riche's *Riche His Farewell to the Militarie Profession* (1581), texts which represented the "Turk" as a valiant, chivalric, magnanimous, worthy opponent (see Dimmock 93-95). But for Dimmock it is Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays that do most to domesticate the image of the Turk, through caricature: "before *Tamburlaine* the place of this figure remained uncertain, peripheral, partially represented and perhaps dangerous. With Marlowe's Bajazeth and those sultans that followed, the formation of a static and "stock" character begins to reveal the extent to which this figure could be familiarized, confined, and, dramatically at least, controlled" (Dimmock 196). Dimmock's is a typical example of how the Persian element has been written out of the critical narrative of English intellectual engagements with the East, though he is more interested in what is at stake in the Persian material than most. Surely it is not so much Bajazeth or Callapine as Tamburlaine himself who shapes the "Turk" plays that followed, in particular the caricature-figure of the "raging Turk"? The forgetting of Marlowe's carefully Persianized Tamburlaine reveals something of the scholarly neglect of Persia and the topic of Islamic schism on the early modern stage, and perhaps, too, of the unwillingness of Marlowe's

fellow-dramatists to engage with the topic of Islamic schism with the same purposefulness.

For evidence, we need only look to *Selimus* (1594) likely written by Robert Greene, and one of the earliest and most striking of the plays written in response to *Tamburlaine* and its enormous commercial success. Here (Ottoman) Selimus is clearly modelled on Persian Tamburlaine rather than Turkish Bajazeth or any other sultan. In fact, another Bajazeth opens the play by recalling Tamburlaine's humiliation of his ancestor, just as he, Bajazeth, is soon to be defeated and humiliated by his own Tamburlainian son, Selimus. The plot concerns the internecine conflict of the family of this next Bajazeth, and his sons' struggle among themselves to succeed him. This transmutation of the conflict between Turks and Persians to one *within* the Turkish ruling family also means that the eponymous hero, however closely modelled on Tamburlaine, is not a Persian but a Turk. Selimus is arguably at his most Tamburlainian when he picks up on the questions about the ethics of empire that Marlowe had raised by attributing his repudiation of religion to his expansionist ambitions (2. 69-122) in a declaration that strongly evokes the pairing of Tamburlaine's Ortelian world-map and those lamented "unconquered" lands (2: 5.3.151, 159) with the Koran-burning scene immediately preceding it. But such transpositions of Tamburlaine into Turkish mould, and of Marlowe's play of Islamic schismatic conflict to plays of internecine Ottoman or Turk/Christian conflict typifies the larger trend in "Turk" plays in the late 1590s and the first decade of the seventeenth century (see Hutchings). Within this trend, the Persians are relegated to the role of ancient sworn enemies, "our chief foe" (Greene 22. 4), now little more than romance foils themselves to the charismatic stage Turks centre-stage. By

the time we get to the “pirate” plays of Daborne and Massinger, the Persians have disappeared completely. Despite Marlowe’s provocative staging of Islamic schism by way of the Persian/Ottoman conflict, the disappearance of this topic even in the afterlife of the *Tamburlaine* plays seems to point to the material and ideological protection of the political interests of the ever-burgeoning English trade with the Ottomans – itself an important context (and subtext) of Marlowe’s play (see Vitkus 1-44).

Jonathan Burton observes that “from its foundation, England’s policy on trade with the Ottoman Empire depended upon saying one thing and doing another” (Burton, “Anglo-Ottoman Relations” 131). From 1580, when England got direct trading privileges with the Ottomans, the greater the public polemic against the Ottoman Muslims, the stronger the trading interests seemed to grow.<sup>20</sup> This policy was rooted in events of the 1570s: the papal excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570; the sack of Antwerp by the Spanish in 1576 which disrupted English exports by that route; the choking off of trade in the Mediterranean thanks to a breakdown in relations between the Venetians and Ottomans in the early 1570s. So, despite sermons preached against the Ottomans, and English bells being rung for the allied papal forces’ victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, Elizabeth was actively seeking cordial relations with Sultan Murad III, emphasising in her letters to him general points of contact and sympathy between Protestantism and Islam (see Skilliter; also Burton *Traffic and Turning* on the tactical mistranslation of her letters in Hakluyt). Divergence between the public rhetoric and private petitions was also a feature of the first visits by William Harborne in 1578, the beginnings of Elizabeth’s cultivation of diplomatic and commercial alliances with the Ottomans. Given that the Ottomans had recently recommenced their “continuall warres”

with the Persians, the foundations of the Anglo-Persian policy so carefully laid in the 1560s and 1570s by brilliant Muscovy Company men such as Anthony Jenkinson and Arthur Edwards had to be abandoned for fear of offending their new trading partner. Nobody was under any illusions about the relative power of the Persians and Turks in the late 1570s: as a 1577 edition of Richard Eden's edition of sources baldly states, "The *Saugh*, or Kyng of *Persia*, is nothyng in strength and power comparable vnto the Turke: for although he hath a great Dominion, yet is it nothyng to be compared with the Turkes: neyther hath he any great Ordinaunce of Gunnes, or Harkebuses" (326).<sup>21</sup> With the trading rights procured by Harborne, the Turkey Company was established in 1580, leaving no doubts about the pragmatic decision by Elizabeth and her counsellors to plump for the more powerful Muslim ally.

This strategic duplicity was not uncontroversial or entirely unknown, however: the ambassadors of other nations were keenly aware of Elizabeth's solicitations and put pressure on her to desist, in particular, from supplying the Ottomans with "bell metals", which, like the armaments England also sent, could be used for military purposes (see Dimmock "Guns and Gawds"). There is some basis to suspect that the merits – and costs – of Elizabeth's decision to build links with the Turks rather than the Persians remained on people's minds in the 1580s and beyond. London printers produced an array of books with a pronounced Persian interest in the 1580s: Sir Thomas North's translation from Jacques Amyot's French edition of Plutarch's *Lives*, incorporated the "Lives" of several Persian kings; the first English translation of Herodotus's *Histories* appeared in 1584 (having been entered in the Stationers' Register in 1581), and comprised only the first two Books on Persia and Egypt; a romance-play based on well-known stories from

ancient Persia, *The Warres of Cyrus*, played on stage and appeared later in print (1588). Certainly, Queen Elizabeth's letters to the Ottoman Shah, and the trading privileges, together with the efforts and successes of the Muscovy Company cultivating relations with Persia and their inventory of Persian requests for English goods, were included for all to read in Richard Hakluyt's nationalistic 1589 compilation, *The Principall Navigations, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. But it was the transactions with Persia – stymied though they now were – that came in for particularly proud comment in Hakluyt's dedicatory epistle to Francis Walsingham: "For, which of the kings of this land before her Majesty had they banners ever seene in the Caspian sea? Which of them hath ever dealt with the Emperor of Persia, as her Majesty hath done, and obtained for her merchants large & loving privileges?" (1589: \*2v).

Thus, we can perhaps read the *Tamburlaine* plays in the context of Elizabeth's decision to pursue trade with the Ottomans at the expense of the Persians. But if Marlowe's plays engage the widespread admiration of the Ottoman empire that partly fuelled Elizabeth's decision to form diplomatic and commercial links with them (see MacLean), the Ottomans in the plays again and again come off worse in the comparison with Tamburlaine, even at his most vicious. In emphasising Tamburlaine's affiliations with Persia, on the other hand, Marlowe's plays build on a familiarity with the imbrication of state and religion in the recent history of Safavid Persia, and on what looks to be a strong, residual English sympathy for Persia. This becomes especially clear around the issue of empire. Daniel Vitkus points to the English imperial fantasies underlying the success of the *Tamburlaine* plays: "Marlowe [...] creates a figure who plays out England's proto-imperialist fantasy and achieves his imperial status through a

process of aggressive transculturation that converts him from a Scythian shepherd (a nomad) to a king of kings.” Played by the English actor Alleyn, it speaks volumes about “English desire for imperial rule” (Vitkus 23), as Vitkus reads it.<sup>22</sup> But critics have been too quick to read these imperial fantasies through the prism of Anglo-Ottoman relations, I think, without due cognisance of audiences’ awareness of the Persian example, and its significance for the play. “Aggressive transculturation” on the Ottoman model plays no part in the visions of English empire expounded by intellectuals such as John Dee, or courtiers and colonists such as Humphrey Gilbert, Philip Sidney or Walter Raleigh. More congenial is the older model of charismatic leadership and providentially-shaded ideological *imperium* to be found in the classical and Safavid Persian model, as we will see in the next section.

In other words, by its strong interest in Persia at this precise moment, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays betray a strong sense of the opportunity cost to England by trading with the Turks, lucrative and empowering though it was proving to be. To this end, Marlowe enlists latent domestic sympathies for the Persians from audiences’ familiarity with the history of Shi’a Islam (some of which may have seemed interestingly consonant with the history of English Protestantism), but also from other literary and scholarly traditions, notably, the most respected classical accounts of the ancient Persian empire of Cyrus the Great. And Marlowe uses these positive associations of the classical Persians to build on certain prevailing connections between Protestant England and Shi’a Persia, connections that might suggest Persia as the more logical and congenial trading partner, and the Persian model of empire as an alternative exemplar to the Ottoman one.

## 2. Ancient Persia, Safavid Persia and England

Tamburlaine's dual identity as a Scythian and a Persian, and how it allows Tamburlaine to remain at all times the natural enemy of the "Turk" (for Persian Tamburlaine, even the Koran is the "Turkish Alcoran" [2: 5.1.172]), rests not only on the contemporary understanding of the schism between Persian Shi'ism and Ottoman Sunni beliefs, but also on the play's evocations of the ancient Persian king and founder of the Persian empire, Cyrus the Great. In fact, we accidentally learn this from Menaphon's slip in attributing Darius's conquest of Greek Asia Minor to Cyrus in the very opening scene of the play (1: 1.1.130.) Tamburlaine is that evocative figure, a shepherd-king. But Marlowe's primary model of shepherd-king (and for which he changed Whetstone's "poore labourer" to Tamburlaine's shepherd) is not Christ, or David, but Cyrus. Although it was Herodotus who told of Cyrus being raised by shepherds, and Herodotus who narrated the salutary details of Cyrus's eventual ignominious fall, Marlowe's model for Tamburlaine was the Cyrus to be found in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, the most optimistic, congratulatory and influential of the histories of Cyrus and his empire in the early modern period. It had been translated into English in 1552 and 1567 (and would soon be translated anew by the prolific Philemon Holland, apparently under commission from King James [see note 38]). Popular among Inns of Court men and university graduates, Sir Philip Sidney drew copiously on it in his *Defence of Poesy* and distributed copies of it among his friends (see Grogan).<sup>23</sup> A semi-fictional narrative of the life of Cyrus, the *Cyropaedia* acquired prestige and influence through its place in mainstream humanist curricula (it can be found on the syllabus of several grammar schools) and its endorsement by writers and educationalists such as Erasmus, Elyot, Ascham and Sidney. Book I is entirely focussed

on the “education” adverted to in the title, and the following eight Books follow Cyrus’s victories over the Medians, Lydians, Armenians, Assyrians and Babylonians. The text concludes with a curiously caustic Epilogue on Cyrus’s eventual slide into looser moral and personal standards with his imperial success, his (again, rosily fictionalized) last days, his death-bed advice to his sons and their mishandling of their inheritance. But Xenophon’s was not the only familiar account of the life of Cyrus. Therefore, those aspects of Cyrus’s life that Xenophon had fictionalized were also familiar to readers who had dipped into Herodotus’s *Histories* (the 1584 English translation already mentioned being only one possible source, as tales from Herodotus often appeared in romance compilations such as Painter’s) or Justin’s *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* (translated into English by Arthur Golding in 1564). Add to this the accounts of Cyrus to be found in numerous historical compendia and epitomes, mirrors-for-princes, and other re-tellings in a range of literary, historical and political genres. But Xenophon’s was the central account to which all of these accounts alluded, however indirectly. To model “barbarous” Tamburlaine on Xenophon’s Cyrus was, therefore, to comment provocatively on a familiar, prestigious text, and to re-imagine its ideals and ambitions shaped by more recent religious turmoil.

Leaving Xenophon’s slip to one side, Marlowe’s chief source, Whetstone, already contained reasons to suggest Cyrus as a template for Marlowe’s Tamburlaine: the emphasis on his lowly roots; the “scourge of God” designation which seems something like a foil to Cyrus’s characterisation (for early modern readers) as the “instrument of Gods power, vsed for the chastising of many Nations” (Raleigh 4D2).<sup>24</sup> Whetstone also notes such relevant details as Tamburlaine’s generosity to and care for his soldiers; and

the evocation in the Bayezid story of “the uncertainty of worldly fortunes”, that old chestnut of the “fall of princes” tradition which was especially fond of moralized exempla from the life of Cyrus).<sup>25</sup> Cyrus was also a familiar figure from biblical accounts of his allowing liberty of conscience to the Jews after his conquest of Babylon (see especially the Books of Ezra and Daniel). The shape of Xenophon’s plot can be discerned in both the details and the thematic undergirding of Marlowe’s plays. Like Xenophon’s Cyrus, Tamburlaine is fiercely loyal to his friends and provides them with a better life in exchange for their support. He and his band professedly “in conceit bear empires on [their] spears” (1: 1.2.64). But for a while at least, they seem content to live those empires in their minds. The turning-point in his imperial ambitions, what transforms such rhetoric into irresistible grounds for action is the moment when somebody else looks set for advancement: having made Tamburlaine regent of Persia, Cosroe sets off to “ride in triumph through Persepolis” (2.5. 49, 50 and 54).<sup>26</sup> Marlowe seems to be isolating a moment where “imperium” as sovereignty, as the ability to rule oneself, spills over into “imperium” as the drive towards expansion, ambition, transgression of limits, and he does so with a direct reference to Persia and the seat of Persian empire. The catalyst and impetus of empire is envy, Marlowe shows. This is a particularly astute reading of the *Cyropaedia* with its emphasis on “honour” and “continencie” as the twin engines of empire. In Marlowe’s reading, Cosroe’s fateful enlisting of Tamburlaine to his cause repeats Median Cyaxares’s disastrously belated distrust of his Persian nephew (Cyrus)’s military support.<sup>27</sup> With his Persianized Tamburlaine, Marlowe takes on the challenge of imagining a contemporary empire-building hero on the classical model of Xenophon’s Cyrus, as his contemporaries were seeking to do, and produces a brilliantly-observed

portrait of the less palatable moral and political values of empire that Xenophon's glowing tribute also conceals. Histories of ancient Persia, specifically of Cyrus, functioned as a kind of surrogate political imaginary, far removed from Rome, within which the question of empire – specifically, an English or British empire – might be tested in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Marlowe's Persian imperialist is, therefore, no token or exoticised Oriental despot, but holds strong and specific domestic interest (see Grogan, and Fuchs on English pursuit of non-Roman imperial models; more generally, see Armitage; Mottram). From Whetstone's Timur and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, I propose, Marlowe forged a Tamburlaine who is both England's dream ruler, and its demon.

The pattern of Cyrus is most strongly felt in Part One: the transformation of the shepherd, the fidelity to his friends, the new identification with Persia. But Part Two completes the trajectory of Cyrus's fall, using elements from both Xenophon and Herodotus: the successful emperor's fatal descent into luxury and excess (see 2.1.3.218-25), hubris (the Koran-burning) and sibling rivalry/filial conflict in the next generation. Reminiscences of Cyrus can be seen in Tamburlaine's (also richly rewarded) devotion to his friends and fellow-soldiers ("These are my friends, in whom I more rejoice, / Than doth the King of Persia in his crown" [1:1.2.240-41]), and in his privileging of his title as king of Persia above all others. Neil Rhodes has also found strong and suggestive connections between the *Tamburlaine* plays and the *Cyropaedia*, and has recently argued that Marlowe's Tamburlaine comprises "Xenophon[']s Cyrus] read through Lucian", a more "astringent" and sceptical re-working of the humanists' idealised hero. In support, he cites plentiful contextual evidence, and, more specifically, elements such as the

evocation of the encounter between Xenophon's heroic wife, Panthea and her Persian guard and would-be lover Araspas in Marlowe's scenes between Olympia and Theridamas. He also points out the Xenophontic character of Tamburlaine's unusual soliloquy in Part One, Act 5, scene one, on "whether what is *kalon* (noble, fine) [but also beautiful] is also *agathon* (good, virtuous)".<sup>28</sup> Other conspicuous parallels with Xenophon's life of Cyrus (and indeed the scriptural accounts of Cyrus) include Tamburlaine's recapitulation of three of the qualities most closely associated with Cyrus: firstly, his magnanimity, glossed by Arthur Golding and corroborated by Walter Raleigh as "the magnificence of Cyrus" (Golding B1v), but transformed, with help from his Timur sources, to the terrifying colour-coded mercy policy of Tamburlaine. Secondly, we should note Cyrus's sexual restraint, exemplified when he refuses to view the captured Panthea for fear of falling in love with her, but carefully preserves her nonetheless. For his part, Tamburlaine makes a point of emphasising that while Zenocrate has been in his power, she has been allowed to remain free of "all blot of foul in chastity" (5.1.487).<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, Tamburlaine's increasingly vigorous self-styling as the "scourge of God" parodically recalls the scriptural Cyrus as (in the words of Raleigh, again) "the instrument preordained and forenamed by God himselfe, not onely for his action, but for the deliuerie of his Church" (Raleigh 3.2).<sup>30</sup> Marlowe's casting of Tamburlaine as a self-aware "scourge of God" thus partakes in an established reading of Cyrus as an "instrument" of God, as well as picking up on the terms of ubiquitous recent polemics accounting for the rise of the Ottomans as a providential scourging of the divided Christian community in Europe.<sup>31</sup> Together, these three qualities – his magnanimity, sexual restraint and agency as the "instrument" of God's "power" and "goodness",

variously – enable Cyrus’s imperial success. And, in turn, Tamburlaine’s parodic recapitulation of these qualities allow Marlowe’s play to be read as an experiment in his contemporaries’ dream of empire: what kind of “instrument”, what kind of “scourge of God”? These are precisely the questions that Marlowe asks his audiences to ask both of Tamburlaine and of Xenophon’s Cyrus?

And the results of this experiment are troubling: the play seems to produce a sly critique of the Xenophontic model of empire and imperialist. Although arguably as successful as Xenophon’s Cyrus, Tamburlaine is a far less tractable or idealised figure. In exploring the *Cyropaedia*’s imperial values, Marlowe makes questions of the kinds of issues that sometimes appear as moralised topoi in the printed marginalia to histories or commentaries on the life of Cyrus: was his empire the result of his personal virtue or of his ambition and cupidity? Did he act on his own part or did he merely make God’s will manifest? What kind of piety does he observe? These issues exercised historians such as Raleigh and popular writers such as William Painter alike, but Marlowe’s fictionalizing experiment makes powerful drama of them, presenting to his audiences a provocative embodiment of the Persian model of empire peddled by English historians, scholars and poets. Both a Cyrus and an anti-Cyrus, Tamburlaine reveals the more troubling immoral impulses and *realpolitik* underlying the successes of Xenophon’s idealised imperialist.<sup>32</sup> Triangulating Whetstone’s Timur with Xenophon’s Cyrus, then, Marlowe fashions a disturbing but familiar-looking Tamburlaine: a new Cyrus, the “instrument” of God and heroic barbarian imperialist – but also an anti-Cyrus, a monstrous embodiment of the imperialist values that the English were so actively courting through proxies such as Cyrus.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. After *Tamburlaine*: onstage and off

The “plethora of imitations” of the *Tamburlaine* plays (some of them lost) that followed on its enormous popular success, and the revival of productions of *Tamburlaine* alongside these imitations during the 1590s, need little discussion here (see Gurr 142).<sup>34</sup> Marlowe’s influence primarily covered genre (the “Turk” plays, as scholars now term them) and characterisation (the “raging Turk” figure, as epitomised in Thomas Goffe’s 1618 play of that name), but also language and dramaturgy (see Rutter). Even more distant figures such as the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* are clearly cut out of the same cloth as *Tamburlaine*, while *Tamburlaine*’s achievements are remembered repeatedly both on-stage and off: the much-cited example of workhouse prisoners pulling rubbish through the streets in 1629 only to be jeered by Londoners with “Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia” (see Hopkins 62) shows not just the endurance in the popular memory of the plays, but also the depth of familiarity with them, and certainly with their most sensational moments.<sup>35</sup>

But we have already seen with *Selimus* that re-workings of Marlovian material were not always so closely attuned to the interests in sectarianism and geopolitics of the *Tamburlaine* plays. In fact, the Eastern settings and variations on the raging Turk character popularised by the *Tamburlaine* plays began to head into new directions, especially during the early Jacobean period. Janissaries, renegades, apostates, merchants, pirates, captives and other go-between or cross-over figures between Christianity and Islam, as well as new permutations of the “bad Jew” partnerships already prominent on stage, grew in popularity, partly because of increased contact with the Ottomans through

trade and related activities (see Matar *Turks, Moors*; Vitkus).<sup>36</sup> (Direct contact with Persia after 1580 and the establishment of the Turkey Company [later the Levant and East India Companies], on the other hand, was minimal until the 1620s.) But it also reflected a wider change in the nature of English interest in the Islamic East. While the sectarian and political matter of the Persian wars remained just about in view in early imitations such as *Soliman and Perseda* (1592) and *Selimus* (1594), it gradually receded and the Persians became somewhat drab, unimportant figures on the early modern stage, token reminders of the faultline within Islam but without revealing any real interest in the motivations or configurations of this faultline. This trend replicates the political currents of the time. With the accession of King James, and the diminution of the Ottoman threat (already on the wane in the later years of the sixteenth century, although this wasn't apparent at the time to most European observers), the earlier English interest in different forms of Islam, and in the political "commodiousness" of Islamic schism, receded. Finally, James's own peace initiatives with Spain and other Catholic countries shifted the focus from the potential of Anglo-Islamic links against Catholic Europe to pan-Christian alliances.

As these larger political and commercial realities trickle down to the Jacobean stage, therefore, we see dramatists increasingly producing plots which bring Christians and Muslims into contact with one another in varying ways, rather than paying close attention to the sectarian politics of the Islamic world, as Marlowe had done.<sup>37</sup> Only in closet drama do we see some measure of survival of these interests, and the interest in the Persian side in particular: plays such as Fulke Greville's *Alaham*, Samuel Daniel's *Philotas*, and the Persian plays of William Alexander (*Croesus*; *Darius*; *The Alexandrian*

*Tragedy*). All of the authors, interestingly, have quite close links to King James himself, and sometimes to his son, Prince Henry too, to whom James addressed his *Basilikon Doron* and for whom he reportedly commissioned a translation of the *Cyropaedia*.<sup>38</sup> In all of these cases, however, the Senecan influence overwhelms the Marlovian influence, and none of them produce anything like the revealing cruxes of religion and politics located within the Islamic world that Marlowe does.

But if the dramatists lose interest in Islamic schism, readers do not. Across a range of prose genres, many of them forms of travel literature or cosmographical compendia but reaching into historiography, satire, and the occasional pamphlet, we find that the Persians and the “Sophian sect” that separates them from the Turks continue to attract attention. The extended edition of Hakluyt’s *Principall Navigations* (1598-1600) preserves and expands his Persian sections and Samuel Purchas later continues the task. The nature and longevity of Shi’a dissent merits comment even from such different writers as George Abbot in his popular and succinct *A Brief Description of the World* (1599), and Thomas Nashe, whose last work, *Lenten Stuffe* (1599), pauses in its lengthy eulogy of the red herring and its Great Yarmouth habitat to deliver a cheeky invented etymology for “Persian Haly, or Mortus Ali, they worship, whose true etimologie is, *mortuum halec*, a dead red herring” (McKerrow 3: 195).<sup>39</sup> But it was the dubious enterprises of a colourful family of minor gentry, the Sherley brothers, which brought the matter of Persia and of Islamic schism back to the public stage. *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* brilliantly (if belatedly) exposes the concatenation of politics and religion that had made the *Tamburlaine* plays so explosive, so topical: the idea that “schismaticall fancie” could provide a cover for *realpolitik* and a mandate for empire, and

that Islamic “schismaticall fancie” could be explored vicariously both for imperial models and for considering the possibilities of the trading alliances that would advance an English empire by another route.

The adventures and misadventures of the Sherley brothers are quite well-known, so I will merely summarize the most salient facts relating to the play under discussion, *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607). Purportedly with the support of the Earl of Essex (his wife’s first cousin), Anthony Sherley left England in 1598. His aim was to pursue English trading interests by attacking Portuguese holdings at strategic points in the Mediterranean, and beyond it, the island of Ormuz in the Persian Gulf, held by the Portuguese since 1516 and, since Philip II of Spain had been crowned King of Portugal in 1581, an obstacle to direct English access to the trading routes farther East. But a change of plan occurred, probably when Sherley reached Persia, and with the support of the Persian sophy, Shah Abbas I, Anthony set about seeking support in Europe for a Christian-Persian alliance against the Ottomans.<sup>40</sup> His brother Robert was kept behind as a hostage and, when Anthony went AWOL from his Persian mission several years later (having received a more attractive commission from the Spanish to attack Turkish ships), Robert himself was sent out on the same mission, together with his Circassian Christian wife – although the sources immediately surrounding *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607) insist on her being a close relation of the Sophy himself and thus, by implication, a Shi’a Muslim. The third brother, Thomas, had a bumpier ride, as well as more self-serving intentions, which the play describes generously: his privateering, the mutiny of his men, his attack of a defenceless Greek village and subsequent imprisonment in a series of Ottoman jails, and his release thanks

to a letter of intervention from King James. Thomas, himself the author of an understandably vituperative *Discours of the Turkes* (1606) (see note 20), returned to London in 1607, and the impetus for the play and pamphlet (as well as a later pamphlet by Thomas Middleton) likely originate with him – although 1607 also saw him locked in the Tower probably under investigation for obstruction of Levant Company business.

The dramatists, John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins, drew most of their material for *The Travailes* from an up-to-date pamphlet by Anthony Nixon, probably commissioned by Thomas Sherley, to which they had access before it was printed. But they also took liberties with it, chief among them relocating from Rome to Venice an earlier meeting between the popular English clown and onetime member of the King's Men, Will Kemp, and Anthony Sherley. They also presented the Persian sophy's victorious return from wars with the Uzbeks bearing heads on spears as a symbolic spectacle rather than a representation of the historical reality, as Anthony Parr has shown, thereby diminishing the impact of Robert's own recourse to this custom later in the play. Finally, exploiting the tastes of their Red Bull audience and the play's genre as citizen romance, the dramatists added Robert's fraternal support for Thomas languishing in a Constantinople jail (see Parr (ed.) 1-20). The plot follows the fortunes of the three brothers over several years, telescoping them into near-contemporaneity: the progress of Anthony on the Sophy's embassy in Europe, including a strikingly sympathetic visit to the Pope; and the trials and tribulations of Thomas, a more familiar story to early modern playgoers of a Christian having to face the cruelty of the Turks. But the play (and its audience) is especially interested in the plot centred on the third brother, Robert, "the Christian General [of the Persian army], / Sherley the Great" (8. 29-30), successful lover

of the Sophy's niece (with the Sophy volunteering as godfather to their child) and, eventually, founder of what the play (incorrectly) terms the first Christian church in Persia. Beaumont took some swipes at the play and its pandering to the popular Red Bull audience in its form and materials in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* soon after (see 4.29-32). But the play looks to have been a success for Queen Anne's Men, as it seems to have played in repertory at both the Curtain and the Red Bull from spring through most of the summer, and they probably toured it too.<sup>41</sup> At least one of the touring companies performed the play two years later, in Yorkshire in 1609, and there may have been other performances (see Parr (ed.) 7-9). The addition of the Kemp scenes in which he competes with an Italian "Harlequin" of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, riffing on the play's strongest theme – the "custom of the country" – is a brilliant stroke, and links the play to earlier "Turk" plays such as *Selimus* with its Bullithrumble scenes, and indeed with Persian-set plays even before *Tamburlaine*.<sup>42</sup> But despite its inclusion in an attractive and fairly recent Revels Edition, it is an unduly neglected play nowadays.<sup>43</sup> Even its editor, Anthony Parr, understates the case when he notes that the play is "a fairly complex dramatisation of cultural encounter", one that conspicuously moves away from demonising the foreign such that "its topicality is part of a cultural process" (13, 6). A more recent essay notes that "*Travels*' defence of the Sherleys is ... in a crucial respect, intertextual", noting as an example that the "Great Turk" seems to be styled on Marlowe's *Bajazeth* (Publicover 701).<sup>44</sup> But its author confines himself to exploring the play's immediate historical and literary connections with, respectively, the Sherleys and "the patriotic adventure-romances that flourished around the turn of the seventeenth century" (Publicover 11). The play has yet to be read as a more complex and ambitious

text still: a knowing response to Marlowe's provocative entwining of religious schism and imperial ambition in ways that were, in turn, carefully attuned to his contemporaries' reception of the *Cyropaedia*.

Like *Tamburlaine*, *The Travailes* is premised on, and deeply invested in the conflict between the Ottomans and the Persians and its sectarian bases. The Persians swear repeatedly by "Mortus Ali", and in scene 7, Turkish prisoners of war are given the opportunity to convert to Shi'a Islam, its differences from Sunni faith spelled out by an unnamed Persian character. (They refuse, of course.) The opening scenes of diplomatic manoeuvring in which the Sophy stages a ceremonial battle between Persian and Turks for the Sherleys, and the Sherleys stage a battle between Christians in return is particularly carefully handled, and bears comparison with *Tamburlaine* for the provocative dramaturgical implications of acting out each kind of schismatic conflict. So, too, the Sophy's initial awed reaction to Anthony Sherley – "What powers do wrap me in amazement thus? / Methinks this Christian's more than mortal" (1.74-75) – recalls that of Theridamas to *Tamburlaine*, and the later descriptions of *Tamburlaine*'s almost god-like presence. *Tamburlaine*'s humiliation of Turkish Bayezid, made infamous by Marlowe's play, is directly referenced by Sir Thomas when he taunts the "Great Turk" (the Ottoman Sultan) who keeps him (Thomas) prisoner and orders that he be tortured. But the recollection of *Tamburlaine*'s enactment of his religious and political hostility to the Ottomans is ironised by the words of Thomas's jailer, comparing the discomforts of Ottoman imprisonment to the sharpness of Christian schism: "And we Turks think that it is too good for these Christians too; for why should we do any better to them, since they do little better one to another?" (12.13-15). The Great Turk conforms easily to the

“raging Turk” stereotype so firmly established by this point, with his cruelty, megalomania and blustering talk: “Stand, Stand! Our fury swells so high / We cannot march a foot ere it break forth”, are his first words in the play (2.1-2). But most strikingly, *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* returns to the topic of Islamic schism, its potential domestic implications and opportunities, and the arguments for allying with Shi’a Persia, as no play since *Tamburlaine* had done. Its topicality is indeed part of a cultural process, not just the wider process of encounters with Islamic others, but the historical process of Anglo-Persian relations and the literary forms that it primarily took, at least until 1622 and the Anglo-Persian alliance evicting the Portuguese from Ormuz. That the Anglo-Persian alliance was a path not taken politically or economically until then (and uneasily even then) does not diminish the interest of English literary attention to Persia, I contend, if we seek a full and nuanced understanding of early modern English understandings of and engagement with the Islamic east.

Given its broad reach and long cultural memory, we should not be surprised, that even earlier English engagements with Persia seem to be distantly remembered in the play: note, for example, the evocation of the much-repeated story of Anthony Jenkinson’s encounter with the Sophy (to be found in Hakluyt, Purchas, and beyond) in the scenes where Anthony berates his Persian colleague, Halibeck, for placing his “unhallowed feet” (v.53) on the steps in front of the Pope. Anthony’s taking umbrage “that his pagan feet should dare to climb / Where none but Christians’ knees should after mine” must, in this context, recall another Anthony, the first Englishman to meet the Persian Sophy, and who was given a pair of shoes to wear before he approached the Sophy “for without the same shoes [he] might not be suffred to tread vpon his holy ground, being a Christian”

(Hakluyt 348-49).<sup>45</sup> In the *Travailes*, Day, Rowley and Wilkins produced a play predicated on a long, multi-stranded literary and historical memory of Persia and Anglo-Persian relations, and charged the deeds of the Sherley brothers with its freight.

But it never loses sight of its object: an appeal to reconsider diplomatic and commercial relations with Persia, despite the health of the Ottoman trade. The play's reliance on a doubling patterning – Persian is matched with Englishman (in both fruitful and unproductive combinations), Turk meets his match in a Christian, Englishman meets his love-match in a Persian woman, Italian clown is outmatched by English actor-clown – is one that serves ultimately to make three the magic number. And the third party holding the power is invariably an Englishman. The Turkish Pasha taken prisoner and guarded by a Sherley is confused: the “custom of tyranny betwixt our nations” (2.105) rationalises his other guard, Persian Halibeck's desire to kill him. But the “stranger which did conquer me” and now keeps him alive, is what “amazes” the Turk, and what transforms the dynamics of the situation. The birth of a child to Robert Sherley and the Persian Sophy's niece ensures the survival and prestige of English Christianity in Persia, no matter the outcome of Anthony's foreign embassy. And of course, ultimately, the three English brothers are destined to outmanoeuvre and exploit *both* Persian and Turk in their various adventures. In this way, the play makes a structural bid in support of the Sherleys' Persian cause, which may once have been – could still be, it suggests – England's cause.

And that cause, stated and pursued by Anthony Sherley in the play, now openly acknowledges the twinned underlying motives of the earliest English interest in Persia, and in Islamic schism: “That you [the Sophy] ... make league with Christendom / And all

the neighbouring princes bordering here, / And crave their general aid against the Turk".

The second motive appears only a line or two later when Anthony tries to persuade the Sophy of this course of action by telling him that to do so would be to "Enlarge your empire living, and being gone / Be called the champion for the holiest one" (2. 241-46).

What Anthony expresses in this extraordinary speech, thinly disguised as a Persian prerogative, is the English imperial fantasy that impelled not just early interest in the Islamic schism and the potential political and commercial opportunities of alliance with the Persians, but also the capacity of Christian schism to serve as a cover for imperial ventures. But writing in 1608, Beaumont was probably right to ridicule the play's ultimate vision, the fantasy in which the Persian Sophy offers himself as godfather to a Christian child and pledges to build a church and a Christian foundation. The time for pursuing a Persian alliance had passed, and the diminution of Persian interests on the early modern stage, and indeed of English interests in Islamic schism and what it could offer them, reflects the larger commercial and political realities: the increasing sway of the trading companies and their diverse and influential investors, and the pragmatic decisions of early modern dramatists to present and explore only the most advantageous and popular Eastern interests of its audiences.

#### **Appendix: Origins of Shi'a Islam, and the establishment of the Safavids<sup>46</sup>**

Shi'a has always been the party of dissent, all the way back to the early days of Islam. Its primary point of divergence from mainstream Sunni Islam is its rejection of the first three

Caliphs after the death of Muhammed. The first four Caliphs (in Sunni tradition the “Rightly Guided Caliphs”), were “Companions”, friends and members of the Muhammed’s community, the first *ummah* or Islamic community: Abu Bakr (Muhammed’s father-in-law and longstanding friend), and two other well-established figures of Muhammed’s community, Omar and Uthman, although Uthman’s pro-Ummayyad interests were to prove particularly divisive. The Koran itself is compiled and systematized during the Caliphate of Uthman, the third Caliph.<sup>47</sup> But Shi’a Islam challenges the authority of these three Caliphs, arguing that it has been usurped from the fourth Caliph, Ali, Muhammed’s cousin and son-in-law, who, as Muhammed’s blood relation, should, they argue, have been the first Caliph and whose family should have inherited rule after him. Instead, Ali was eventually murdered by members of Uthman’s family (the Ummayyad) who ruled for the next century. As a result, Shi’ism challenges the authenticity of some sections of the Koran and allege that it contains not only the word of God as given to Muhammed, but also unauthorised additions by Uthman. Although the “party of Ali” was present from very soon after the death of Muhammed, it was consolidated and acquired a political heartland in Persia in the mid- to late-fifteenth century, with the political conquests and conversion to Shi’ism of Shaykh Junayd and his son Haydar (“Giunet” and “Aidere”, in the early modern sources) with the help of the Qizilbash (or “red caps”, as early modern eye-witnesses observe). Shaykh Junayd was a descendent of the first Safavid Shaykh Safi al-Din, a Sufi mystic (dervish) who established a foothold in Ardobil, northwestern Persia, and who claimed to be a descendent from Ali, the fourth Caliph and first Shi’a Imam. Founder of the Safavid dynasty, the term most favoured by early modern English sources for the ruler of Persia –

the “sophy” – is a corruption of the founder’s name. Positing etymologies for the term “sophy” is one of the favourite pastimes of the early modern English commentators, however, and it comes to stand in English minds for the unification of nation and religion of Shi’a Islam in Persia at the beginning of the sixteenth century (see, for example, Minadoi, Purchas 430).

This radical mix of Sufism and Shi’ism which gave the Safavids claims to co-divinity with the Imams and a radical political mandate, had earned them the loyalty of the Turcoman tribes, the Qizilbash. With their help, Junayd, his son Haydar and particularly his grandson Ismail managed to regain most of Persia from aggressors within its various borders (including the Ottomans and Mongols) and from the various Timurid, Ilkhan and Qara-Qoyonlu and Aq-Qoyonlu dynasties of the interior. Shaykh Ismail’s later decision to emphasise the Shi’a more than the Sufi basis of Safavid authority, and his expedient decision to establish a more moderate form of Shi’ism (“Twelver” Shi’ism) as the state religion, seems to have been at least in part a political decision to control the significant Qizilbash power within Persia. The subsequent rise of the Persian-speaking, “Tajik” administrative class throughout the sixteenth century who became a mainstay of Safavid Persia, bolstered its longevity in a time of much conflict. Ismail is a key figure here, as all the early modern English sources note. From his base in Ardobil, he defeats the Aq-Qoyunlu in 1501 and in 1514 finds himself in his first major battle with the Ottomans, where he is defeated by Selim I at the battle of Chaldiran. Just three years later, Selim’s victories in Syria, Egypt and beyond culminate in his receiving the keys to the Kab’a, the holy shrine in Mecca, and as such, taking the title of [Sunni] Caliph of Islam. (It is Selim’s son Suleyman [“the Magnificent”] who reigns until 1566 and who becomes

such a source of anxiety to Europe after his conquest of Belgrade, Rhodes [with the expulsion of the Knights of St John], the siege of Vienna and further campaigns against Austria.) The hostilities between the Safavids and Ottomans do not go away, however, and what few periods of peace there are between them are short and precarious. The reign of Ismail's son, Shah Tahmasp (whom Anthony Jenkinson met), was marked by conflict with Sunni Muslim neighbours on both sides: the Ottomans and the (Mongol) Uzbeks, descendents of Timur and the Timurids who had held Persian territory until their defeat by Uzun Hasan in the late fifteenth century. Persian agitation among the Shi'a communities in Ottoman territories was another bone of contention, and a constant worry to the Ottomans. This ongoing history of Ottoman/Persian conflict throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held particular interest for a Christian Europe that felt, for much of the sixteenth century, both threatened by and envious of the apparently sudden rise of the Ottomans, and often hopeful and admiring of their increasingly unified and wealthy Persian enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dimmock, Vitkus, Burton on Tamburlaine's Oriental identity. Vitkus, for example, suggests that Tamburlaine's act of burning the Koran makes him "an anti-Islamic scourge and a destroyer who seeks to annihilate Islam as an established religious culture" (51) – a reading that would allow him to be read as a scourge of God *for* the Christians.

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<sup>2</sup> Produced during the caliphate of Uthman and before the leadership of Ali, the first Shi'a Imam, doubts lingered for Shi'a Muslims over the authority of *every* part of the text. Minor though these doubts likely were, it is, on the other hand, highly likely that any such doubts were exaggerated by early modern Christian writers and commentators in light of their own troubles over the authority of the Bible. See the Appendix at the end of this essay for further details of the origins of the schism in Islam and its relevance for early modern English audiences.

<sup>3</sup> A Reuters report which appeared in the *Irish Times* on 5 October 2010, for example, told of an attack by Jewish settlers on a West Bank mosque in which the Koran was burned and Hebrew threats scrawled on the walls – “the fourth such attack since December [2009]”.

<sup>4</sup> Whetstone correctly notes Ismail's founding of the Safavid dynasty (or “empire”, as he revealingly terms it), and the Safavid instatement of (Twelver) Shi'ism as the state religion of Persia, its first such incarnation. See Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> In helpfully highlighting the “ambiguous religious polyphony assigned to Persians during this period” on the English stage, Ghatta also argues for the viability of Marlowe's Tamburlaine's identity as a Shi'a Muslim. We differ, however, in that he sees the play (and especially what he goes on to call Tamburlaine's “shifting religious identity” as a Timur figure) as a relatively accurate representation of the historical realities of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century Persia, rather than (as I do) as a reflection of English audiences' knowledge of Persia and the subtext of their interests in Persian models. Unfortunately, Ghatta provides no explanation of how Marlowe or an English audience might have known of historical realities such as the tradition tracing Timur's descent

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from the Shi'a hero, Ali, or the existence of Shi'a communities in Persia before the Safavids, except that these "must have been part of circulated knowledge".

<sup>6</sup> This version of the idea comes from Purchas, *His Pilgrimage* (1617), but similar suggestions can be found in the accounts of the early Muscovy Company adventurers gathered in Hakluyt (1589).

<sup>7</sup> Alleyn's role as Tamburlaine made him an obvious casting choice in the many imitations of Marlowe's play and hero; for example, in *The Battle of Alcazar*, the stage directions (in the "Plot") specify that Alleyn plays Muly Mahamett. See Greg 26.

<sup>8</sup> It was the 1620s before Persia became an object of direct interest to Britain again, following the (enforced) support of East India Company ships for the Persian campaign to oust the Portuguese from the strategically-positioned island of Ormuz in 1622, which led, in turn, to the commencement of diplomatic relations with Persia in 1626 when Sir Dodmore Cotton was sent on an embassy to the Persian Shah. But the Ottoman trade was well established by then, and the political "commodiousness" of Islamic schism was felt less deeply.

<sup>9</sup> It is Mehmed, conqueror of Constantinople, who after his "victories against the christians passed into *Asia* against *Vsancusan*, the mighty king of *Persia*" (Whetstone 74).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Marlowe is not the first to come up with this strong identification of Timur with Persia. In her recent study of western historiography of the East, Margaret Meserve observes the same phenoment among quattrocento Italian humanists writing on Timur, respected scholars such as Francisco Filelfo and Flavio Biondo (Meserve 215-23).

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<sup>11</sup> Abbot's Oxford DNB biographer suggests that this popular work was produced for use by his Oxford students, although it was much reprinted and his name only appeared on the title-page in printed editions after his death in 1634.

<sup>12</sup> Dimmock describes the 1595 Minadoi/Hartwell *History* as "presenting a strikingly similar perspective upon these events [the Ottoman-Persian wars] to that which Marlowe had articulated in *Tamburlaine* less than a decade before" (139).

<sup>13</sup> Eastern Persia bordered the Sunni Uzbek khanates, descendents of the Mongols and Timur himself, while the western border was shared (and often disputed) with the Ottomans.

<sup>14</sup> While there are obvious problems in reading the *Tamburlaine* plays as fully continuous with each other, the continuity of the source material and contextual issues is easier, especially given that Part Two followed fairly rapidly on Part One. But there are clearly differences of emphasis, and of the strength of allusion, across both Parts; the classical/Islamic dynamic of Scythian-turned-Persian *Tamburlaine* in Part One seems to give way to a more militantly Islamic Persian/"scourge of God" dynamic in Part Two.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix on the origins of Shi'ism, the establishment of the Safavids in Persia, and with them, of Shi'ism as the state religion.

<sup>16</sup> Jenkinson's account appears in both editions of Hakluyt and is well known and much cited. I include the first sentence where Safavid Ismail claims descent from Ali as it is a much earlier instance of the claim being known to English audiences than Anthony Parr gives in his edition of *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers*, discussed at length later in this essay. See Meshkat on Jenkinson's journey and its reception.

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<sup>17</sup> Outright hostilities between the Ottomans and Persians broke out previously in 1512-20, 1534 and 1548-55. Persian agitation among Shi'a communities in other parts of the Ottoman empire was also known to occur, raising the ire of the Ottomans.

<sup>18</sup> Having emphasised the spread of Islam by “word and sword” (e.g., 205, 227), at a later point we find this observation of the division within Islam: “the sword being decider of controuersies in their Religion” (Purchas 427).

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix, and the inaccurate but suggestive hint of this in my earlier quotation from Whetstone.

<sup>20</sup> It seems that this strategic duplicity was recognised and embraced by the English in what Marlowe might encourage us to consider the spirit of equivocation. We have in Thomas Sherley, after his imprisonment in a Constantinople jail for several years, a wonderful example of an Englishman absorbing and re-articulating this state policy of duplicity. In his *Discours of the Turkes*, written in Constantinople in late 1606 and early 1607, the first months after his release (after the intervention of King James), Sherley says “And yf there shoulde bee a generall warre made by all Christian princes vpon the Turke, there is noe nation soe potente to offende the Turkes & receaue noe kinde of dommadge from them as the Englishe”, noting the superiority of English ships and the likely support of Christians held in captivity by the Turks. But in the very next sentences, he nonchalantly describes the gunpowder, tin, lead, swords, muskets, and arms that comprise “The wares that the Englishe sende into Turkie” (*A Discours of the Turkes*, ed. by E. Denison Ross, *Camden Miscellany*, 16 [1936], pp. 8-9).

<sup>21</sup> Guns and arquebuses, of course, were precisely what the English were shipping to the Ottomans. See Dimmock, “Guns and Gawds”.

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<sup>22</sup> For Vitkus *Tamburlaine* is “a picture of an empire created by individual will, by a single, unchanging, unrelenting leader whose burning drive for possession [eventually] burns out” (p. 75).

<sup>23</sup> His brother Robert took advantage of his time in Europe to order tapestries on themes from the life of Cyrus on behalf of his friends, including Penelope Rich. See Alexander 138.

<sup>24</sup> See Raleigh’s *Historie of the World*, Book 3, chapters 2 and 3 for several versions of this idea. (That quoted above comes from 3. 3. 2.) An interesting, consonant and contemporary interpretation of Cyrus comes from the prolific Lodowick Lloyd who suggests in *The Consent of Time* (1590) that, though in “such fauour with God”, and “being then the onely conquerour of the world, & hauing vnder the *Persian* scepter all the East kingdomes”, Cyrus’s downfall comes because he places his trust in himself rather than God, so that he is instead taught the lesson that “Gods seruaunts should knowe their infirmities, and confesse that God giueth victorie” (sig. Q2r-v/ff. 243-44).

<sup>25</sup> This tradition, ultimately derived from Herodotus, of reading Cyrus as an exemplar of the mutability of human life, is an enduring one, found everywhere from Livy (*History of Rome* [9.17.4]), moralistic scholarly compendia (e.g. Richard Brathwait, *The schollers medley* (1614)) and pamphlet poetry to genres more openly inflected by fall-of-princes values (e.g., Lodowick Lloyd’s compendium, *The Pilgrimage of Princes* [1573] and William Alexander’s closet drama, *The Tragedy of Darius* [1603]).

<sup>26</sup> Persepolis post-dates the historical Cyrus, being the city founded by the later ruler Darius, but it was sometimes confused in early modern sources with Cyrus’s seat, Pasargadae.

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<sup>27</sup> Zenocrate's travel from her uncle's court in Media, "Where all [her] youth [she has] been governed" (1: 1.2.13), is what brings her into Tamburlaine's power in the first place, perhaps another replaying of Persian Cyrus's annexing of his grandfather and uncle's Median empire, the first of his imperial conquests?

<sup>28</sup> In "Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in Sixteenth-Century England: Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*", a paper delivered at the 2010 RSA annual convention in Venice. Rhodes notes that the Panthea/Olympia connection is first observed by Tucker Brooke, although in relation to another play that derives from the *Cyropaedia*, *The Warres of Cyrus*. See notes to the Brawner edition.

<sup>29</sup> Tamburlaine's restraint and monogamy has caused much bemusement to editors and scholars, who (correctly) note that it is not in keeping with the lascivious, appetite-driven Eastern despot stereotype so common in the Renaissance. That is, I would suggest, because we have been looking to Ottoman rather than Persian models for Tamburlaine, in defiance of the play's own careful geopolitical construction of its hero. Tamburlaine's stringent fidelity to Zenocrate instead recalls Cyrus's punctilious treatment of Panthea, left unmolested in his care – a courtesy that Alexander the Great, in turn, extended to the womenfolk of Darius III, the last Persian emperor, earning him Darius's endorsement as sufficiently honourable to be the conqueror of the "race of Cyrus". The connections between Cyrus and Alexander, already hinted at in the classical sources, tend to be reaffirmed during the early modern period. Here, I quote William Alexander's *The Tragedy of Darius* (1603) (G1).

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<sup>30</sup> Raleigh's narration of the life of Cyrus is well researched and shows much sensitivity to the political ideas for which the life of Cyrus was a vehicle in early modern England, particularly after the accession of James.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Knolles's version is typical: "the first and greatest" cause (of "the beginning, progresse, and perpetuall felicitie of this the Othoman Empire") is "the iust and secret iudgement of the Almightye, who in iustice deliuereth into the hands of these mercillesse miscreants, nation after nation, and kingdome vpon kingdome, [...] to be punished for their sinnes" (sig. [A4]v).

<sup>32</sup> Machiavelli himself had found Xenophon's Cyrus an exemplary figure, primarily for his willingness to deceive others in order to win power. See, for example, *Discorsi* 2.13 and 3.1.

<sup>33</sup> Grounds for looking to the Persian empire as a direct exemplary model for England could be found by Marlowe's contemporaries, although with some effort. Renaissance ethnography decreed that both were northern races, descended from the line of Japhet, and characterised by pale skin and a "cold" humoral disposition. Moreover, it was generally agreed that the first inhabitants of the island of Britain came from somewhere in the East, whether Troy or beyond. And radical Protestants such as John Foxe implicitly linked Protestant England to the ancient Eastern empires of Assyria and Persia by appropriating the *translatio imperii* trope westwards again to suggest that England – and later Britain - might become the "fifth monarchy" or fifth world empire prophesied in the Book of Daniel. Painful memories of Britain's "barbarian" origins as testified by Tacitus, Caesar and others could also be re-deployed to accommodate the

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more flattering Persian “barbarian” example. For discussion of British efforts to escape or rewrite its “barbarian” past, see Rhodes 118-48, and Mikalachki.

<sup>34</sup> We know only the title of *Tamar Chan* (which seems to have been in two parts), for example, but given the proliferation of imitations of the *Tamburlaine* plays, it seems reasonable to conclude that others, too, may have been lost.

<sup>35</sup> As, of course, does Pistol in *2Henry IV*, 2. 4.159-60. See, for example, Hardin 31-41 citing Levin 60.

<sup>36</sup> Matar makes the striking claim that “The numerical evidence about the concurrent interaction with Jews and American Indians shows that Renaissance Britons were far more likely to meet or to have met a Muslim than a Jew or an Indian” (3).

<sup>37</sup> *Othello* is a complicated but relevant example; the more obvious ones would include *The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukely*, Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk*, Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*, John Mason’s *The Turk*, Goffe’s *The Raging Turk*, Massinger’s *The Renegado* as well as heroic romances such as *The Foure Prentices of London*. For a helpful but not consistently accurate summary of plays in the period with relatively substantial treatments of Persia, see McJannet.

<sup>38</sup> James’s dislike of the Ottomans, despite the strength of trade between both powers, perhaps underlies his conspicuous personal interest in Persia, especially the Persia of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. It seems likely that writers and courtiers in his circle sought to express their loyalty to him by producing works based on Xenophon and other historians of Persia. Henry Holland, son and publisher of Philemon Holland’s English

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translation of the *Cyropaedia*, uses the dedicatory epistle to claim that the translation was originally commissioned by James.

<sup>39</sup> Early modern English sources often termed Ali “Mortus Ali”. It is actually a corruption of “*murtaza* Ali”, but Anthony Parr suspects it may have suggested martyrdom to English readers. See Parr 64n.

<sup>40</sup> In this essay, I continue to use the term “sophy” as the early modern sources do: to help preserve the strongly-felt distinction between the Persian and Ottoman rulers

<sup>41</sup> In his travel journal, published in 1611 as *The Preachers Trauells*, John Cartwright (who had met Anthony Sherley along the way) scoffs that the stories of Robert having a child in Persia and Shah Abbas acting as godfather to this child are “certainly more fitte for a Stage, for the common people to wonder at, then for any mans priuate studies” ([K3]v-[K4]/ff. 70-71). Cartwright’s scepticism is well-founded since Robert and Teresa Sherley’s first surviving child was born in England in 1611. For a closer look at Christianity in Persia, and the stubborn rumours of Shah Abbas’s imminent conversion to Christianity, see Houston.

<sup>42</sup> Vitkus traces Bullithrubble’s dramatic ancestry back to another Persian play, Thomas Preston’s *Cambyzes* (1561). See Vitkus (ed.) 20.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Hattaway agrees with *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*’s Boy’s estimation of the play as a “spectacular play of little worth” (Hattaway’s words, 84n) in his New Mermaids edition. More recently, Richard Raiswell, author of the new Oxford DNB entries for the Sherleys, deems the play “short and unremarkable”.

<sup>44</sup> Arguments have also been advanced for its connections with Shakespeare plays such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Pericles*. See, for example, H. Neville Davies.

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<sup>45</sup> It is also worth noting that Anthony Jenkinson attributes this wary treatment of him to peace terms the Persian Shah had recently agreed with the Ottomans, and to the hostile presence of the Ottoman ambassador at the court.

<sup>46</sup> This very brief summary is primarily derived from Endress. It is not intended to be a full or authoritative account of the origins and history of Islam and Islamic schism, but compiled in broad brush strokes with an eye to the elements known to early modern readers in England.

<sup>47</sup> For early modern writers, the divergence between the Sunni and Shi'a interpretations of the Koran and the authority of its various components was sometimes rendered as a difference of texts, as, for example, in the Whetstone version cited earlier in this essay.

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