TAMBURLAINE, THE SCOURGE OF GOD:
MEXÍA, MARLOWE AND VÉLEZ
DE GUEVARA

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Tamburlaine (or Timur Lang, 1336-1405) is one of those historical characters who have become a legend and a myth. History and literature unite in the formation (deformation?) of these characters. This is also the case of Richard II of England, his contemporary, and many others. In this paper I want to show how the figure of Tamburlaine as Scourge of God was used by three different writers.

Pedro Mexia published his *Silva de Varia Lección* in 1540 (43?). Chapter XXVIII of Part I is dedicated to Tamburlaine and has the title: "Del excelentísimo capitán y muy poderoso rey el Gran Tamorlán. De los reinos y provincias que conquistó; y su disciplina y arte militar". The *Silva* was very well known in the Renaissance, and it was translated into English in 1571 under the title: *The foreste or collection of histories, no less profitable then pleasant...* Doone out of French into English, by Thomas Fortescue. London, I. Kyngston for W. Jones, 1571.

As we can see in the title, the Chapter dedicated to Tamburlaine is a description of his conquests and personality. He was often a libertador of oppressed peoples, an "excelente capitán que fue tan sabio y diestro en gobernar su gente que nunca hubo en ella motín ni rebelión notable". But he was also cruel. A merchant from Genoa who travelled with the army of Tamburlaine dared to ask him why he showed so much cruelty with those who humbly implored his mercy. There comes a short reference to the Scourge of God. It is reported that

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1 The relevance of this medieval king is shown by the numerous embassies that visited him. See F. López Estrada: "La relation de l'ambassade d' Henry II au Grand Tamerlaine", *Études de Lettres*, Revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Université de Lausanne. Recits et voyages hispanique. Juillet-Septiembre, 1992. 28 pgs.
4 *Silva*, op. cit. p. 415.
Tamburlaine, with much anger and alteration, his face as burning and his eyes full of fire, answered: "Tú debes de pensar que yo soy hombre como los otros. Muy enangado estás en ello, que no soy sino iva de Dios y destrucción del mundo; y no parescas más ante mí si no quieres llevar el pago que meresce tu atrevimiento". The merchant, who knew him well, changed his route and he was not seen again.

It is admitted by the critics that the Silva was one of the sources Marlowe used for his Tamburlaine. Infinite ambition, inordinate lust of dominion, and unbounded belief in his own victorious destiny are outstanding qualities in the sixteenth century conception of Tamburlaine, not products of Marlowe's invention. This is not to say that Marlowe used everything in the histories without selecting for his purpose. It is obvious that he was more interested in the spiritual consequences of this power lust, as Leslie Spence says.

The title page of Marlowe's Tamburlaine (1590) presents "two Tragicall Discourses" concerning a mighty monarch who "for his tyranny, and terour in Warre" was termed, THE SCOURGE OF GOD. It is not only a mere phrase repeated more than a dozen times in the play; it is a definitive concept which signifies a pattern of human behaviour and of divine destiny. This concept is used in different ways by Catholics and Protestants, the latter exploiting the idea more than the former. Roy W. Battenhouse wrote an extraordinary study of the concept.

In the Renaissance orthodox doctrine taught that God punishes the wicked in two ways: internally, by sending maladies of the mind and perturbations of the passions; externally, by permitting the ravages of tyrants, who are thus made to serve God as his scourges. In using the second of these two means of punishment, God permits evil agents to rage for a time, to be used simply as a means of punishing the wickedness of other men. "Scourge of God", then, is a concept employed in accounting for historical calamities such as wars and tyrannies, which are interpreted as social punishments inflicted under God's providence by wicked men who will quite probably suffer the same type of "scourge" themselves in the course of time.

Although an ancient notion, it was frequently invoked by Renaissance moralists who wished to make it clear that retributive justice is not confined to an after-world.

8 See also Seneca's De Ira, and among the Christians Lactancian's De Ira Dei.
9 A Commentary Upon the Prophecies of Isaiah (1690), pp. 115-122. It appeared in Latin in 1551, in French in 1552, both editions dedicated to Edward VI. Later Latin editions appeared in 1559, 1570, and 1583; and a 1572 French translation of the 1570 Latin edition was the basis of C. Cotton's English translation, entered to Harrison and Bishop as early as 21 Jan 1577, then on 26 Jan. 1608 to Kingston, and printed by him 1609.
10 It is therefore a particularly appropriate sign of Tamburlaine's rage when he tears Bajazet under foot, and when he orders his horsemen to charge (and thus to trample under foot) the virgins of Damascus. (Tamburlaine, 11. 1458, 1898).
11 Commentary, pp. 119-120.
The "Scourge of God" concept helped explain history to many others besides Calvin, continues Battenhouse. The concept was useful, for example, in accounting for the miseries suffered by Christendom at the hands of the Turks. God "suffereth the wicked and cursed seed of Hymenæus to be a scourge and whip for our sines", wrote Peter Ashton in a preface to his Shorte Treatise Upon the Turkes Chronicles (1546). And Richard Knolles in "The Preface to the Reader" of his The Generall Historie of the Turkes (1603) gives the same explanation of Christendom's suffering. The Turkish empire has had scandalous successes. One cause for this domination is "the uncertainite of worldly things", which must be forever rising and falling. But "the first and greatest" cause, Knolles says, is the just and secret judgement of the Almighty, who in justice deliueth into the hands of these merciless miscreants, nation after nation, and kingdom upon kingdom, as unto the most terrible executioners of his dreadful wrath, to be punished for their sinnes.12

Philip Mornay, says Battenhouse, whose popular work of Huguenot apologetics was translated by Sidney and Golding13, interpreted some of the greatest heroes of history as unwitting instruments of Divine Providence. For example, Cyrus was led by his ambition to make war upon the Assyrians. But God adapted Cyrus' design to an historical purpose of His own: the deliverance of the Israelites. Titus was led by his own passion to attack Jerusalem: but God thus made Titus the executor of justice against the Jews who crucified Christ. When Judas betrayed Christ, the devil himself served God's providence. Mornay's most significant example, however, is Attila, the great robber-conqueror, much famed as God's scourge14. Mornay's Attila is like Isaiah's Assyrian and like Marlowe's Tamburlaine:

Likewise when Attila entered euin into the bowelles of Europe, all the Preachers of Christendom did nothing els but bewayle the wretchednesse of that tyme. Ye must thinke that when this great Robber cast lots in his Countrie of Scythia, whether he should leade the third part of that land, he had another meaning then to reforme the world. Yet not withstanding, all men acknowledge him to be a necessary scourge of God, and to have come in due season. Yea and he himselfe considering that he had conquered much more of the Countrie, than ever he hoped at the first to have scene, insomuch that he had overcome euin those which were counted the strength of the World: as barbarous as he was, he fell to thinke of himself, that he was the Scourge whereby God chastised the World. Not that God is not able to chastise vs himselfe whensoever he listeth... but that as a Master of a howsould holdeth skorne to whippe his Slaves himselfe... but causeth (peradventure) the groome of his stable to doe it, to the intent to shew them the insensibleness of his displeasure: Een so doth God punish the wicked one by another15.

As Battenhouse points out, Marlowe as a divinity student at Cambridge very probably read Protestant theologians such as Mornay. This would provide us with ample justification for examining quite precisely this theory which makes histories of warfare so piously educational. A fundamental aspect to the "Scourge of God" concept, of course, is that provides a solid justification for the existence of wars: they are paradoxically justified (they scourge sinners) and at the same time are condemned (by God, who will eventually see to it that the wager of war is in his turn punished).

Thus, as Battenhouse shows, Elizabethan authors commonly define war as "a scourge of the wrath of God"16. Greville condemns war as "the perfect type of Hell", but also justifies war as, by Heaven's overruling power, "The sword of Justice, and of Sinne the terror". He explains that war is a form of tyranny grounded in man's sin, arising when man gives rein to the rebellion that lives in his nature. Thus, when man repeats the original sin and strives to become God, he becomes merely the Scourge of God. Greville points to Nimrod and to the Turkish empire as two notable examples of highly prosperous tyranny founded on war. He explains that Mahomet's religion is, essentially, a Religion-of-War: it prepares men for danger only; it considers virtues of peace effeminate; its discipline is not how to use but how to get; its Church is "mere collusion and deceit"17. So Mahomet's followers, boldly "climbing vp united staires" of diligent wickedness, have prevailed over the Christians, because the Christians are split between a doctrine of peace and a pope who stirs them up to war. The wicked Turks punish the impious Christians. War is of the devil, but the devil is under the providence of God.

12 Quoted by Battenhouse, p. 339.
13 Mornay's De la Verité de la Religion Chrétienne (Antwerp, 1581) is in the S.R. licensed for translation on 13 Oct., 1581, and on 7 Nov., 1586, Thomas Cadman was paid for printing the translation.
14 Vélez de Guevara has also a play called Attila, azote de Dios.
15 Mornay, op. cit., p. 209.
16 The quoted phrase is Nicholas Breton's in Characters Upon Essays Moral and Divine (1615). Note also in The Good and the Bad (1616) Breton's character of "An Unworthy King": he is "the scourge of sin... he knows no God, but makes an idol of nature...". (Cf. Tamburlaine, 1. 869).
17 Note that Tamburlaine in Marlowe's play exhibits just such religion as is here described.
Nimrod, whom Greville has cited as type-example of the Scourge, was a hero known to Renaissance readers in Du Bartas' popular story. The story is noteworthy, because the pattern of Nimrod's career parallels Tamburlaine's. At an early age Nimrod tyrannizes, like Tamburlaine, over shepherds.

Battenhouse goes on to show that the "Scourge of God" notion often contains within it its own undoing. The tyrant Caesar, so Philip Mornay said, was slain miserably "To shewe vnto Tyrannes that the highest step of their greatnesse is tyed to a halter, and that they be but Gods scourges which he will cast into the fyre when he hath done with them". And La Primaudaye affirmed that for tyrants God has His own secret but sure stroke of revenge - "God will returne into their bosom the euil which they have done". This faith sustained the important Elizabethan doctrine that men should not for private reasons take God's revenge into their own hands.

The concept of the "Scourge of God" has, therefore, two complementary pedagogical aspects: it goes someway to explaining the difficult "problem of evil": calamities are just chastisements permitted by God and tyrants should take note that their excesses will not go unpunished: they in their turn will be chastised.

There is, certainly, says Battenhouse, good reason for supposing that Marlowe was not ignorant of the meaning of the concept. The Scythian Tamburlaine is, like the Scythian Attila and like all Turks and Titans, a Scourge of God. In terms of Isaiah's philosophy of history, his rise can be seen as having a providential purpose because of the wickedness of the Persians, the Turks, and the Babylonians. He is a rod for their chastisement. The scourging which he administers is, except in the case of the virgins of Damascus, more or less deserved: Mycetes is a vain and foolish king; Cosroe is a usurper; Bajazet is proud and cruel. Tamburlaine is perhaps more wicked than they; but God uses the wicked to punish the wicked. The destruction and slaughter which Tamburlaine wreaks in his lust for power but under the mask of piety are a scandal permitted under God's providential justice.

The conqueror's religion is a Religion of War. Throughout the play Tamburlaine fulfills the action demanded by his rôle as Scourge of God. Until such time as Heaven decides to cast its Scourge into the fire, he is permitted to continue in a crescendo of pride and conquest.

Finally, we have the catastrophic spectacle of Tamburlaine's blasphemy and death. This is the point which Tamburlaine's history reaches with the Triumphal Entry into Babylon. Drawn in his chariot by slave-kings, Tamburlaine likens himself appropriately to Belus, the son of Nimrod, to Ninus, Iegenardy Assyrian conqueror, and to Alexander. These earliest of kings (the accent on primitivism may be significant) were, for Elizabethan readers, stock examples of pride, ambition, and impiety.

The overthrow of Babylon has symbolic importance, because Babylon in Christian tradition is, as we know, the epipome of wickedness. The moment therefore is a significant one. Tamburlaine, calling himself God's scourge, has, like the Assyrian of Isaiah's prophecy, punished the world's wickedness symbolized by Babylon. His usefulness as Scourge may now be regarded as at an end. We may expect him, like the Assyrian, to vaunt himself against God. Even while his soldiers are still about the work of the destruction of Babylon, Tamburlaine calls out:

Now Casane, wher's the Turkish Alcaron
And all the heapes of supersticiousbookes,
Found in the Temples of that Mahomet,
Whom I haue thought a God? they shall be burnt.

In vaine I see men worship Mahomet,
My sword hath sent millions of Turks to hell,
Slew all his Priests, his kinsmen, and his friends,
And yet liue vnoucht by Mahomet.

Then, as the books are burning, Tamburlaine reveals to us that he has reached the moral stand which Greene called "atheist", and which is, to speak accurately and according to Calvin's interpretation, the epipome of blasphemy. He dares God out of heaven in a manner which recalls certain bystanders at Calvary addressing Christ. He repudiates God's laws and openly questions the existence of God. His words are:

Now Mahomet, if thou haue any power,
Come down thy selue and worke a miracle,
Thou art not worthy to be worshipped,
That sufferes flames of fire to burne the writ
Wherein the sum of thy religion rests.

20 Tamburlaine coincides in time with the schism of Avignon, "the Babylonian captivity".
22 This is not historical: he was reported to be a devout Muslim and a man of letters.
Less than twenty lines later Tamburlaine cries: "But stay, I feel my selfe distempered sudainely" (I. 4329). The average Elizabethan could be relied upon to draw the right conclusion in terms of the moral teaching of the day: "it is often said of the wicked in the Scripture, that God will return into their bosom the euil which they have done" (La Primaudaye). God has cast his Scourge into the fire—a fire in Tamburlaine's own blood, kindled by the conqueror himself.

I do not know a Catholic equivalent of the Protestant concept of "Scourge of God" as seen in Marlowe's play. In Spanish drama we only have Guevara's play, where that concept is used in a different way and Tamburlaine becomes God's arm to avenge a love affair, as we will see.

Luís Vélez de Guevara (Ecija, 1570 - Madrid, 1644) was one of the few playwrights of the Spanish Golden Century who didn't care about the printing of his works. That's why they are distributed in different collections, although a lot of them appeared first as suelias, and today are an authentic rarity. An example is his play

Comedia Famosa, la Nueva Ira de Dios, y Gran Tamerlan de Persia...
En Valladolid: En la Imprenta de Alonso del Riego, en donde se hallará con otros distintos, Historias, Comedias, Autos, Libros, Coplas, Entremeses, y Estampas. (without date)23.

His plays, says Mesonero Romanos, "pertenecen al drama apellidado entonces de ruído ó de cuerpo24; tratan argumentos é intervienen en ellos

personajes históricos y elevados, vidas y hechos esforzados de los héroes y de los santos, y expresado todo con el mayor lujo de entonación y accesorios de efecto en la escena, especialmente codiciados por el público de aquella época"25. I have been talking about history and histories in this paper, but we must take care when we apply it to Guevara's works. Cotarelo, a specialist on Guevara, said that "más de la mitad de sus comedias son históricas, legendarias o genealógicas"26. We must not take "históricas" in a literal sense.

Alberto Lista, protagonist of the revival of the Sevillian renaissance poetry of the eighteenth century, criticized Guevara in the most absolute terms and gives an accurate description of some of his heroes:

Pocos vestigios se ven en GUEVARA de las mejoras que hizo Lope en el arte dramático. Mas bien parece imitador de las comedias de Virués, Cervantes y otros antecesores del padre de nuestro teatro, que de la gracia y fiel representacion de las pasiones humanas, que, á pesar de sus defectos, admiramos en los dramas de este. Casi todas sus fábulas son ó se fingen tomadas de la historia. Figuran en ellas Tamorlan, Escanderbech, el Rey Desiderio, Atila, Roldan, Bernardo del Carpio, cuyos caracteres desfigura, dando á estos héroes el lenguaje de los rofianes y baladrones. Gusta mucho de la bambolla y del aparato teatral, como Virués, é introduce, como él, personajes alegóricos27.

A commentary that was retaken by Alborg in our days:

Vélez se tomaba con los hechos y personajes históricos—lo mismo nacionales que extranjeros—identicas libertades que todos los dramaturgos de su tiempo: la Historia era sólo un deposito generosamente colmado de acontecimientos y tipos de excepción, en donde provehese para urdir conflictos de comedia. Y esta condición es todavía más notoria en el teatro del ecijano, hasta el punto de constituir una de sus más acusadas características. Ningun otro dramaturgo llevó a las tablas, en la misma medida que Vélez, tantos reyes y reinas, apasionadas damas y audaces caballeros, siempre trazados a escala heroica. No faltan entre sus obras las piezas de más sencillo y natural enredo, pero la mayor parte de las suyas están repletas de románticos sucesos, violencias y crímenes, virtudes conducidas hasta imposible perfección o pasiones de anormal y bárbaro primitivismo28.

25 Quoted by Mesonero Romanos, op. cit. pp. xii-xiii.
As we are going to see, the idea of Tamburlaine as Scourge of God has been transformed. The influence of Mexia and Perordinus is clear, especially in the description of our hero:

Hobre es de mediano cuerpo,
de cuya espontosa cara,
aun aqui la carne tiembela,
rizada, y negra la barba,
los ojos desencazados,
la nariz abierta, y ancha,
con una señal hecha:
es la mitad de su cara
de la color de la rosa,
y la otra mitad morada:
los labios gruesos, y rocosos,
y la nerviosa garganta,
corno de un fiero novillo
con las venas señaladas.
Largo, y negro es el cabello,
formado el pecho, y la espalda,
travado de braço, y ombro,
y la mano corta, y ancha;
las piernas largas, y recias,
calzada una tosca abarca:
es coxo de la una pierna,
por esto en la lengua Persiana,
por llamarle el hierro coxo,
el gran Tamarlán le llaman.

This is the atmosphere. Tamburlain becomes God’s arm to avenge a love affair of a Christian princess and the Turk. And he is introduced with the idea that he was elected by God:

Christians ay en Balaquia,
pero aunque Christianos son
a trueco de verse libres,
seguiran nuestra opinion.
El Tamarlán me llaman,
que en vestra Persiana voz
quiere dezir, Hierro coxo,
porque coxo, y fuerte soy.
Esta rosa, que en mi cara
demuestra un grande arbol
díze, que en mi nacimiento
fui señalado de Dios.

although from the beginning we have him as his scourge, the avenger against the Turk:

Tenéos, villanos honrados,
dexad vivos a estos dos,
que de en medio desta afronta,
gordan para darle cuenta
deste castigode Dios,
al Ejercito de Turcos.

"Tamarlan" against God: "la nueva ira de Dios", as he is addressed by different characters:

Yo, que soy el Tamerán,
yo soy el que fuí pastor
vil, de baxo nacimiento,
y he de ascender al asiento,
y estado superior.
Yo soy quien con tardo buelo
la tierra pienso ganar,
y qui si lo llego intentar,
he de alzarme con el Cielo.

Bay.: .......... 
Tam.: Ni Alá quiere q me ayude,
ni mahoma, ni la Luna,
y quiero, que la fortuna
sea contraria, y no se mute;
ni quiero favor del Cielo, 
miemors durare la guerra, 
sea en mi contra la tierra, 
tengan por fuerza el suelo, 
juntense todo el poder 
del mundo y en contra mia, 
que antes, que se acabe el dia, 
té he de matar, ó prender.
(p. 10)

Tamburlain, after vaunting heaven and earth, directs his conquests towards 
the deep. Remember the medieval and renaissance idea of the four levels of the 
Universe:

Yo, q os ofrecí en mi tierra? 
yá sé que prometí un día, 
que à todos os premiaria 
acabando la guara; 
acabese, que es temprano; 
lapa no me pidais, 
hasta que el cetro veais 
de todo el mundo en mi mano, 
y luego con pecho fiel, 
que aya conquistado el mundo, 
iré a ganar el profundo, 
por daros Reynos en el.
(p. 22)

As happens in Marlowe's Tamburlain, Part II, there is an unnatural coalition 
of Christians and Muslims against Tamburlain. He dies, not in peace as Mexía 
says, but poisoned by Aurelia:

Mas ay Alá, qué es aquésto? 
què fuego en el alma se entra, 
que las entrañas me abran? 
ay Alá mis muerte es cierta. 
O Alá cruel, y embistisco, 
que por estar en su esfera 
seguro de mis hazañas, 
oy a morir me condenas. 
Aguardame Bayaceto, 
que en lasinfernales penas, 
dixiste, que me aguardabas, 
y ya está mi alma en ellas.
(p. 28-29)

Velez follows Mexia in the description of the huge tomb built for Tamerlan:

Llevad esse fiero monstruo; 
y en essas asperas sierras, 
que dividen los confines 
de la Rufia, y de la Grecia, 
le hazed un bello sepulcro, 
por dexar memoria eterna 
de su vida, y de su muerte, 
y en él enterrado sea.
(p. 29)

As we have seen, very little of Battenhouse's exposition of the "Scourge of 
God" theory in the Renaissance is kept in Guevara's play. Only the idea is left. 
The figure of Tamburlaine is transformed, exaggerated, suitable for the theatrical 
aparatus of the Spanish drama of the 17th century. The Spanish conquistador 
Aguirre was also termed "la cólera de Dios", but this is another theme.

Y aquí acaba la Comedia / de la Nueva Ira de Dios / y Gran Tamorlán de 
Persia.