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# Dramatic Representation of the Battle of Ankara and Bayezid I's Captivation by Tamerlane

## Ankara Savaşı ve I. Sultan Bayezid'in Timurlenk'e Esir Düşmesinin Sahneye Yansıması

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### Özet

Bu makalenin amacı, I. Bayezid ve Timur (Timurlenk)'un orduları arasında gerçekleşen Ankara Savaşı (1402) ve özellikle de bu savaşın sonucunun sahneye yansımasını veya gönderme yapılması Christopher Marlowe'un tragedyası *Tamburlaine, Bölüm I* (1587), ve Thomas Dekker'in komedyası *Old Fortunas* (1600)'da incelemektir. Ankara Savaşı Anadolu, Balkan ve Bizans tarihi açısından önem taşımasına rağmen söz konusu iki tiyatro eserinde Ankara Savaşı'na çok az yer verilmiş, ve daha çok I. Bayezid'in Timurlenk'in eline esir düşmesine odaklanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ankara Savaşı, I. Bayezid, Timurlenk, Tiyatro, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker.

### Abstract

This paper dwells on the dramatic representation of the Battle of Ankara (1402) fought between the forces of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane) and Bayezid I in two plays: Christopher Marlowe's tragedy *Tamburlaine, Part I* (1587) and Thomas Dekker's comedy *Old Fortunas* (1600). Although the Battle of Ankara constitutes an important point in the history of Anatolia, the Balkans and Byzantium, the two plays dwell more on the captivation of Bayezid I by Tamerlane, and its results rather than the battle itself.

**Key Words:** Battle of Ankara (Angora), Bayezid I, Tamerlane, Drama, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker

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This paper dwells on the dramatic representation of the Battle of Ankara (1402) fought between the forces of Timur Khan (Tamerlane) and Bayezid I<sup>1</sup>, with reference to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Part I* (1587) and Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunas* (1600). It is apparent that in these plays, the emphasis has been on the result of the battle and Bayezid's captivation father than the battle itself or the concrete circumstances that led to his defeat (or the military strategies employed by Tamerlane's to win the battle) such as Tamerlane's army outnumbering the Ottomans<sup>2</sup>, the Tartars and the Sipahis from the Anatolian Beyliks leaving to join Tamerlane's army, and the main water supply (for both the armies) being diverted to a location near the town of Çubuk by Tamerlane to deprive the Ottoman forces from having any access to water.

The Battle of Ankara (Angora, Ancora) fought between the army of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I "the Thunderbolt"<sup>2</sup> and the Turco-Mongol leader Tamerlane<sup>3</sup> near Ankara on July 20, 1402 marks a noteworthy point in the history of Anatolia, the Balkans and Byzantium. Perhaps its importance can be better illustrated by Bayezid's and Tamerlane's former position up to the 'clash' between their armies.

At the time Murad I, Bayezid's father, was assassinated at the Battle of Kossova<sup>4</sup> in 1389, the Ottomans had founded an empire composed of vassal principalities in the Balkans and Anatolia<sup>5</sup>. Bayezid I acceded the throne after his father's death, and under his rule the Ottomans continued their expansion in Anatolia, Balkans and the frontline between Islam and Christianity moved slowly towards the Kingdom of Hungary.

Sigismund, the Hungarian King and the Holy Roman Emperor, alarmed by the Ottoman advancement towards his kingdom, made a call to the Catholic and Orthodox Christian states and principalities through Pope Boniface IX, in order to organize a Crusade to fence out the Turks from Europe. And thus, the crusade of Nicopolis (Battle of Nicopolis) launched in 1396 between the Ottoman and Serb forces on one side, and an allied force from the Kingdom of Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire, France, Wallachia, Poland, England, Scotland, old Swiss Confederacy, Republic of Venice, Republic of Genoa,

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<sup>1</sup> Although the correct spelling for the Ottoman Sultan's name is Bayezid I, "Bajazeth" has been employed in *Tamburlaine, Part I* and "Bajazet" in *Old Fortunas*. Thus, the forms preferred by the playwrights will be maintained when referring to their plays.

<sup>2</sup> 1354-1403

<sup>3</sup> 1336-1405

<sup>4</sup> The aftermath of the Ottoman victory at the Battle of Kosovo (1389) illustrates that they had conquered most of the Balkans, and had reduced the Byzantine Empire to the area immediately surrounding Constantinople. The Ottomans also proceeded to besiege Constantinople, the Byzantine capital in 1390, 1395, 1397, 1400 and 1422, finally conquering it in 1453.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1481*, The Isis Press, Istanbul 1990.

Knights of St. John on the other. The Battle of Nicopolis took place at the fortress of Nicopolis in Bulgaria resulting with the victory of the Ottomans, only further reaffirming their control of the Balkans. Following the battle, Bayezid I returned to Anatolia in 1393 and added other principalities to create a centralized empire stretching from "Danube to the Euphrates"<sup>6</sup>. Timur, in the meanwhile, had established a powerful empire, proclaimed himself heir to the sovereign rights of the Ilkhanids over Anatolia, and wished to rehabilitate the Mongol Empire.

The Ottoman sultan challenged and forced Tamerlane to fight him at Çubuk (near Ankara), but the Ottomans lost the Battle of Ankara on 28 July 1402. As a result, Bayezid I was taken prisoner<sup>7</sup>. His wife Maria (Olivera Despina), the daughter of Lazar (King of Serbia) was also captured at Bursa with their two daughters and sent to Tamerlane<sup>8</sup>. Bayezid unable to endure the shame of his downfall died in captivity shortly afterwards in Akşehir in 1403.

Historical narratives on Bayezid I's defeat by Tamerlane was thoroughly established in Europe after a century or so after the tragic event. These accounts adopted a classical tradition of historiography, characterized by the telling of history from "the point of view of man as citizen of a secular state" and the course of events directed by Fortune, as an outcome of Renaissance Humanism<sup>9</sup>. Thus, chronicles connected Bayezid's downfall to fortune and elaborated on the humiliations he went through in the hands of Tamerlane. According to different perspectives, Bayezid was exhibited in a cage, fed with the crumbs from Tamerlane's table, and used as a block to mount to his horse, or as a footstool to his throne. There are also variations about the death of Bayezid, some have stated that he died a natural death while others indicated that he dashed out his brains against the bars of the cage or poisoned himself with the poison concealed in his ring.

Whichever version of the event they might have preferred, Bayezid's defeat and capture became a popular subject for western writers nevertheless.

<sup>6</sup> Halil İnalcık. *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*. Tr. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber, Weidefeld and Nicolson, London 1973, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> The former sovereigns who took refuge under Tamerlane's protection re-established their independent principalities, the remaining Ottoman territory was divided among Bayezid's sons and they all accepted Tamerlane's sovereignty. On Tamerlane's death they began an intensive struggle for control of the whole territory and by 1415 the Ottomans were able to re-establish their former control in Rumelia and Anatolia (Inalcık, 1973: 16). Bayezid's imperial ambition to capture Constantinople, however, was not realized until 1453.

<sup>8</sup> M. Çağatay Uluçay, *Padişahların Kadınları ve Kızları*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 2001, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*, George Allen&Unwin, London 1984, pp. 57-58.

One of the plays including this historical battle is Christopher Marlowe's *Tamerlane, Part I*<sup>10</sup> (1587-8), a two-part drama written in blank-verse. Marlowe's tragedy illustrates Tamburlaine's rise through military conquest from being a shepherd-robber to gaining unrivalled power. Tamburlaine helps Cosroe to overthrow his brother Mycetes, the Persian king, but then persuades the Persian lords to join him against Cosroe and defeats him. He next conquers the forces of the Turkish Emperor Bayezid I ("Bajazeth" in the play) and captures both the Ottoman Sultan and his empress Zabina. Bajazeth is chained and kept in an iron cage, fed with leftovers and used as his footstool, while his wife serves as a servant to Tamburlaine's concubine's maid. This ridicule continues until Bajazeth and Zabina commit suicide by beating their heads against the bars of the Bajazeth cage.

In *Tamburlaine, Part I*, Tamburlaine and Bajazeth confront each other for the very first time in Act III, scene iii. They are both accompanied by their men and their female companions Zabina (Bajazeth's wife) and Zenocrate (Tamburlaine's concubine). After a long verbal duel between the two parties Bajazeth and Tamburlaine leave their crowns with their female companions for safe keeping and leave for the battle. The battle (the Battle of Ankara) is fought off the stage and is presented only by a stage direction: "*BAJAZETH flies [across the stage], and he [TAMBURLAINE] pursues him [off stage]. The battle short, and they [re] enter. Bajazeth is overcome*". After his victory over Bajazeth's army, Tamburlaine gloats by mocking him:

Tamburlaine:	Now, king of bassoes, who is conqueror?
Bajazeth:	Thou, by the fortune of this damned foil [defeat].
Tamburlaine:	Where are your stout contributory kings?

(III. iii, 212-215)

Zenocrate, her lord having returned, attempts to present Tamburlaine with his crown, but he asks her to hand him that of Bajazeth's held by Zabina: "Nay, take the Turkish crown from her, Zenocrate,/And crown me emperor of Africa" (III. iii, 220-221). Zabina voices their hope of being ransomed, but Tamburlaine makes it clear that "Not all the world shall ransom Bajazeth" (III. iii, 232). Tamburlaine's last remark illustrates his desire to use the Ottoman Sultan as a spectacle of his power. Bajazeth, aware that the Christians states and principalities believe that he will no longer constitute a threat to them in his present situation, indicates that the villainous and base Christians will be overjoyed by his tragic state:

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<sup>10</sup> For the sources used Marlowe in composing *Tamburlaine*, see. Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*. Ed. J. S. Cunningham. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1981, pp. 9-29.

Ah fair Zabina, we have lost the Turkish emperor  
 So great a foil by any foreign foe.  
 Now will the Christian miscreants be glad,  
 Ringing with joy their superstitious bells  
 And making bonfires for my overthrow.  
 But ere I die, those foul idolaters  
 Shall make me bonfires with their filthy bones-  
 For though the glory of this day be lost,  
 Afric and Greece have garrisons enough  
 To make me sovereign of the earth again.

(III. iii, 233-243)

According to Bajazeth, Christians will show their joy by ringing their “superstitious bells” and lighting “bonfires”. In this case, Bajazeth is referring to Christianity as a superstition and “superstitious bells” is a direct reference to the church bells or those rang at Christian ceremonies. He also expresses his belief that Christians will also built bonfires to celebrate his defeat. Since Bayezid I was moving towards Europe and had a blockage of Constantinople (the Byzantine capital) before the Battle of Ankara, Christians would naturally have been content about the defeat of the Ottomans and Bayezid’s capture by Tamerlane. However, Bajazeth also believes that “Afric and Greece have” enough “garrisons” to make him the “sovereign of the earth again” and asks Tamburlaine to set a ransom so that he can re-conquer the world. But Tamburlaine refuses and asks his men to bind Bajazeth and Zabina, while they continue their protestations:

Bajazeth:	Ah villains, dare ye touch my sacred arms? O Mahomet, O sleepy Mahomet!
Zabina:	O cursed Mohamet that makes us thus The slaves to Scythians rude and barbarous!

(III. iii, 268-271)

Such lines show that Bajazeth and Zabina attribute their undesirable condition to the indifference of “Mahomet”, the prophet, towards them. It also gives Marlowe a chance to imply the ‘inferiority’ of Islam reflected by the tragic situation of the Muslim Sultan and his wife, in comparison to Christianity, which has saved the Christian states and principalities from the attacks of the Ottomans by the intermediacy of Tamburlaine. For this reason many western chronicles refer to Tamerlane as the ‘scourge of God’.

The next time we see Bajazeth is in Act IV, scene ii of the play. He is brought on to the stage in a cage drawn by Moors and followed by Zabina.

Tamburlaine tells his men to bring out his “footstool”, referring to Bajazeth, and the Ottoman sultan furiously exclaims that Tamburlaine has to “*rip my [his] bowels with thy [his] sword/ And sacrifice my [his] heart to death and hell*” before he yields to such “slavery” (IV. ii, 16-18). In response, Tamburlaine calls him a “base villain, vassal, slave to Tamburlaine” and “[u]nworthy to embrace or touch the ground/ [t]hat bears the honour of my [his] royal weight,” (IV. ii, 19-21) and then gets up upon Bajazeth to his chair. Zabina, saddened by her husband’s situation, seeks to insult Tamburlaine:

Darest thou, that never saw an emperor  
Before thou met my husband in the field,  
Being thy captive, thus abuse his state,  
Keeping his kingly body in a cage  
That roofs of gold and sun-bright palaces  
Should have prepared to entertain his grace?  
And treading him beneath thy loatsome feet  
Whose feet the kings of Africa have kissed?

(IV. ii, 58-65)

Zabina brings up the question of Tamburlaine’s origin, as a Scythian shepherd, claiming that far from becoming an emperor, he had not even encountered a ruler of that rank before meeting her husband. At her insult, Tamburlaine suggests that Zenocrate should maintain better control of her “slave”, but, in order to degrade Zabina, Zenocrate states that Zabina is her “*handmaid’s slave*” (Anippe). Immediately afterwards, Anippe, Zabina’s new master, threatens to have her whipped stark-naked if she continues to act disrespectfully.

Bajazeth recognizing his own pride in Tamburlaine, warns him that his pride and mistreatment of him will make Tamburlaine fall as low as himself:

Bajazeth: Great Tamburlaine, great in my overthrow,  
Ambitious pride shall make thee fall as low  
For treading on the back of Bajazeth  
That should be horsed on four mighty kings.  
Tamburlaine: Thy names and titles and thy dignities  
Are fled from Bajazeth and remains with me,  
That will maintain it against a world of kings.

(IV. ii, 75-81)

Tamburlaine, however, states quite confidently that Bajazeth’s “titles” and “dignities” have now been transferred onto him and that he will retain them in spite of “a world of kings” who might seek to take them away.

Following Tamburlaine's statement emphasizing his belief in his own capacity and power, he now announces how Bajazeth is to be treated while he lives:

There whiles he lives, shall Bajazeth be kept,  
And where I go be thus in triumph drawn;  
And thou, his wife, shalt feed him with the scraps  
My servitors shall bring thee from my board.

(IV. ii, 85-88)

Tamburlaine indicates that Bajazeth will be kept in a cage, fed with the leftovers from his "board", and be brought with him to wherever he may go in order to show Tamburlaine's "triumph". Since his reputation will be boasted with the exhibition of a spectacle as powerful as Bajazeth, he will never set him free:

Not all the kings and emperors of the earth,  
If they would lay their crowns before my feet,  
Shall ransom him or take him from his cage.  
The ages that shall talk of Tamburlaine,  
Even from this day to Plato's wondrous year,  
Shall talk how I have handled Bajazeth.

(IV. ii, 92-97)

Tamburlaine emphasizes that even receiving all the "crowns" belonging to all the kings and emperors of the earth "shall" be enough to ransom Bajazeth. Thus, Tamburlaine underlines the importance that he attaches to having triumphed over a ruler such as Bajazeth.

Bajazeth, now convinced that he will never be able to escape from Tamburlaine, links his rise to fortune. In Act V, scene i, Bajazeth claims that even though he and Zabina may curse Tamburlaine, the heavens "frown" and the earth "quake[s]" in anger at his doings, they cannot deny the fact that a powerful "star" (destiny, fortune) influences Tamburlaine's "sword":

Ah fair Zabina, we may curse his power,  
The heavens may frown, the earth for anger quake,  
But such a star hath influence in his sword  
As rules the skies, and countermands the gods  
More than Cimmerian Styx or Destiny.

(V.i.230-234)

Zabina complains that there is no-one to save them out of their misery: "Then is there left no Mohamet, no Gods,/O fiend, no Fortune, nor hope of

end/To our infamous, monstrous slaveries?” (V.i, 239-241) while Bajazeth curses their fate:

O dready engines of my loathed sights  
 That sees my crown, my honour, and my name  
 Thrust under yoke and thralldom of a thief-  
 [...]
 You see my wife, my queen and empress,  
 Brought up and propped by the hand of fame,  
 Queen of fifteen contributory queens,  
 Now thrown to rooms of black abjection,  
 Smeared with blots of basest drudgery,  
 And villeiness to shame, disdain, and misery.  
 (V. i. 259-269)

Bajazeth asks Zabina to bring him some water and presents a soliloquy before he commits suicide:

O highest lamp of ever-living Jove,  
 Accursed day, infected with my griefs,  
 Hide now thy stained face in endless night  
 And shut the windows of the lightsome heavens;  
 Let ugly darkness with her rusty coach  
 Engirt with tempests wrapt in pitchy clouds  
 Smother the earth with never-fading, mists,  
 And let her horses from their nostrils breath  
 Rebellious winds and dreadful thunderclaps:  
 That in this terror Tamburlaine may live,  
 And my pined soul, resolved in liquid air,  
 May still excruciate his tormented thoughts.  
 Pierce through the centre of my withered heart  
 And make a passage for my loathed life.

(V. I, 290-304)

Bajazeth calls on Jove, the god of gods, to hide his “stained face in endless night”, “shut the windows of the lightsome heavens” and let “ugly darkness” encircle in tempests with her horses breathing “rebellious” winds from their nostrils, so that Bajazeth’s soul may torment Tamburlaine’s thoughts. Following his soliloquy, Bajazeth “brains himself against the cage”. His wife, on returning cries “O *Bajazeth*, O *Turk*, O *emperor*-[...] *Hell*, *death*, *Tamburlaine*, *hell*! [...] *Make ready my couch, my chair, my jewels, I come, I come, I come!*”, runs against the cage and “*brains herself*” too. When Zenocrate comes of the stage and discovers the dead Ottoman couple, she calls out: “Behold the Turk and his great emperess!” (V. I, 355; 358; 363), thus concludes the Bajazeth episode in Marlowe’s play.

Bayezid's tragic end was often linked to fortune. This view is illustrated in Thomas Dekker's comedy in blank-verse *Old Fortunatus* (1600). In Act I, scene I of the play, the goddess of Fortune comes on the stage with four of her 'kingly' slaves. The Goddess of Fortune boasts that the world a "ball" which is hers to shape as she decides. According to the Goddess, kings and emperors do not advance to such high positions because of their own personal power. Instead, they attain such a power and become kings and emperors because she decides to make them so. Thus, it is in her power to both create kings and emperors, and to bring their downfall:

This toy called world, at our imperial feet?  
This world is Fortune's ball, wherewith she sports.  
Sometimes I strike it up into the air,  
And then create I emperors and kings:  
Sometimes I spurn it, at which spurn crawls out  
[...]  
'Tis I that tumble Princes from their thrones  
(I.i, 108-114)

Her captives made up of kings scream "Accursed Queen of chance, damned sorceress" (I. i. 99) claiming that they are the "sons to Shame, and Sorrow's heirs" (I.i, 179). The goddess Fortune introduces these four kings (Henry V<sup>11</sup>, Frederick Barbarossa<sup>12</sup>, Lewis the 'Meek'<sup>13</sup> and Bajazet<sup>14</sup>) to Fortunatus: "Behold these four chained like Tartarian slaves/These I created emperors and kings,/And these are now my basest underlings:" (I.i, 181-183). Details including the four kings being prisoners, being referred to as "Tartarian slaves" together with their employment of footstools by the Goddess all bring to mind Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Part I. One of the four exalted and debased kings that she presents is Bajazet (Bayezid):

Here stands the very soul of misery,  
Poor Bajazet, old Turkish Emperor  
And once the greatest monarch of the East.  
Fortune herself is sad to view they fall,  
And grieves to see thee glad to lick up crumbs,  
At the proud feet of that great Scythian swain,

<sup>11</sup> Henry V (1086-1125) was King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick (I) Barbarossa (1122-1190) was crowned King of Germany, King of Italy, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Burgundy.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis the 'Meek' is actually Louis I (778-840) also known as "the Pious" and "the Fair". He was the King of France, Germany, Aquitaine, the Franks and the Holy Roman Emperor.

<sup>14</sup> Bayezid I, (1359-1402), the Ottoman Emperor.

Fortune's best minion, warlike Tamburlaine:  
Yet must thou in a cage of iron be drawn  
In triumph at his heels, and there in grief  
Dash out thy brains.

(I.i, 195-204)

The Goddess of Fortune indicates that the debasement of the greatest monarch of the East forced to eat crumbs and dragged in an iron cage, even makes her grieve.

The outcome of the Battle of Ankara and the degrading captivation of Bayezid I with his wife Maria Olivera Despina in the hands of Tamerlane has been a popularly narrated subject probably because it is an example of the defeat of a powerful Muslim Sultan whom under the Ottoman forces constituted an important threat to the West. In accordance with the high circulation of this historical event, Bayezid's tragic ends finds its place in Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Dekker's plays composed in the Elizabethan Period. However, Marlowe's tragedy *Tamburlaine, Part I* and Thomas Dekker's comedy *Old Fortunas* dealing with this event have magnified Bayezid's fall, slavery and debasement in the hands of Tamerlane, instead of concentrating on the whole battle.

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