



“RELATIONS BETWEEN AMIR TEMUR AND SULTAN BAYAZID IN THE INTERPRETATION OF A FRENCH ENLIGHTENER”

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Abstract

The article examines the relationship between Amir Temur and Sultan Bayazid as described by the French Enlightenment thinker of the 18th century, Marie Arouet Voltaire, in his work “Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and on the Principal Facts of History from Charlemagne to Louis XIII”. Based on the sources of the Timurid era, the study analyzes the French philosopher’s reflections on the contradictions and clashes of interest that arose in the late 14th and early 15th centuries between the rulers of Turan and the Ottoman Empire, the dynamics of the development of diplomatic relations, and the details of the Battle of Ankara. The research employs the comparative and problem-chronological methods. In addition, Voltaire’s views on the negative perceptions that had developed in Western Europe regarding the relations between Amir Temur and Sultan Bayazid are examined on the basis of historical sources. The author analyzes the errors and inaccuracies found in these interpretations and provides critical observations on the matter.

Key words: Amir Temur, Sultan Bayazid, Tahurtang, Transoxiana, Ottoman Empire, Laonic Chalkondyl, Nizam al-Din Shami, Ahmad ibn Arabshah, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, Louis XV, Battle of Ankara, The Tale of the Iron Cage.

I. INTRODUCTION

French Enlightenment thinkers also conducted research on the history of Amir Temur. During the reign of Louis XV (1710–1774), shortcomings in the administrative system, financial crises, and religious conflicts began to intensify in France from the second half of the 18th century. The rise of corruption under the absolute monarchy and the renewed dominance of the Church over the citizens compelled the Enlightenment philosophers to struggle as defenders of the people. Among them was the Enlightenment philosopher Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694–1778), who advocated for individual and religious freedom. Throughout his life, Voltaire conducted research on both scientific and imaginative subjects. Having served for several years as the royal historian, he was eventually exiled from his homeland due to his sharp criticism of the Church and the nobility in his works. As a result, Voltaire lived in England, Germany, and Switzerland, continuing his creative and scholarly pursuits. His significant work, “Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and on the Principal Facts of History from Charlemagne to Louis XIII,” brought him considerable recognition. The eighty-eighth chapter of the second volume of this monumental study is devoted to the history of Amir Temur [6:418–426]. In this section, the author expresses his views on certain aspects of the life and statecraft of the great conqueror. For example, Voltaire opposes the opinions of some Western writers who portrayed Amir Temur as cruel in his treatment of Sultan Bayazid [6:421]. He emphasizes that such



claims are not found in Arab or Persian sources and notes that the limited information about Amir Temur can instead be traced in Turkish chronicles [6:421].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

The primary source examined in this study is Voltaire's work titled "Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and on the Principal Facts of History from Charlemagne to Louis XIII". In this research, Marie Arrouet Voltaire's interpretation was compared and critically analyzed alongside the works of historians from the Timurid era such as Nizamuddin Shami, Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi, and Ahmad ibn Arabshah, leading to the formulation of scholarly conclusions.

Furthermore, in analyzing the academic perspectives presented in the existing literature, the study employed a comparative analytical method based on the principles of scientific rigor, objectivity, and historicism.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 88th chapter of his work, Voltaire gives a detailed account of the relationship between Amir Temur and Sultan Bayazid. According to the French historian, the interaction between the two rulers began after the Emperor of Greece appealed to Amir Temur for assistance [6:420]. Having learned of Amir Temur's victories during his "Five-Year Campaign" the Greek ruler sought his help against the Ottoman Sultan [6:420]. At the same time, five local governors in Asia Minor, whose territories had been conquered by Sultan Bayazid, also asked for Temur's support [6:420]. Indeed, Timurid-era sources confirm that envoys from Western lands visited the court of Amir Temur [2:283; 3:231–232]. Historian Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi likewise notes in his work that Sultan Bayazid had occupied the southwestern and central provinces of Asia Minor in the early 15th century – though Voltaire does not name these territories explicitly [3:232]. The Ottoman Sultan, dissatisfied with his earlier conquests, even sent a letter to Tahir Tang, the governor of Erzincan (under Temur's protection), demanding his submission [3:232]. With regard to the events of 1400, Voltaire provides a general assessment of the early stage of relations between the two rulers, drawing upon available historical sources. He then turns to the beginning of their diplomatic correspondence, writing: "He (Tamerlane – emphasis ours, N.I.) began by sending ambassadors to Bayazid, asking him to abandon the siege of Constantinople and to do justice to the Muslim princes who had been deprived of their dominions. Bayazid received these proposals with anger and disdain. Tamerlane declared war against him and marched to meet him" [6:420]. Voltaire also refers generally to the three exchanges of ambassadors between Amir Temur and Sultan Bayazid, though he focuses primarily on the first stage of this diplomatic mission. In the first letter sent by Amir Temur, he notes that he was aware of the Ottoman ruler's preoccupation with Western Europe and demanded that Bayazid renounce his claims to the eastern regions of Asia Minor [2:284–285; 3:232–233]. The harsh and insulting response from Sultan Bayazid – containing both personal affronts and threats of military action – is also discussed in this context [1:256–258].

The French historian further comments on the Battle of Ankara, stating that it occurred in 1401 and that both sides employed cannons and incendiary weapons [6:420]. In Voltaire's view, Amir Temur's victory resulted from the discipline of the Mavarannahr army and its effective use of artillery [6:420]. Although Voltaire errs in dating the battle, he correctly



recognizes that artillery played a key role in Temur's military success. His discussion of this subject likely drew upon Nizamuddin Shami's account, where the historian vividly describes the use of elephants equipped with archers and flamethrowers: "Archers and fire-throwers, adorned with weapons and armor, were placed on elephants whose trunks could slay a wild tiger and whose rage pierced the hearts of enemies; they prepared their hands for shooting arrows and casting flames" [2:331].

During the Battle of Ankara, Sultan Bayazid was captured by Mahmud Khan of Mavarannah and brought before Amir Temur. Timurid sources note that Temur treated the Ottoman ruler with great respect [2:334; 3:261]. However, some Western European accounts depict Amir Temur as treating Bayazid cruelly during his captivity. Voltaire addresses this in a section titled "The Fable of the Cage and the Cause Preventing the Marriage of Sultans" He analyzes the issue based on Turkish, Persian, and Arab sources, noting that Persian and Arab historians writing about Temur never mentioned Bayazid being confined in an iron cage; on the contrary, they emphasized the honorable treatment he received [6:421]. Turkish chronicles, however, record that Amir Temur ordered Bayazid to be locked in a cage. Voltaire argues that some Turkish historians sought to depict Temur as a barbaric figure and that in doing so they borrowed false accounts from Greek historians – one of their greatest errors [6:421]. The unnamed Greek historian to whom Voltaire alludes is most likely Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who in his "The Fall of the Greek Empire" [4:28] writes that Sultan Bayazid was kept in an iron cage. Voltaire also refers to certain Arab historians who claimed that Amir Temur insulted the women of Bayazid's household. "According to Arab writers," Voltaire notes, "at a banquet, Bayazid's half-naked wife served Tamerlane wine, which gave rise to the famous legend that Turkish sultans vowed never to marry again. This fable, as we can see, is contradicted by the fact that Murad II (1404–1453) married the daughter of the Serbian despot and Mehmed II (1432–1481) married one of the local princesses" [6:421]. The Arab historian Voltaire refers to is Ahmad ibn Arabshakh, who in his "Aja'ib al-Maqdur fi Tarikh Taymur" recounts that Amir Temur took revenge on Sultan Bayazid [1:276]. Yet, as noted in Ottoman historical literature, the sultans of later periods did marry, disproving such legends [7]. Thus, the French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire sought to challenge the distorted interpretations of certain Western authors regarding the events between Amir Temur and Sultan Bayazid. Through critical engagement with primary sources, he called for a source-based and scholarly approach to understanding this historical episode.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Voltaire provided yet another example supporting the view that Amir Temur did not imprison Sultan Bayazid in a cage, but instead treated him with great respect. According to the author, if Amir Temur had truly acted cruelly toward the Ottoman Sultan and his wife, he would have shown the same hostility toward Bayazid's sons as well [6:422]. On the contrary, Voltaire notes that Amir Temur established friendly relations with Bayazid's sons, such as Suleyman and Musa, and showed them kindness and care [6:422]. This fact alone, Voltaire argues, is sufficient to disprove all negative opinions directed against Amir Temur in this matter. Indeed, historian Nizamuddin Shami [2:342–343] wrote that Amir Temur treated Suleyman, the son of Sultan Bayazid, with friendship and goodwill, while Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi [3:267–268; 270] also recorded that Musulman, Ya'qub, and Musa Chalabi received the same respectful treatment from the great conqueror.



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