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A Christopher Marlowe Chronology

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Contents

<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
<i>Chronology</i>	1
<i>Who's Who in the Marlowe Chronology</i>	195
<i>Works Cited</i>	199
<i>Index</i>	204

General Editor's Preface

Most biographies are ill-adapted to serve as works of reference – not surprisingly so, since the biographer is likely to regard his function as the devising of a continuous and readable narrative, with excursions into interpretation and speculation, rather than a bald recital of facts. There are times, however, when anyone reading for business or pleasure needs to check a point quickly or to obtain a rapid overview of part of an author's life or career; and at such moments turning over the pages of a biography can be a time-consuming and frustrating occupation. The present series of volumes aims at providing a means whereby the chronological facts of an author's life and career, rather than needing to be prised out of the narrative in which they are (if they appear at all) securely embedded, can be seen at a glance. Moreover, whereas biographies are often, and quite understandably, vague over matters of fact (since it makes for tediousness to be forever enumerating details of dates and places), a chronology can be precise whenever it is possible to be precise.

Thanks to the survival, sometimes in very large quantities, of letters, diaries, notebooks and other documents, as well as to thoroughly researched biographies and bibliographies, this material now exists in abundance for many major authors. In the case of, for example, Dickens, we can often ascertain what he was doing in each month and week, and almost on each day, of his prodigiously active working life; and the student of, say, *David Copperfield* is likely to find it fascinating as well as useful to know just when Dickens was at work on each part of that novel, what other literary enterprises he was engaged in at the same time, whom he was meeting, what places he was visiting, and what were the relevant circumstances of his personal and professional life. Such a chronology is not, of course, a substitute for a biography; but its arrangement, in combination with its index, makes it a much more convenient tool for this kind of purpose; and it may be acceptable as a form of 'alternative' biography, with its own distinctive advantages as well as its obvious limitations.

Since information relating to an author's early years is usually scanty and chronologically imprecise, the opening section of some volumes in this series groups together the years of childhood and adolescence. Thereafter each year, and usually each month, is dealt with separately.

Information not readily assignable to a specific month or day is given as a general note under the relevant year or month. The first entry for each month carries an indication of the day of the week, so that when necessary this can be readily calculated for other dates. Each volume also contains a bibliography of the principal sources of information. In the chronology itself, the sources of many of the more specific items, including quotations, are identified in order that the reader who wishes to do so may consult the original contexts.

NORMAN PAGE

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I owe a great debt to the extraordinary kindness of Susan Cerasano and David Riggs for sending me copies of their work, and in the case of David Riggs of his own working chronology. Susan Cerasano and Patrick Cheney both very generously read the entire manuscript and caught many errors and omissions, and Michael Frohnsdorff graciously sent me a copy of his *Christopher Marlowe: The Local Connection and New Research*. Charles Nicholl has consistently been a source of help and encouragement in matters Marlovian. The anonymous reader for Palgrave did an exceptionally thorough job of going through the manuscript and made many astute suggestions. All remaining errors and infelicities are of course entirely my own.

Introduction

Christopher Marlowe is an unusually difficult subject for a book of this kind because so little evidence survives about his life. To be able to say with precision where he was on any one day, or what he was doing, is the exception rather than the norm. Consequently, this attempt at a chronology will seem disappointingly vague when it comes to providing concrete information about Marlowe's activities and whereabouts, and I make no pretence to be able to fill in any of the many gaps in what we know about him. Conversely, much of the information which I have been able to provide may seem, at least at first sight, irrelevant because so much of it is about people other than Marlowe. However, everything I have included here relates to one (or more) of the categories which I discuss below, which seem to me the crucial rubrics under which the facts relating to Marlowe's life and works need to be considered. In the interests of economy and clarity, I have keyed the entries to a bibliography, so that a reference in brackets after a item always indicates a book or article which contains significantly more information on the topic for readers with a particular interest in that area. I have also adopted a 'fish-eye lens' approach to the years of Marlowe's actual life, by which I mean that I have noted for these years major festivals, particularly Easter, Accession Day and the principal fair held in the city in which he was then living or might be expected to be found in the summer. These events may or may not have been of any interest to Marlowe himself, but they will have shaped the experiences of those around him, and will have affected the range of activities available at those particular times. On the same principle, I have recorded striking natural phenomena such as earthquakes and comets, which will have attracted widespread comment at the time and which everyone will have been aware of. I have taken a similar approach to the theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe's diary: when Marlowe was alive, I have noted all performances, to give a sense of the nature of the other plays on the London theatrical scene with which his works were in competition and dialogue; after his death, I have noted only those of Marlowe's own plays.

The kinds of information found here, then, fall broadly into the following categories.

Significant dates in Marlowe's life and in the lives of his family

This is the simplest and most straightforward category, but also, alas, the smallest. Marlowe is elusive even by the standards of Elizabethans, as will indeed be apparent when the number of entries directly about his doings is compared with the number on other people who we know or assume to have been involved in intelligence work.

The bare facts of his life are these. He was christened at St George's Church, Canterbury, on Saturday, 26 February 1564, and normal Elizabethan customs for the baptism of babies would suggest that he was no more than a few days old at the time. He was the second child and first son of John Marlowe, a relatively recent newcomer to busy commercial Canterbury from the quieter Kent town of Ospringe, and of John's wife Katherine, who was originally from Dover. 1564 was also the year in which William Shakespeare was born (he was christened at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 26 April 1564), but although Marlowe and Shakespeare were to grow up as unquestionably the two greatest dramatists of the time, and despite the persistent speculation that they collaborated on the *Henry VI* plays, there is no proof that they ever met. Nevertheless, their works were undoubtedly in dialogue; Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, for instance, forms a natural pair with Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and Shakespeare's *Richard II* with Marlowe's *Edward II*, even if the precise chronological sequence – and hence which is responding to which – cannot always be established. There are not many dates directly relevant to Shakespeare to be found in this edition (not least because his whereabouts during these years are even more shrouded in mystery than Marlowe's); however, I have tried to provide dates for, or in connection with, all those of Shakespeare's works which show signs of this literary dialogue.

For much of Marlowe's early life, little more is known than when his various siblings were born and died and the occasions on which his quarrelsome father got himself involved in lawsuits or other legal dealings. Not until December 1578 does Marlowe's life begin to take concrete shape, for in that month he was enrolled as a scholar at the King's School, Canterbury. Since fourteen was unusually late for an Elizabethan boy to start attending grammar school, it seems likely that he was already a student either there or elsewhere, but there is no record of this. He did not stay at the King's School long, because by December 1580 he had arrived as a scholar at Corpus Christi College,

Cambridge to study divinity. He was the beneficiary of a scholarship set up by Archbishop Matthew Parker, which was bestowed on students who were considered likely to study divinity and take Holy Orders. This suggests that at this stage of his life Marlowe must either have believed in God or must have been prepared to act a part.

Marlowe's time at Cambridge passed, as far as is known, without either incident or any particular academic distinction until some time in the early summer of 1587, for on Thursday, 29 June of that year the Privy Council drafted a minute to the Cambridge authorities ordering them to stop making difficulties in the matter of conferring Marlowe's degree. This extraordinary document, which I have reproduced in full within the Chronology, unfortunately suggests more than it explains, but two things seem to be relatively clear. The first is that the authorities were reluctant to allow Marlowe to proceed to the degree because he had been absent, hence presumably failing to fulfil the university's strict residence requirements. The draft wording of the Privy Council's minute (which is all that survives) says that 'it was reported that Christopher Morley was determined to have gone beyond the sea to Reames and there to remain'. Unfortunately, as generations of scholars have discovered to their cost after poring over this in vain, this is about the least helpful formulation that could possibly have been found. Does it mean that Marlowe had never in fact gone to 'Reames' (i.e. the French city of Rheims) at all? Or does it mean that he had gone there, but had not intended to stay?

Fortunately there is not much doubt about what Marlowe would have been doing in Rheims if he had in fact gone there, and that gives us a pretty good clue to what this was all about. Since 1578, Rheims had been the home of the seminary to which English Catholics could go in secret to train for the priesthood, which they were forbidden to do in Protestant England. An atmosphere of paranoia about Catholic plots had prevailed in England after the Pope had excommunicated Elizabeth I in 1570 and thus effectively given Catholics a licence to kill her. In such a climate, to go to Rheims was a treasonable act. Presumably the implication of the Privy Council's letter is that it had been erroneously rumoured that Marlowe was one of these young men.

Since we have the Privy Council's word for it that this was not in fact the case, two possibilities remain open: first, that the entire Rheims story was a red herring and that Marlowe had actually been somewhere else entirely; and second, that Marlowe had in fact been to Rheims, but for completely the opposite purpose to that rumoured – not because he himself was a Catholic, but because he was spying on Catholics.

Because this has generally been accepted by Marlowe scholars as the more likely possibility, I have included in the Chronology a lot of information about others known to have been involved in the Elizabethan secret service, even though in so doing I have been particularly struck by the fact that no entries recording payment to Marlowe for this kind of work have ever been traced. I have no explanation for this, but one possibility might conceivably be that we should be looking for an alias for him – or, of course, that we need to revisit the hypothesis that he was indeed in long-term government employment after 1587. I have also widened the focus to include not just those members of the intelligence service whose careers are known to have intersected at some stage with Marlowe's, such as Robert Poley, the known agent who was in the room when Marlowe was killed, but also other people who may or may not have been directly or indirectly involved with him, most notably the Earl of Essex, who launched a rival intelligence service after the death of Sir Francis Walsingham and whom many Marlowe scholars have suspected of being in one way or another implicated in Marlowe's death.

After his degree had duly been awarded, Marlowe left Cambridge and appeared almost immediately in London, where his play *Tamburlaine the Great* became an overnight success, to be followed in quick succession by *Tamburlaine the Great, Part Two*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris* and *Edward II*, as well as the great poem *Hero and Leander*. For the six remaining years of Marlowe's life after he left Cambridge, I have concentrated on three kinds of information: information about the London theatrical and literary scene, of which he was so prominent a part; information about the various kinds of legal difficulties in which Marlowe found himself from time to time during these years (he was arrested on 18 September 1589 for his part in the killing of William Bradley by his friend Thomas Watson; on 26 January 1592 he was arrested for coining in Flushing; on 9 May 1592 he was bound over in the sum of £20 to keep the peace towards Allen Nicholls, Constable of Holywell Street, Shoreditch, and Nicholas Helliott, beadle, and to appear at the General Sessions in October; and on 15 September 1592 he was arrested for fighting in the streets of Canterbury with a tailor named William Corkine); and lastly, information about any events which may possibly have a bearing on the circumstances surrounding his mysterious death at Deptford on Wednesday, 30 May 1593.

In recent years, principally as a result of Charles Nicholl's magisterial *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe*, interest in Marlowe's

death has in fact outweighed interest in his life. This interest was first sparked when Leslie Hotson uncovered the coroner's report on Marlowe's death in 1925. (I have reproduced this in full in the Chronology in the entry for 30 May 1593.) Many aspects of the story it tells do not seem to make much sense, not least the fact that the wound it describes, if it was indeed in the precise location which the report claims, would not have proved mortal. Moreover, it seems very strange that Marlowe was in the room with three other men – Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley – but that when he allegedly turned violent, two of them were no more than passive bystanders in the ensuing scene. Consequently, many scholars have suspected either a cover-up or a conspiracy of some kind, and a lot of names and events have been adduced in connection with this. I have given information about as many of these as I can, including the previous histories and subsequent careers of the three other men in the room at the time of Marlowe's death, though I have not pursued the lunatic fringe theory that he was not in fact killed at all but smuggled abroad to write the works of Shakespeare, while another body (in some versions that of John Penry, author of the Martin Marprelate tracts, who had been executed the day before) was substituted for his.

Finally, I have tried to trace something at least of the afterlife, in both the popular and literary imaginations, of Marlowe himself and also of his works. This is why the Chronology continues long after his death in 1593 to trace his continuing and indeed escalating impact on the development of English literature and drama.

Dates of events which are dramatised in Marlowe's works

Apart from *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Hero and Leander*, both of which are set in the mythic past, the events described and dramatised in Marlowe's works are almost always precisely datable. I have included information on those events both because this illustrates the remarkable chronological range of Marlowe's attention and interests, which spread from the wars of ancient Rome to figures who were his contemporaries, and also because it allows for comparison between the real chronology of events and Marlowe's fictionalised representations of it. This, along with the attention to his sources discussed in the next section, does produce the initially odd-seeming effect of a Chronology of Christopher Marlowe's life that starts hundreds of years before he was even born, but my hope is that it facilitates a clearer understanding of both the scope of Marlowe's achievement and the nature of his

dramaturgy, particularly the sharp, cynical, almost Hollywood-style cutting with which he likes to segue between events, as in *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part One where Mycetes runs off the stage, only for the news of his death to be coolly reported seconds later, while his erstwhile favourite Meander passes smoothly into the service of his probable killer. To organise the information related to Marlowe's life and works chronologically does also throw up some interesting facts and conjunctions. It is striking, for instance, how little time separates the death of Edward II from the birth of Timur Leng, the model for Tamburlaine, although the plays based on their respective figures seem to belong to such very different worlds. Focusing on history in this way also makes starkly visible just how much of the available life history of Timur Marlowe used in Part One, and hence the reasons why he had to rely on invention and anachronistic material in Part Two.

Dates of Marlowe's sources

Marlowe used a significant number of sources for his work, which have been magisterially documented by Vivien Thomas and William Tydeman in *Christopher Marlowe: The Plays and Their Sources* (London: Routledge, 1994). I have noted dates of both first publication (where known) and also of significant re-publication (especially where new material has been included). I have been particularly careful to track anything bearing on what is perhaps the most important of the many unsolved puzzles of Marlowe's career, the dating of *Doctor Faustus*, which is divergently ascribed by Marlowe critics to either *c.* 1588 or *c.* 1592/3. This may seem an infinitesimal difference, but not only do these two possible dates represent the two poles of Marlowe's literary career, they would also have given very different contexts for the first performances of the play. 1588 was the year in which the Spanish Armada sailed; Englishmen, including Marlowe's father, were training for military service and expecting an imminent invasion, and in such a context Faustus's call for defiance of the Prince of Parma, prospective leader of the invasion forces, would have been a sharply urgent and contemporary one, whereas by 1592, four years after the Armada had been dispersed by storms, it would have had merely historical interest. (By 1591, for instance, the Canterbury records note that John Marlowe no longer possessed any of the military equipment he had had at the time of the Armada.) Many critics (myself included) think that *Doctor Faustus* 'feels' early, and its references to Spain and the Prince of Parma would certainly have made it a far more topical and exciting play in

Armada year than it would have been four or five years later. The insuperable objection to the 'early date' theory appears to be the lack of proof that there was any edition of the *English Faust Book*, Marlowe's principal source, before 1592. However, the bibliographical and archival evidence on this issue is by no means conclusive, and recently uncovered evidence makes the possibility of an early edition seem ever more real, so I have tried to provide a clear enough guide to the maze for the reader at least to understand the issues, even if they feel that a definitive conclusion is presently impossible to reach.

Landmarks on the literary scene

Marlowe wrote a number of different kinds of work. Some of these conform fairly well to Elizabethan generic rules and expectations – *Edward II* is easily recognisable as a history play, and *Hero and Leander* as an epyllion (a short, mock-epic, comic poem on love) – but others are much less readily classifiable: *Tamburlaine the Great*, for instance, claims to be a tragedy, but ends with a marriage. Some are entries in a crowded field – translations of the classics, in particular, were very much in vogue – but in other instances Marlowe proves surprisingly reluctant to imitate contemporary fashion: I think we might well be surprised, for example, that as far as we can tell he never wrote a Petrarchan sonnet, a genre at which virtually all his major contemporaries tried their hand. I have tried to give an indication of what other kinds of work were current when he was writing, both to show when he is in line with convention and when he departs from it, and also to give some sense of the extent and immediacy of his influence.

Information about Marlowe's known or probable circle

Although Marlowe himself is so difficult to track down, there is a surprising amount of information available about many of the people with whom he was certainly or probably associated or acquainted, particularly about Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley, the three men who were in the room when he died, and Richard Baines, whose path crossed his on a number of occasions, most notably when both were arrested for coining in Flushing and when Baines submitted to the Privy Council a 'Note' listing Marlowe's alleged blasphemies. I have therefore recorded information about these men, about others with whom Marlowe is said to have been linked, and also about the various Catholic priests and exiles who are particularly likely to have

attracted the interest of the intelligence services during the years when Marlowe was perhaps associated with them. It is unfortunately inevitable that this should produce a somewhat tangled web, in which loyalties and motivations are often entirely unclear. This was simply the nature of the Elizabethan intelligence world, particularly when the success of so many projects depended on men with one set of loyalties being able to pretend convincingly to subscribe to quite another. Often they were so successful that it is no longer possible (if it ever was) to see which is the pretence and which the truth, as in the case of John Cecil, who appears to have been either an improbably accident-prone Catholic priest or an improbably conspicuous government plant. Consequently, the inclusion of details of these men's careers may at times seem more to blur the overall picture than to clarify it, but this is likely to have been exactly what would have been experienced by anyone associated with espionage or counter-espionage in this period.

Material of unknown relevance

It will be apparent from the last few pages of the chronology that a number of really significant discoveries about Marlowe's life (the Dutch shilling incident, the name of his assassin, his role in the Hog Lane fracas) have all been made within the last hundred years or so. I hope that more may follow and that parts of his life which are still mysterious to us, such as the sources of his income, his whereabouts at times when they are currently unknown, and the reasons for his death, may one day become clearer. I have, therefore, included here some pieces of information even though I am unsure what their significance might be, or even whether they are significant at all, for the simple reason that they have proved hard to unearth, and my instinct is that they are better recorded where any future researcher on Marlowe will be easily able to retrieve them. On something of the same principle, I have also included details of the dates when these later discoveries about Marlowe's life were made. Anyone interested in the reception of Marlowe's life and works can thus easily reconstruct whether someone writing about him at a particular time did or did not have access to a particular piece of evidence or information about him.

Places where Marlowe definitely wasn't

Negative evidence is always much less exciting than positive evidence, but it is valuable nevertheless. Marlowe studies have been too long

bedevilled by men with similar names. I have tried to make it plain where a mention of a 'Mr Morley' definitely cannot refer to Marlowe, and I have also listed his absences from college as recorded by the Corpus Buttery book. On the same principle, I have tried to make clear to what extent the various Richard Baines who muddy the waters can or cannot be securely distinguished.

America

One place where Marlowe definitely wasn't, but about which I have nevertheless included considerable information, is America. This is because the single most startling thing about Marlowe to his contemporaries, and the thing on which they most often commented, was his alleged atheism, which the Baines Note links directly to Thomas Hariot's observation 'That the Indians, and many authors of antiquity, have assuredly written of above 16 thousand years ago, whereas Adam is proved to have lived within six thousand years'. Hariot, whom Marlowe knew, went to America with the Grenville expedition in 1585, and his *A Brief and True Report of the new-found Land of Virginia* appeared in 1588. It is a commonplace that Columbus's discovery of America had rocked Renaissance Europe, not least because it called into question the authority of the Bible, which failed to mention America. Marlowe, who was fascinated by geography (see Seaton, 'Marlowe's Map'), will have been interested in this New World, not just for its own sake but also because its discovery prompted the rush to colonise it, and colonisation is something looked at in a number of Marlowe's plays, whether in connection with the marauding Tamburlaine or in relation to Aeneas, whose journey from Troy to Africa and thence to Rome made him in a sense the first of all colonisers. Moreover, Sir Walter Raleigh, the principal impetus behind English voyages to America, is another of the shadowy figures who may well have had some connection with Marlowe's death. As with other areas of focus in this Chronology, then, America may have had no direct connection with Marlowe, but attention to what was going on there does, I think, help us understand more clearly the contexts in which he lived and wrote.

As will be apparent from all this, I have consistently erred on the side of possible over-inclusiveness rather than of omission. I have also assumed that readers are more likely to dip into this book for information about specific dates and events rather than to read it cover from cover, so I have also erred on the side of repeating information about individuals and their relevance to Marlowe rather than risk baffling the reader who has skipped over the first explanation of it.

Note on quotations

For documents directly relating to Marlowe's life, the most comprehensive and readily available source is A. D. Wright and Virginia F. Stern, *In Search of Christopher Marlowe*. Unless stated otherwise, this is the source of all such quotations.

Note on dates

On Saturday, 24 February 1582, Pope Gregory XIII issued a Papal Bull which instated the Gregorian Calendar and displaced the Julian one. The 'New Style' was ten days ahead of the old, but was not adopted in England until the eighteenth century. After 1582, dates given below therefore continue to be Old Style unless indicated otherwise, but I have also noted the separate Gregorian Easter Sunday for all subsequent years when Marlowe was alive, and have indicated when people writing from the Continent are clearly using the New Style. In some cases, most notably of Englishmen writing from abroad or in the immediate aftermath of the change, it is not clear which is meant, so I have therefore given both possible days of the week.