

## PART ONE: TEXT

### 1 INTRODUCTION: TAMBURLAINE

We know relatively little about the history of *Tamburlaine* prior to the twentieth century. It is generally accepted that Part I was written in 1587 and Part II no later than 1588. In *The Elizabethan Stage*, E. K. Chambers cites a letter of 16 November 1587 which mentions an accident at a performance by the Lord Admiral's Men in which a player, who was supposed to shoot a gun at a fellow actor tied to a post, 'swerved his peece being charged with bullett missed the fellowe he aymed at and killed a chyld, and a woman great with chyld forthwith, and hurt an other man in the head very soore' (Oxford, 1923, II, p. 135). It seems likely that the play in question was Part II of *Tamburlaine* and that the accident occurred during the execution of the Governor of Babylon. If so, Marlowe had completed both parts of *Tamburlaine* by the time he left Cambridge in 1587. Certainly Part II was completed by 1588 because Robert Greene refers in a prefatory epistle to his *Perimedes the Blacke-Smith* (published 1588) to 'daring God out of heaven with that Atheist *Tamburlan*', undoubtedly an allusion to Tamburlaine's burning of the Koran and then challenging Mahomet to punish him for it.

*Tamburlaine* was published in octavo form in 1590, but the first recorded performances were in 1594. Philip Henslowe, manager of the Admiral's Men, noted in his *Diary* that Part I of *Tamburlaine* was performed fifteen times between 28 August 1594 and 12 November 1595 and that Part II was performed seven times between 19 December 1594 and 13 November 1595. Although we lack evidence about the staging of *Tamburlaine* in the sixteenth century, Professor C. F. Tucker Brooke has conjectured that Part I 'evidently got its start in the old inn-yards rather than at the more dignified "Theatre" [1576] or "Curtain" [1577], for the title-page bears the typical description of miscellaneous inn-yard performance, "sundry