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TIMUR, 'THE WRATH OF GOD'

*An Unknown Source of Oddverjaannáll
and the Vindication of a Tyrant
in Ambáles saga and Ambáles rímur*

TIMUR (1336–1405), born at Kesh in the Chagatai Khanate in modern-day Uzbekistan), is perhaps better known to contemporary anglophone audiences as the protagonist of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*.¹ There he is represented as an almost unstoppable force, sweeping across the world in a way that is reminiscent of previous conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan. While not related to the latter, Timur seems to have styled his imperial aspirations upon and seen himself as the heir to the founder of the Mongol Empire. His conquests did not match those of his role model in extent, but were nevertheless seen as prodigious. He was particularly famous for his defeat of the Ottoman Emperor Bayezid I at the Battle of Ankara in 1402, and the tortures and humiliations which Bayezid subsequently suffered were in certain sources recounted in a way which leant more of an air of Eastern tyrant than illustrious empire-builder to their perpetrator. In fact, it is the many ambivalences in the portrayal of Timur which make him such an interesting object of study. Through European humanist eyes, Timur represented an almost contemporary figure who impressively rivalled the colossi of the classical past. But he could also represent the terror of oriental rule. The fact that the Ottoman empire came to represent an ever greater threat to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also meant that Timur's defeat of Bayezid could come to be seen in a new light by later generations, that is, as the actions of an early challenger to

- 1 For a brief but clear biographical summary of Timur see Marcus Milwright, "So Despicable a Vessel: Representations of Tamerlane in Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Muqarnas* 23 (2006): 318. Note that while there seems to be a recent consensus on 1336 as Timur's year of birth, Milwright says merely that he was born in the 1320s or 1330s.

the looming Turkish threat. Thus, Timur was rehabilitated as a hero for Europeans floundering in a new geopolitical climate. As Milwright states '[o]f all the great warriors who swept across Central Asia and the Middle East in the medieval period, Tamerlane [i.e. Timur] is arguably the one who had the most enduring impact on the culture of Renaissance and early modern Europe.'²

That such a figure, in the decades and centuries after his dramatic rise and fall, would spark interest among learned and intellectually-curious Icelanders should come as no surprise. Already in the Middle Ages, Icelanders had written and copied works which highlighted previous ambitious conquerors, for example *Alexanders saga*, dedicated to the exploits of Alexander the Great, and the various narratives which discuss Atli and draw on legends of Attila the Hun. The first evidence of Timur's penetration into Icelandic literary culture is not to be found in a saga or eddic poem, however, but rather in *Oddverjaannáll* 'the annal of the men of Oddi' under the entry for 1398.³ The work which frames this entry was thus named because in the seventeenth century it was mistakenly assumed to have its origins in the learned circle which formed around Sæmundur Sigfússon (*hinn fróði* 'the wise', 1056–1133) and his descendants, the *Oddaverjar* 'men of Oddi', in the twelfth century. The text exists in its entirety in only one sixteenth-century manuscript, AM 417 4to,⁴ and can be dated on the basis of references within the text and margins to the period 1575–1591.⁵ *Oddverjaannáll* is a heterogeneous work, the style changing greatly as the centuries flow by, and the ever more abundant interpolations have the effect of shifting it generically from a typical medieval annal towards an early modern chronicle. The early section focusses

2 Milwright, "So Despicable a Vessel," 317.

3 To my knowledge Timur appears in no other Icelandic annals. See, for example, the single reference to Timur ('Tamerlanes Scyta') in the 'navneregister' in *Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, ed. by Gustav Storm (Oslo (Christiania): Grøndahl & Sons, 1888), 641.

4 A number of excerpts, all of which can be traced back to AM 417 4to, appear in manuscripts of later provenance. See *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, ed. by Eiríkur Þormóðsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, Rit 59 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2003), cxlix–cliv.

5 The most recent editors, however, give the time of writing of the main text as 1540–1591 (*Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, cxii). It would thus seem that they choose to see the many borrowings from Anders Sørensen Vedel's *Den danske Krønike* (1575) (listed on cxlii–cxliii) as additions to a preexisting 'main' text.

on Roman emperors and the growth of the church, often taking the form of a series of short biographical sketches or anecdotes of wonders and martyrdoms. As the annals reach the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the information provided is denser: each year is supplied with information on climate conditions, natural phenomena, the sinking of merchant ships, church matters, lay disputes and Scandinavian monarchs, all of this stacked together with little attempt being made to smooth over transitions from one topic to another. This unevenness is of course natural, since the sources available for the various periods differed greatly. The early part (up to AD 67) seems to rely more heavily on the so-called *óstyttir* 'unabbreviated' *Oddaannálar*, a non-extant forerunner to both the extant *styttir* 'abbreviated' *Oddaannálar* and the text under consideration here. Eiríkur Þormóðsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir formulated the hypothesis of the dependence on the unabbreviated forerunner, which may itself have taken texts as varied as Tacitus' *Annals*, Hector Boece's *Historia gentis Scotorum* and Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* as source material.⁶ The later sections, within which the description of Timur is found, focus predominantly on Scandinavian events and rely more heavily on a number of sagas, as will be mentioned below, with the most recent period also most likely making use of oral traditions which transmitted information on events within a national ambit.

Timur, while nowadays identified as a Turco-Mongol, is presented in the annals as a Tartar king,⁷ yet prior to his appearance the place of the Tartars within world history is far from being a principal interest of the annals' compiler. Nevertheless, changing times and new geopolitical entities such as the Turks (Ottomans) or Tartars do gradually make their presence felt to a certain degree as the Middle Ages wear on. The Tartars are first mentioned in 1241, the same year that Snorri Sturluson dies, with the unobtrusive comment 'Tartarar baurdust j Vngaria' [the Tartars fought in Hungary]. Following this in 1246 Cam, King of the Tartars, is said to be baptised, in 1260 a Tartar army is massacred in Jerusalem, in 1277 Tartars kill the Sultan of Babylon, in 1286 they send messengers to the Danish

6 *Oddaannálar* og *Oddverjaannáll*, xx–xxv, xxxviii–xliv.

7 On the Icelanders' complex and changing relationship to the Turkic peoples see Sverrir Jakobsson, "Saracen Sensibilities: Muslims and Otherness in Medieval Saga Literature," *JEGP* 115 (2016): 226–29.

King Erik (presumably Erik VI, r. 1286–1319) and in 1306 Tartars save Jerusalem from *Saratina* ('the Saracens?') and Tartar messengers sent to Rome are baptised there.⁸

Thus, a mildly positive picture of the Tartars, flirting with Christianity and fighting other non-Christian peoples, emerges prior to the entry concerning Timur. That entry, dated indirectly to 1398 since it occurs *are seirna* 'a year later' than 1397, reads as follows:

J þenna tíma var sa Tartara kongur er Tamerlanes Scyta hiet hann var skotskur að ætt: hann var mjökall tyranni og blóðhundur: Eitt sinn sat hann í borg: Og er borgarmenn voru svo nær sem yfir komner: létu þeir sínar jungfrur og meyjar út ganga í huiptum klæðum með olífu kústu í sínum haundum: Enn þessi grimmi víkingur: lét sitt hóffolk með hestafötum sundur Ríða greiðt fólk: þá hann var af einum sínum vndir manni aðspurdur hvar fyrir hann slíkkann harðann og ógudligann gíorning fremdri kúad hann sig ekkj einn mann heildur Reidi Guðz vera: hann er líkjari við hinn grimma Hannibal til allra manna jllsku.⁹

[At that time a king named Timur Scythia ruled the Tartars. He was of Scottish (i.e. Scythian) extraction. He was a great tyrant and bloodthirsty. On one occasion he was besieging a town, and when the citizens were as good as defeated, they sent their maidens and young women out in white clothes bearing olive branches in their hands. But this cruel marauder had his retainers trample said women beneath their horses' hooves. When he was asked by one of his inferiors why he had committed such a harsh and ungodly act, he said that he was not a man but the wrath of God. He is most similar to the cruel Hannibal in all deeds of human evil.]

My principal aim in this article is to identify the source of this information, although a secondary aim, following on from the first, will be to show how such information has been put to use in one example from Icelandic

8 *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, 146–47, 150, 155–56, 163. It should be mentioned that most of these events are not unique in being mentioned in *Oddverjaannáll* but appear in other annals which cover the same period.

9 *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, 183.

saga and *rímur* literature. In attempting the first aim it is, however, worth bearing in mind Thomas C. Izard's words (in discussing the search for the influences upon Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*) that one could be 'understandably led astray in the maze of sources'.¹⁰ Gustav Storm, the first editor of *Oddverjaannáll*, discusses the array of texts which the compiler of this work made use of. In addition to the dependence upon previous annals, Storm mentions the inclusion of excerpts from Anders Sørensen Vedel's Danish translation of Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (1575), *Knýtlinga saga*, Philip Melanchthon's reworking of *Carion's Chronicles*, *Ólaf's saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta*, *Sverris saga*, and a number of *Íslendingasögur* and *samtíðarsögur*.¹¹ Of these, the most relevant (since it is the only one to mention Timur), is the Melanchthon revision of *Carion's Chronicles*, of which Storm says 'Laanene fra denne findes dog kun i Keiser Sigismunds Historie, nemlig ved Aar 1396–98, 1400, 1410, 1414 og 1416' [loans from this work are found only in the story of Emperor Sigismund, namely for the years 1396–1398, 1400, 1410, 1414 and 1416].¹² No mention is made of Emperor Sigismund in 1398 – rather we find a reference to the killing of Gunnlaugur bóndi Magnússon in Iceland (about which more below) and the passage about Timur – so we may assume that Storm is including the Timur reference under the vague and inclusive umbrella of *Keiser Sigismunds Historie*.

Carion's Chronicles (also *Chronica Carionis*), which included information on Emperor Sigismund, was one of the major works of sixteenth-century Lutheran historiography. It was prepared by Johann Carion (1499–1537) and appeared in its earliest German-language form in 1531 in Wittenberg. Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and, after his death, his son-in-law Casper Peucer (1525–1602) prepared an expanded Latin version of the first two sections of the chronicle which appeared in parts between 1558 and 1565 and then in a single volume, also in Wittenberg, in

10 Thomas Izard, "The Principal Source for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*," *MLN* 58 (1943): 416. See also Eric Voegelin, "The Humanists' Image of Timur," trans. by M.J. Hanak, *Analysis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, ed. by David Walsh, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin 6 (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 178.

11 *Íslandske annaler*, ed. by Storm, xxx–xxxii.

12 *Íslandske annaler*, ed. by Storm, xxxi. I believe that additional loans from a similar source also appear earlier in the annal (for example the entry for 1338 on Dante's involvement at the Diet of Frankfurt), but there is not space to discuss these here.

1572. Many reprints and translations exist, making charting how material from this chronicle-complex circulated difficult, but we can be sure of its influence on Icelandic culture through, in particular, an Icelandic translation found in BL Add. 11153. Robert Cook produced a survey of this and other Icelandic works which show the influence of *Carion's Chronicle* and addressed Storm's comments regarding *Oddverjaannáll*.¹³

To summarise Cook's assessment, he shows that in spite of what Storm affirms, the entries around the year 1400 in *Oddverjaannáll* show too many divergences from the known versions of *Carion's Chronicles* for them to be directly derived from them.¹⁴ In the case of the entry on Timur, for example, the detail of the olive-branch-carrying maidens being trampled to death, which is the core of the portrait provided in the Icelandic annal, simply does not appear in Carion's work, which thus cannot be the source.¹⁵ The description of the maidens does, however, as Cook notes, appear in Petrus Perondinus' *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris Vita* (1551), Pope Pius II's *Asiae Europaeque elegantissima descriptio* (1458), Pedro Mexia's *Silva de varia lección* (1543), Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* (1544), as well as many of the translations and adaptations that all of these works spawned. Cook does not proceed any further in an attempt to determine which of these texts might lie at the root of the entry in the annal (which is understandable, since his interests lie solely with the influence of *Carion's Chronicles*), and Eiríkur Þormóðsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir in their more recent edition of *Oddverjaannáll* add no new information on this matter.¹⁶

To determine which, if any, of the sources mentioned by Cook was available (in one form or other) to the compiler of the Icelandic annal, a comparison of the main points is required.¹⁷ These are five, namely (i) the Scythian origin of Timur (combined with the statement that he is called the king

13 Robert Cook, "The *Chronica Carionis* in Iceland," *Opuscula* 8 (1985): 226–63.

14 Cook, "The *Chronica Carionis*," 233.

15 Cook, "The *Chronica Carionis*," 231. Examples which give an idea of the variety of descriptions of Timur to be found in different versions of *Carion's Chronicles* can be found on f. 157v of the 1531 German edition and pp. 1027–28 of the 1573 German edition.

16 *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, cxlvii–cxlix.

17 It should be noted that no known direct translations into Icelandic of the works of any of these authors are known. See, for example, their absence from the (admittedly not comprehensive) list of personal names which can be browsed on handrit.is.

of the Tartars), (ii) the already-mentioned trampling of the olive-branch-bearing maidens, (iii) the affirmation, by Timur, when questioned about his harshness, that he is the wrath of God, (iv) the comparison to Hannibal, and (v) the dating of the events to 1398. While the latter point could be merely coincidental – the compiler simply having inserted the material at a point deemed reasonable – the others should be present in some form or another in a putative source. If no such source exists, then we must assume either that it has been lost or that there has been a work of synthesis at some point, where points from various accounts were combined.

Pedro Mexia's work, first published in 1543 in Spanish but reprinted and translated on numerous occasions, has been of great interest to literary scholars, since Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587/1588) can be traced back to it.¹⁸ The *Silva* ('forest', i.e. literary miscellany) is a collection of many stories, that of Timur being just one among many. They are not provided with dates, such only being normal practice in works which present themselves as history. Mexia describes his sources, the principal of which for the section under consideration seems to be an Italian work by Andrea Cambini (d. 1527) entitled *Della origine de Turci* (1529).¹⁹ Cambini himself remarks that his information is based on that provided by Pope Pius II.²⁰ A comparison of these three works shows that in the step between Cambini and Mexia an important detail, namely the comparison of Timur to Hannibal, drops out. This effectively rules out Mexia's work, or any of its derivatives, from being the direct source of *Oddverjaannáll's* entry.

The *Cosmographia* of Sebastian Münster (1488–1552) first appeared just a year after Mexia's *Silva*, but was subsequently reissued and translated on numerous occasions. Münster was a Lutheran, employed at the University of Basel from 1529 until his death, and his *Cosmographia* describes the en

18 See Thomas C. Izard, "The Principal Source for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*," *MLN* 58 (1943): 411–17; see also Leslie Spence, "The Influence of Marlowe's Sources on *Tamburlaine*," *Modern Philology* (1926): 181–99; Leslie Spence, "Tamburlaine and Marlowe," *PMLA* 42 (1927): 604–22; Hugh G. Dick, "Tamburlaine Sources Once More," *Studies in Philology* 46 (1949): 154–66.

19 Pedro Mexia, *Silva de varia lección* (Madrid: Matheo de Espinosa y Arteaga, 1673), 197.

20 Andrea Cambini, *Libro d'Andrea Cambini della origine de Turci et imperio delli Ottomanni* ([Florence]: [Heredi di Philipppo di Giunta], 1529), 2.

tire known world as well the histories of many nations.²¹ Timur appears on two occasions, firstly in Book V (principally concerned with Asia), where the Tartars are described and a list of their leaders is given.²² The section of interest to us here, however, appears in Book IV, as part of the description of Greece. The recent history of that land is presented through a list of the Ottoman emperors, and Timur's cruelty and claim of divine justification appears within the description of *Baiatzet der vierd Türckisch keyser* 'Bayezid, the Fourth Turkish Emperor'.²³ Münster's description, which tells summarily of the trampling of the olive-branch-bearing maidens and Timur's haughty response on being questioned about his cruelty (points ii and iii), includes no comparison with Hannibal, no date when the events took place, and, while saying that Timur is a Tartar, only mentions Scythia as one of the regions he conquered. Thus for similar reasons to those presented with respect to Mexia's text, Münster's, which also owed a clear debt to Pope Pius II's work, is unlikely to have been the immediate source of the entry in *Oddverjaannáll*.²⁴ Later editions and translations of the *Cosmographia* often contain additional material, but none of it seems to bring us any closer to the extract in *Oddverjaannáll*.

Of the four potential sources suggested by Cook, the *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris Vita* 'Life of the Great Timur, Emperor of the Scythians' (1553, reprinted on many occasions) by Petrus Perondinus stands out as being the only work exclusively concerning itself with Timur as a

21 See Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster: Describing the World in the Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

22 Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia: Beschreibung aller Lender durch Sebastianum Munsterum in welcher begriffen aller völkler, Herzschaftten, Stetten und namhafftiger slecken herkommen* (Basel: Henrichus Petri, 1544), dcxxv.

23 Münster, *Cosmographia* (1544), dlxxvii.

24 The title alone is suggestive of the influence, Pope Pius II's work also commonly being referred to as his *Cosmographia* (see, for example, the title page of his *Cosmographia Pii Papae in Asia et Europæ eleganti descriptione* ([Paris]: Henricus Stephanus & Ioannis Hongontius, 1509)). Münster's phrasing, *Sihstu mich für ein Menschen an: Du irrst, dann ich bin der Zorn Gottes und ein Verderbung der Welt* [You consider me a man: You are wrong, for I am the wrath of God and the destruction of the world], *Cosmographia* (1544), dlxxvii, is also a faithful reproduction of Pope Pius II's *Tu me hominem esse arbitraris? Falleris: Ira dei ego sum et orbis vastitas* [You judge me to be a man? You are mistaken: I am the anger of God and the destruction of the world], *Cosmographia* (1509), 26v. Münster also includes details about Bayezid being used as a stool for Timur to climb up onto his horse, taken from the *Europa* of Pope Pius II (*Cosmographia* (1509), 93r).

historical personage. Almost nothing is known of the author, who, in twenty-six short chapters, gives the most extensive account of Timur to be produced up to that time. Perondinus' description of the trampling of the maidens appears in Chapter 18, entitled *De sævitia et crudelitate eius contra victos, et supplices* 'About his savagery and cruelty towards those defeated by him and supplicants',²⁵ while the questioning of his cruelty and his response appears in Chapter 19.²⁶ The description thus has all of the main points of the narrative (i, ii and iii), including a comparison to Hannibal (iv) somewhat later in Chapter 21.²⁷ Nevertheless, these details are spread out over several chapters and with a great amount of other material intercalated, giving an impression which is, on the whole, much further away from the entry in *Oddverjaannáll* than the previously described passages in Mexia and Münster. It is also the case that the year in which the events took place is not given. Perondinus' work came to be reprinted a few years later in Conrad Clauser's Latin translation of Laonikus Chalkokondyles' *Proofs of History* and had an influence on later portraits of Timur such as those by Louis Le Roy (1510–1577) in his *De la vicissitude ou variété des choses en l'univers* (1576) and Philipp Lonicer in *Chronica Turcica* (1578), but it is not the source of the Icelandic material.²⁸

The last to be discussed of the four potential candidates mentioned by Cook is Pope Pius II, or Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–1464) as he was known prior to his pontificate. He was, as we have seen in the cases of Mexia and Münster, a forerunner to many of the early modern writers who portrayed Timur's deeds, preceded only by Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459).²⁹ Pope Pius II's work on Asia, called *Cosmographia* when it was

25 Petrus Perondinus, *Magni Tamerlanis Scytharum Imperatoris Vita* (Florence, 1553), 53.

26 Perondinus, *Magni Tamerlanis*, 54.

27 Perondinus, *Magni Tamerlanis*, 57.

28 Conrad Clauser, trans., *Laonici Chalcondylæ Atheniensis, de origine et rebus gestis Turcorum Libri Decem, nuper è Graeco in Latinum conuersi* (Basil: Joannes Oporinus, 1556), 235–48; Louis Le Roy, *De la Vicissitude ou Variété des Choses en l'Univers* (Paris: Pierre l'Huilier, 1575); Philipp Lonicer, *Chronica Turcica* (Frankfurt am Main: [Feyerabend], 1578).

29 Pope Pius II made use of Bracciolini's account, which appeared in his *De varietate fortune*, effectively complete by 1447 and circulating in manuscripts or piecemeal in print afterwards. See the first complete printed version, Poggio Bracciolini, *Historie de varietate fortune*, ed. by Dominico Giorgio (Paris: Coustelier, 1723), 36–39. Bracciolini does not mention the trampling of the maidens.

published posthumously in Paris in 1509 alongside his work on Europe,³⁰ was written shortly after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 and thus is permeated by this looming threat. He describes an east-west itinerary, but ends up devoting most space to Asia Minor and its inhabitants. Before arriving at this destination, Timur is described 'in the section devoted to Parthia - the country lying just south of Scythia'.³¹ A compelling case is made by Margaret Meserve for Pope Pius II's having occluded Timur's 'barbarous' Central Asian, Mongol or Scythian origins, for the purpose of presenting a Parthian/Persian power of the kind which Christian Europe could attempt to forge an alliance with against a common threat which lay between them. It is probably for this reason that, though the account of the siege with the olive-branch bearing maidens (ii), Timur's angry response on being questioned about his lack of mercy (iii) and the comparison with Hannibal (iv) are all present,³² Timur is clearly not said to be a Scythian king (i). Once again the year when the events took place (v) is absent.

While none of the four authors mentioned by Cook quite fit the bill as being the source of the entry in *Oddverjaannáll*, Pope Pius II's account is the closest, and this aids us in identifying the actual source. The Nuremberg Chronicle, written in Latin by Hartmann Schedel in 1493 and translated into German in the same year by Georg Alt, is yet another of the texts which borrows the section on Timur almost word-for-word from Pope Pius II's *Asia*.³³ While the Nuremberg Chronicle begins its entry on Timur by stating that he died in the year 1402, yet another work based pri-

30 Other influential editions in the sixteenth century were his collected works, *Opera quae extant omnia* (Basel: Henricus Stephanus, 1551; repr. 1571).

31 Margaret Meserve, "From Samarkand to Scythia: Reinventions of Asia in Renaissance Geography and Political Thought," *'El Piu Expeditivo Pontifice': Selected Studies on Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405–1464)*, ed. by Zweder von Martels and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 34.

32 Pope Pius II, *Cosmographia* (1509), 26r–26v.

33 Hartmann Schedel, *Registrum huius operis libri cronicarum cum figuris et imaginibus ab inicio mundi* (Nuremberg: Koberger, 1493); Hartmann Schedel, *Register des Buchs der Croniken und geschichten mit figuren und pildnussen von anbeginn der welt bis auf disse unnsere Zeit*, trans. by Georg Alt (Nuremberg: Koberger, 1493). The description appears on the same page (ccxxvii) in both the Latin and German versions. As already stated, the *Asia* was first published in Paris in 1509, thus Schedel's sources were handwritten manuscripts. See Bernd Posselt, *Konzeption und Kompilation der Schedelschen Weltchronik*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 71 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 250.

marily on the Nuremberg Chronicle, namely Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* (1531) begins its entry by stating that *Anno Mcccxcviii war Tamerlanes der groß künig der Tartern oder Parthier* 'in the year 1398 Tamerlanes the Great was the king of the Tartars or Parthians'.³⁴ The year given by Franck matches that in *Oddverjaannáll*, and as can be seen from the text below, the main points of the story of the trampling of the maidens, along with Timur's statement that he is the wrath of God and the narrator's statement that he was like Hannibal in his cruelty, make this a very likely source of the material in the Icelandic annal:

eins mals verzug die auffgebung ein statt biß an andern tag, da schickten sy all yr kinder vnd junckfrewlin her auß in weissen kleidern, ölzweiglin vor jhn tragende, in hoffnung mit yrer vnschuld des fürsten zorn zuuersunen. Aber er schaffet dise all mit dem reisigen zeug zuertreppen, vnnd die statt zuerbrennen. Als er aber von ein geheymen seins gesinds gefragt, warumb er die grausamkeit also geübt hett an disem vnschuldigen blüt, da hat er ym zornigklich mit entstellung seiner geberdt antlitz, vnd mit feürschiessenden augen geantwort Meinstu ich sey ein mensch: Nein du irrest, ich binn der zorn Gottes vnd ein verwüstung der erden, hüt dich das du mir hinfürter nit meer begegnest, mitt solcher frag. Die disen Tirannen gesehen haben, sagen er sy dem wütterich Hanibal gleich gwesen in aller wütterey.³⁵

[On one occasion the surrender of a town was delayed until the second day, and then they sent all their children and maidens out in white clothes, holding out olive-branches in front of themselves, in the hope that they would placate the prince's anger with their innocence. But he caused them all to be trampled by the mighty troop and the town to be burnt to the ground. When he was asked, however, by a close confidant, as to why he had exercised such cruelty upon these innocent souls, he then looked at him furiously and with a change having come over his demeanour, and with fire in

34 Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* (Strasbourg: Balthasar Beck, 1531), cxcviii recto.

35 Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cxcviii recto and verso.

his eyes answered, ‘Do you consider me to be a man? Oh no, you are mistaken. I am the wrath of God and the destruction of the earth. Take care that you henceforth never more confront me with such questions’. Those who have seen this tyrant, say that he is similar to the despotic Hannibal in all his ruthlessness.]

Having located such a likely candidate in the 1531 *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* of Franck, it is worth mentioning that a second extended edition appeared in 1536 (although with the section on Timur close to identical), and that Franck also reused much of his material in his *Germaniae Chronicon* (1538).³⁶ The latter, however, cannot in either of its two print runs be the source of the section on Timur as it omits the telltale comparison with Hannibal. Taking the 1531 edition as a starting point, however, a yet stronger case for Franck’s role as source for the Timur passage in *Oddverjaannáll* might be made if we could show that it is the source of the other passages from the end of the fourteenth and start of the fifteenth centuries which Storm believed all came from a single source covering the life of Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437). As it turns out, several correspondences do come to light.

Cook says that under the year 1400 in *Oddverjaannáll* there is an entry which reads “woru slegnir [sic] margar þusundir Gydinga af Praga jnnbyggjurum”. This is not reported in any of the consulted versions of *Chronica Carionis*.³⁷ In Franck’s *Chronica*, however, we read ‘Darnach Mcccc kamen die Prager [...] und überfielen die Juden [...] unnd schlügen etlich tausent zustodt’ [Afterwards in 1400 the inhabitants of Prague came and attacked the Jews and killed several thousand of them].³⁸ Cook also comments that ‘Under “Ano 1416” O-A [i.e. *Oddverjaannáll*] has “waru a daugum Petrus Cameracensis Leonhardus Aretinus Pogius Florentinus

36 For the corresponding section on Timur see Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* (Ulm: Varnier, 1536), ccxxxiii recto; Sebastian Franck, *Germaniae Chronicon. Von des gantzen Teutschlands aller Teutschen völker herkommen* (Augsburg: Westermair, Alexander Weyssenhorn and Heinrich Stainer, 1538), ccxxviii recto; Sebastian Franck, *Germaniae Chronicon. Von des gantzen Teutschlands aller Teutschen völker herkommen* (Frankfurt: Egenolff, 1538), ccxlii verso.

37 Cook, “The *Chronica Carionis*,” 231. The annal entry translates as ‘many thousands of the Jews who lived in Prague were killed’. For the original text see *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, 183.

38 Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cxcvii verso.

Johannes Gerson." Gerson is mentioned in Melanchthon-Peucer, by last name only [...] the other names do not appear in any version of Carion'.³⁹ In Franck's *Chronica*, however, we find the following: 'Anno Mccccxvi leuchtet [...] Petrus Cameracensis, Leonhardus Aretinus, ein Philosophus, Orator und Historicus, Poggius Florentinus, Johannes Gerson' [In 1400 Petrus Cameracensis, Leonhardus Aretinus, philosopher, orator and historian, Poggius Florentinus and Johannes Gerson shone brightly].⁴⁰ That is to say, Franck records all four names in exactly the same order. Other details found in *Oddverjaannáll* and also recorded by Franck are 1396 as the year of the Battle of Nicopolis (*Carion's Chronicle* has 1395),⁴¹ the detailed description of Emperor Sigismund's lascivious second wife Barbara (as opposed to the single sentence in *Carion's Chronicle*) and the comment that Jerome of Prague was burnt 140 days after Jan Hus.⁴² Not all the information which Cook refers to can be found, however, in Franck's work, so it is clear that information has been supplemented from elsewhere. A case in point is the reference to Emperor Sigismund becoming the 36th Holy Roman Emperor in 1410 and the enigmatic reference to a strange occurrence in Augsburg ten years previously. The earliest editions of *Carion's Chronicles* say that Sigismund is the 35th emperor, while Franck's *Chronica* makes him number 117 in an unbroken line of emperors all the way from ancient Rome (and records no significant events in Augsburg in 1400). Curiously, in another work by Franck, his *Germaniae Chronicon*, the numbering of the German emperors is much more in line with that found in *Oddverjaannáll*, with Sigismund the 36th emperor. Moreover in *Germaniae Chronicon* under the entry for 1380 we are told of the discovery of gunpowder for firearms by a monk and that this technology came to be adopted in Augsburg in 1400 (Franck's *Chronica*, both the edition from 1531 and that from 1536, seem to contain an error at this point and


39 Cook, "The *Chronica Carionis*," 233.

40 Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cccix recto. Cook states that he has 'not been able to identify "Petrus Cameracensis"'. This would seem to be Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420), at one time Bishop of Cambrai and Gerson's teacher.

41 Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cxcvii recto. For the battle of Nicopolis, the number of Christians killed is given as 100,000, which, admittedly, does not match the 920,000 of *Oddverjaannáll*.

42 Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cciiii recto, ccccx recto.

Tamerlanes Scythar. Imp.

 A MER LANES Schytharum Imperator, qui propter inauditam animi feritatem atque saevitiam portentosasque vires, orbis TERROR, & CLADES Orientis appellatus est; ex humili militia loco per omnes honorum gradus ad eximiam bellicae virtutis opinionem, & denique ad summum imperium ascendit; insigni praesertim applaudentium militum studio, quum adulatione quadam Temir Cuthlus vocaretur, quae vox Tartarice fortunatum ferrum significat. Eum Samarcandae urbis, quae est ad Iaxartem amnem Sogdianae regioni finitimum, infimae classis ciuem fuisse tradunt. Quam urbem usque ab Alexandri Magni temporibus Quinto Curtio notam videmus: restanturque Persae, homines historiae non ignari, quibus cum nos collocti sumus, Samarcandam à Tamerlane tanquam patriam suam totius subacti à se Orientis opibus & spolijs mirè auctam atque exornatam fuisse. Erat Tamer-

Images 1 and 2: Details of text and a woodcut of Tamerlanes Scytharum Imperator [Tamerlan, Emperor of the Scythians] from Paola Giovio, Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium (Basel: Pietro Perna, 1575), 102–03. This work was originally published in 1551 (with Timur described on pp. 95–97) but without the images.

state that the technology was adopted in Augsburg in 1330).⁴³ Thus the *Germaniae Chronicon* seems a more likely source for the detail mentioned in *Oddverjaannáll* that ten years prior to 1410 (i.e. 1400) ‘war first tidskat Bysna med ferd i Augzburg’ [the use of shotguns first caught on in Augsburg].⁴⁴

Even if Franck’s works in tandem are the sources of the added material in *Oddverjaannáll*, they seem not to have been used completely in isolation. Someone involved in the chain of transmission has at some point seen fit to call Timur *Tamerlanes Scythar*. This cannot be from Franck, who always refers to Timur as King of the Tartars or the Parthians (even if in his *Weltbuch* he alludes to the fact that the Scythians had been conquered

43 Franck, *Germaniae Chronicon* (Strasbourg, 1538), ccxxxviii verso–ccxxxix recto; Franck, *Germaniae Chronicon* (Frankfurt, 1538), ccxxiii recto; Franck, *Chronica* (1531), cxcvii recto; Franck, *Chronica* (1536), cxxxiii recto.

44 *Oddaannálar og Oddverjaannáll*, 188. ‘bysna’ here is presumably the genitive plural of ‘byssa’ [rifle]. Compare Danish ‘bøsse’ and German ‘büchsen’ (the word used in Franck’s *Germaniae Chronicon*).



by the Tartars and now live *Tartarisch*).⁴⁵ Whoever added this epithet could have been inspired by, among others, the aforementioned Petrus Perondinus, the Italian biographer Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) (see Image 1 and 2) and/or the German historian Philipp Lonicer (1543–1599) (see Image 3). The latter is perhaps a strong contender, since exactly the same orthography is used.

While doubts still remain as regards some of the material in *Odd-verjaannáll*, we now have a much clearer picture of the provenance of the Timur-related material. Moreover, in the course of determining the

⁴⁵ Sebastian Franck, *Weltbuch* (Tübingen: Morhart, 1534), xciii verso.

source of the Timur excerpt in *Oddverjaannáll* we have seen the wealth of representations of this historical figure in early modern writing, from tyrant, to potential eastern savior of Christendom, to moral exemplum of martial virtues and vices. We must, however, be cautious when assessing the process whereby material was selected for inclusion in the annal. We cannot be sure that the compilers were aware of many of these sources, and they may simply have used the only material that was to hand, namely a slightly modified version of Franck's *Chronica*. Moreover, we cannot know whether the author of *Oddverjaannáll* had a full text of Franck's work(s) or was already using an edited version. Perhaps the excerpts we see were the only ones available, but there may also have been a process of selection. If the latter, perhaps there is a reason why information about Timur and his merciless actions is juxtaposed with another event of more local interest. That local event is the killing of Gunnlaugur bóndi Magnússon from Reykholt (in Borgarfjörður) as retribution for his killing of Jón afbragð the previous year (1397). Gunnlaugur Magnússon was *sýslumaður* 'county magistrate' in Borgarfjörður between 1375 and 1399, and the killing of Jón afbragð is said to have been just one example of his overbearing behavior and is linked with 'annad hardligt framferdj wid bændur þa hann hafði kongz syslu' [other harsh actions taken against farmers when he held the position of the king's magistrate].⁴⁶ It seems that Gunnlaugur, like Timur according to some accounts, took excessive advantage of his position, and thus abuse of power emerges as a theme uniting east and west, distant lands and more familiar districts. The killing of Gunnlaugur may even have been moved in the annal to 1398 to highlight this correspondence: Hannes Þorsteinsson says in a footnote to his edited text of Bogi Benediktsson's *Sýslumannaæfir* that it is more likely that Gunnlaugur was killed in 1400, as appears in *Lögmannsannáll*.⁴⁷

The preceding discussion of the potential sources for the description of Timur in the *Oddverjaannáll* was extensive, especially considering the fact that the entries taken from Franck's work represent only a very small

46 *Oddaannállar og Oddverjaannáll*, 183. Gunnlaugur bóndi Magnússon is not mentioned in Páll Eggert Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár frá landnáms tímum til ársloka 1940*, I–VI (Reykjavík: Hið íslenszka bókmenntafélag, 1948–1976), but he does appear in *Sýslumannaæfir eptir Boga Benediktsson á Staðarfelli*, I–V, ed. by Jón Pétursson and Hannes Þorsteinsson (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Herbertsprent, 1881–1915), III. 385–86.

47 *Sýslumannaæfir*, ed. Jón Pétursson and Hannes Þorsteinsson, III. 386.



Image 3: Picture of Tamerlanes Scytha from Lonicer, Chronica Turcica, 14 verso.

portion of the annals as a whole. Nevertheless, it can hopefully serve as an example. Much work has been done on the continental sources of medieval Icelandic literature, but a similar effort remains to be made as regards the continental sources of much early modern and post-Reformation Icelandic literature. The necessary legwork may be slow and painstaking but is vital if we are to get a comprehend fully on the intellectual and cultural possibilities of sixteenth and seventeenth century Iceland. Moreover, annals and historiographical works have been particularly neglected, lacking the easy appeal of more literary text types to modern readers.⁴⁸ But as Ingi

⁴⁸ A study which forefronts historiographical writing, but is little known due to it only existing

Sigurðsson has pointed out, '[b]lómaskeið í annálaritun var hér á landi frá því um 1630 fram yfir 1800' [the heyday of Icelandic annal-writing took place from around 1630 up to after 1800], so a better understanding of this form of writing and the sources it made use of is all the more important if we are to get to grips with intellectual culture after the Reformation.⁴⁹

There is yet one more reason why the example of Timur in particular is worthwhile investigating, that being that it contributes to filling out our picture of how Icelandic authors had access to information on and adapted materials pertaining to the east and Asia Minor (modern Turkey). In the medieval period eastern themes appear in texts in a number of ways, albeit particularly in religious texts, learned histories and fantastic or exoticising accounts (these groups not being mutually exclusive). Limited contact with peoples from the east and an absence of Jewish or Muslim communities in Iceland played into what Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams have described as their 'absent presence', since '[t]he Muslims and Jews from the Scandinavian and Baltic sources are products of the imagination, an imagination created from ignorance, maybe curiosity'.⁵⁰ It has been well-documented how Snorri Sturluson explained the Nordic pantheon as euhemerised Trojan refugees, ensuring an enduring conceptual connection between Scandinavians and the area of modern-day Turkey. Sverrir Jakobsson has shown how the schism between the Western and Eastern church remained amorphous in the minds of Icelanders, and Constantinople and its emperor retained a superlative position in the minds and hearts of Icelandic writers even after they had been associated with heresy and thus rejected by other parts of the Roman Catholic world.⁵¹ Geraldine Barnes has described how Icelandic romance, unlike English and French Romance which were shaped by their national experiences of the crusades, 'had no comparable history of religious dispute, violated cultural taboos, military failure, ter-

as an unpublished doctoral dissertation, is Louis Pitschmann, "*Þýskaland's saga: A Critical Edition with a Philological Commentary*," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1975).

49 Ingi Sigurðsson, "Þróun íslenzkrar sagnfræði frá miðöldum til samtímans," *Saga* 38 (2000): 13.

50 Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß, "Introduction: Encounters and Fantasies: Muslims, Jews and Christians in the North," *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews, and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 3–4.

51 Sverrir Jakobsson, "The Schism that Never Was: Old Norse Views on Byzantium and Russia," *Byzantinoslavica* 66 (2008): 173–88.

ritorial conquest or the involvement of their countrymen in the sack of Constantinople'.⁵² Constantinople and its environs thus remained central for Iceland in ways which it did not for mainland Europeans, but the relationship with the east was constantly developing. By the seventeenth century, for example, the dominant power in Asia Minor, the Ottomans, came to be associated with abductions and terror as Algerian pirates (called *Tyrkjar* 'Turks' in Icelandic sources), raided the coasts of Iceland.

As an example of the ways in which historiographical texts were made use of in imaginative engagements with the east, I will end with a discussion of a post-Reformation literary text which makes use of material familiar from the Timur entry in *Oddverjaannáll*. The example will show how the annal entry can aid our wider comprehension of Early Modern Icelandic literature. Thus, following the appearance of 'Tamerlanes Scyta' in *Oddverjaannáll*, the conqueror's name is absent from Icelandic culture until it surfaces again in the seventeenth-century *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rímur*.⁵³ The relationship between these two works (and the versions of the prose saga) remains a matter of debate,⁵⁴ but the precise nature of their relationship need not be determined in order to appreciate the ways in which they present anew the character Tamerláus (as he is called), as I

52 Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Medieval Iceland*, The Viking Collection 21 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), 13.

53 The form of the name 'Ambáles' varies. Israel Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland* (London: David Nutt, 1898), always uses 'Ambales'. In *Ambáles rímur eftir Pál Bjarnason*, ed. by Hermann Pálsson, Rit Rímnafélagsins V (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1952), the form 'Ambáles' is consistently used (and I follow this usage). In Heiko Uecker, ed., *Der nordische Hamlet, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Germanistik und Skandinavistik* 56 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005) the earliest form of the saga is called 'Amlóða saga', but Uecker says that 'Ambales saga' (without accent) is the title commonly used in later witnesses. In fact, the earliest manuscript witnesses also provide alternative titles: in AM 521 b 4to we read 'saga af Amlod edur ambales' (f. 1r) and in AM 521 c 4to 'hier biriar søgu Af Ambulo edur Amloda enum heymska' (f. 1r). I use 'Ambáles saga' when referring to the prose text.

54 Earlier scholars assumed that the *rímur* were based on the saga, but then Hermann Pálsson claimed that sagas had been written on the basis of the *rímur* on two separate occasions (*Ambáles rímur*, x). The two similar sagas based on the *rímur* are the texts found in, on the one hand, AM 521 a 4to and AM 521 b 4to and, on the other hand, in AM 521 c 4to and the majority of other manuscripts. More recent studies such as Uecker, *Der nordische Hamlet*, and Ian Felce, "In Search of *Amlóða saga*: The Saga of Hamlet the Icelander," *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 101–22, have not fully accepted Hermann Pálsson's thesis, and more work needs to be done before the relationship can be stated with certainty.

will discuss here. Tamerláus first appears in chapter 4 as the son of King Soldán and the brother of Málprýant and Fástínus.⁵⁵ With the support of the latter brother, Tamerláus leads an attack on Venice and abducts a Christian princess, allowing her to continue practicing her faith after he marries her.⁵⁶ Thus, although the brothers are presented as the antagonists of the saga, Tamerláus seems to have some redeeming features.

From this point on the story leaves Tamerláus behind in order to follow Ambáles, whose father, Salman, has been killed by Fástínus. Fástínus allows Ambáles to live because he thinks he is a fool, but, eventually suspecting Ambáles of acting and being a potential threat, he sends him away. Fengi and Claudius, Fástínus's counterparts in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, send the Prince of Denmark to the British Isles to die. Fástínus, however, sends Ambáles to Tamerláus in Scythia. At this point there are a number of differences between the saga and its forerunner in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). They share the fact that the protagonist swaps the letter which his traveling companions were supposed to give to the king at the destination and thus avoids the ensuing trouble. In *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rímur*, however, Ambáles develops a close relationship with Tamerláus after revealing that Tamerláus is not actually Soldán's son. Tamerláus' mother had an affair with Duke Artax of Indíaland and Tamerláus is the result. When Tamerláus' mother's infidelity is revealed, she writes, enraged, to her legitimate sons and encourages them to take back the kingdom from their bastard brother. They happily consent (although this conflict does not materialise, since their delayed response is preempted by other events), and thus Tamerláus is no longer on the side of Málprýant and Fástínus. In league with Ambáles he has now switched from being a villain to a good guy.

Tamerláus' rehabilitation becomes even more patent when he sets out, along with Ambáles, to fight the heathens who are besieging Christian Constantinople (which, of course, forms no part of either Saxo Grammaticus' or Shakespeare's versions). We are told that:

55 I refer to the chapter numbers from Uecker, ed, *Der nordische Hamlet*, 63–64, which provides an edition of AM 521 b 4to. This corresponds to chapter 3 in Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, 13–14, and fitt 2 in *Ambáles rímur*, 18–19.

56 The *rímur* tell us that the 'drottning [...] þess heiðna manns [...] helgri trú fékk [...] að halda inn til dauða' [queen of this heathen man was allowed to keep her pious faith until she died]. See *Ambáles rímur*, 18–19.

Sä keisarj, er Catalichtuz var ad nafni [...] sat i Constantynopel, sem hófudborg var ä Gricklandi og sem med sýnum lóndum, vard-veitti tru cristinna manna, hann atti jafnan orrostu vid þær þiödir, sem kólludust Saraseno, sem voru grimmar þiödir og vykingar [...] og ei þirmdu þeir vóggubornum nie þeim sem ä elli sæng läu og því mätti þä blóðhunda kalla, af þeirri þiöd, eru tartarar komnir [...] vmm þennan tyme var eirn grimmur kongur þessa lydz [...] sem sat vm Constantynopel med iiij M vopnfæra manna [...] hann het Baiasetez, eda Bastianus, óknafn hanz var ottomanus, hann hafdi störan ofmetnad, i öllu öhofi holldzinz eptirlætj [...] hann framdi hinn vesta lifnad, med ærnum skómmum, hann tok þær ägiætustu meyar og konur, þar höndla kunni, og lagdj þær i syna huilu, og hieilt med þ[eim] samfarir medann hann listi, og þa hann girnist ecki leingra hina sómu, risti hann hennar kuid i sundur med hnyfi og drap so eina eptir adra⁵⁷

[The emperor named Catalichtuz [...] ruled from Constantinople, which was the capital of Greece, and which along with his lands observed the faith of the Christian people. He was always having battles against those people who were called Saracens, who were cruel peoples and marauders [...] and did not spare children in the cradles nor the aged lying in their beds, and thus they might be called bloodthirsty. The Tartars are descended from those people. [...] At that time there was a cruel king ruling over those people [...] who had besieged Constantinople with 4,000 armed men [...] He was called Bayezid or Bastianus and his cognomen was 'the Ottoman'. He displayed overweening pride and partook of corporal pleasures beyond all moderation [...] his lifestyle was most terrible and exceedingly shameful. He would take the most excellent maidens and women whom he could get his hands on and lay them down in his bed and have sex with them as much as he liked and when he no longer desired the woman, he would cut open her belly with a knife and in this manner killed them one after the other] (my translation, likewise below)

57 My own transcription of AM 521 c 4to, f. 6v. Italics are used where I have expanded abbreviations. The same applies to the two additional passages from AM 521 c 4to quoted below.

Following this horrific description, Tamerláus explains to Ambáles that it is because of these cruelties that he is going to war with Bastíanus. Moreover, Tamerláus has a personal motivation: his sister was one of the maidens previously abducted, raped and slaughtered by Bastíanus. Thus in Bastíanus we are presented with a figure who is not only sharply distinguished from Tamerláus (remember that when Tamerláus abducted the Venetian princess, he allowed her to keep practising her faith and married her rather than keeping her as a concubine), but has a fair amount in common with Timur as we know him from other sources (such as *Oddverjaannáll*). The description of Bastíanus and the Saracens whom he leads focusses on their cruelty to innocents, young children, the elderly and maidens, all of whom they slaughter mercilessly.⁵⁸ They are, moreover, besieging a city. It is also the slaughter of innocents during a siege which lies at the heart of the description of Timur found in *Oddverjaannáll*.

It is worth noting at this point that the text I have quoted is my own transcription from AM 521 c 4to, and the reason for this is that this witness seems to show a particularly dense interplay of details traditionally associated with Timur, moreso even than the texts in the *rímur* (from AM 521 e 4to) and from the other version of the prose saga (represented by AM 521 b 4to, as edited by Uecker). So, for example, while those texts refer to Tamerláus and Ambáles' enemy as 'Bastíanus' and 'Bastijnus' respectively,⁵⁹ AM 521 c 4to calls him 'Baiaasetez, *eda* Bastianus'. In doing so, AM 521 c 4to draws attention to the historical figure who presumably forms the model for Bastíanus, namely the Ottoman emperor Bayezid I (1354–1403), who, as was mentioned at the start of this article, was famously defeated by Timur at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Bayezid had interrupted his siege of Constantinople precisely to go and face the threat presented by Timur, whereas in the imaginative version being discussed here Tamerláus brings the battle to Bastíanus mid-siege. Likewise, AM 521 c 4to is the only one of the three texts which mentions the Tartars, apparently descended from the Saracens/Ottomans whom Bastíanus leads. This, like the descriptions

58 Compare also, the slightly less gruesome account in, Uecker, ed., *Der nordische Hamlet*, 155.

59 *Ambáles rímur*, ed., 202; Uecker, ed., *Der nordische Hamlet*, 154.

of extreme cruelty to innocents, links Tamerláus' enemies in *Ambáles saga* to the description of Timur himself as presented in *Oddverjaannáll*, where he is called *Tartara kongur* 'king of the Tartars'.⁶⁰

The similarity between the description of Bastíanus and earlier descriptions of Timur, which might lead us to see the latter as a possible source for *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rímur*, is brought into focus by two more passages which follow and also resonate strongly with earlier accounts of Timur, such as that in *Oddverjaannáll*. These passages, moreover, continue to use material from the earlier descriptions of Timur while apparently consciously distancing Tamerláus from the barbaric image of his literary predecessor. A more positive Timur than the ethically dubious one of certain historiographical texts thus emerges.

The first of these passages is when Ambáles responds to Tamerláus' account of the horrors perpetrated by Bastíanus upon his sister. Ambáles suggests a plan which involves Tosti, a dwarf friend whom he has enlisted to provide support to Tamerláus' army. Ambáles explains to Tamerláus:

þennan kong muntu sigra, með ollum hanz monnum, því reidi þess mikla guds mun yfir hann falla, og alla þá sem með honum eru, eg mun lata tosta felaga minn skielfa þá með ludri sinum [...] Spyr kongur menn syna, huada hliöd þeir hugdu þetta vera, enn þeir sögdu það er róddz [sic] gudz cristinna manna sem i lopti heirist, og bodar þier og ozz hans stränga reidi og hefnd, því þitt vont athæfi hefur vpp vakid hanz grimdar reidi yfir ozz⁶¹

['You will defeat this king and all his men because the wrath of the great God will come down upon him and all of those who are with him. I will have Tosti, my companion, make them quake with his trumpet' [...] The king [i.e. Bastíanus] asks his men what sound they thought it was, and they said 'that is the voice of the Christian men's God which can be heard in the air and announces to you and us his

60 Interestingly enough, a later text from the same group as AM 521 c 4to calls the Saracens *Tíran(n)ar* 'tyrants', which may remind us of the description of Timur as a *tyranne* from *Oddverjaannáll*. See Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, 148. This may, however, be a mere coincidence.

61 AM 521 c 4to, f. 6v.

fierce anger and vengeance because your evil behaviour has roused his wrathful anger against us].⁶²

This passage notably uses *reiði* ‘anger’ on three occasions, once when Ambáles assures Tamerláus victory since God is angry at Bastíanus, and twice when Bastíanus’ own men interpret the sound of Tosti’s horn as revealing God’s wrath. In *Oddverjaannáll* Timur justifies his seemingly harsh behaviour by saying that he is not a man, but rather *Reidi Gudz* ‘God’s anger’. The text of *Ambáles saga* presented here seems to draw upon this famed comment, but makes it more acceptable and less arrogant: by placing the words in the mouths of Ambáles and Bastíanus’ men, Tamerláus seems not to be ‘blowing his own horn’, so to speak. Moreover, the idea that Tamerláus is a tool of God’s anger is more acceptable when placed in the context of his confronting the malevolent Bastíanus, rather than trampling olive-branch-bearing maidens.

The second of the two passages refers back to those olive branches and occurs when Bastíanus, having heard Tosti’s horn, puts together a group of men and sends them to investigate the army which has recently arrived in the vicinity of Constantinople:

kongur skipadj 30 mónnum til forvitnj, alla vel vopnada, þeirra foringi het Taliruz, honum treisti kongur vel vpp ä frödleik, frægd og fram góngu, og er hann kom so nær, ad hann sä her budir og merki Tamerlans kongs Skot honum skielk i bringu, tok nu oliu kuistu, og menn hanz sier i hendur, og ridu ad her voctrunum, var honum Rum gefit, kvad tulk ad finna, liet kongur Ambales honum mæta ad Andsuórum, Ambales spyr hann nafnz og erinds, enn hann sagdi sem var, Ambáles sagdi honum þu mätt segja herra þynum, ad kongur Tamerlan af scytia sie yfir hann komin[n] med sinn her, ad hefna svjvirdingar, og dóða sistur sinnar og annara þeira illsku verka, sem cristnum mónnum giortt hefur, og ä hann óngvan kost, lifs nie vægdar, og vogi hann sig ad veria, þä mä hann ozz mæta, nær buin þicist: Taleriuz sagdi ad lytt mundi hann ottazt skial þetta, og mundi hanz ei langt ad byda. Skilldu þeir talid⁶³

62 Compare the very similar passage in Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, 150. Also, the corresponding passages in *Ambáles rímur*, 204–05; Uecker, ed., *Der nordische Hamlet*, 156.

63 AM 521 c 4to, f. 6v.

[The king arranged for 30 men to satisfy his curiosity, all of them well-armed. Their leader was named Talirus. The king trusted him greatly on account of his wisdom, renown and valiant deeds. And when he got so close that he saw King Tamerláus' war-tents and standard, he was overcome with fear. Now he took an olive branch in his hands, and his men too and they rode up to the sentries. A space was made for him, and he said that an interpreter should be found. The king had Ambáles meet with him to answer his questions. Ambáles asks him his name and purpose, and he said what they were. Ambáles said to him: "You may tell your lord that King Tamerláus of Scythia has come upon him with his army to avenge the disgrace done to his sister and her death and the other evil deeds which he has done to Christian people. And there is no chance that he will live or receive mercy, and should he dare to defend himself, then he will have to meet us when the time seems right'. Talirus said that he would hardly be scared of such prattle and they would not have to wait long for him. Thus they ended their conversation.]

The fact that Talirus bears an olive branch (a white flag of sorts) to avoid facing a violent reception must surely bring to mind the olive branches which the maidens carried before being trampled to death upon Timur's orders. This is all the more the case since olive branches are few and far between in Old Norse literature: the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose lists only a handful of appearances of the word *ólifakvistr/ólifukvistr/olíuviðarkvistr* 'olive branch', all of which involve a messenger being sent to parley but otherwise have nothing distinctly in common with the description in *Ambáles saga*.⁶⁴ The point here, however, is that Tamerláus responds in a very different way to Timur as represented in *Oddverjaannáll*. Talirus is rude and condescending, but nevertheless is treated with dignity and provided with space and an interpreter. While Timur did not hesitate

64 Two occurrences are from the same passage in *Karlamagnús saga*. See C.R. Unger, ed., *Karlamagnus saga ok kappá hans: Fortællinger om Keiser Karl Magnus og hans Jævnninger i norsk Bearbejdelse fra det trettende Aarhundrede* (Oslo (Christiania): H.J. Jensen, 1860), 334–35. Another two are from *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*. See Sven Grén Broberg, ed. *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, STUAGNL 38 (Copenhagen: S.L. Møller, 1909–1912), 155, 323. The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose only covers the period up to 1550.

to slaughter even the epitome of innocence (maidens), even when they pled for mercy, Tamerláus here goes to lengths to be hospitable even to the haughtiest visitor. It is worth noting that the description of Talirus' visit to Tamerláus' camp and meeting with Ambáles is much more extensive in AM 521 c 4to than in either the *rímur* or the saga text as it appears in AM 521 b 4to. In the corresponding four verses of the *rímur* we read simply:

XI.46 Þaðan riða þrjátíu lét
þengill strangur hljóðs á braut
með tundur randa, og Tólýrus hét,
sem treysti hann bezt í hvörri þraut.

47. Stóru dýri rekkurinn reið
rétt og hitti á plássið það,
sem herinn fyrir á brautum beið,
brjótar spjóta fundust að.

48. Fulla og alla fékk hann raun,
fróður varð af kominni þjóð,
að vondur mundi að vonum laun
vísir kjósa engin góð.

49. Aftur sneypur hraðan heim
hann þá rann með téðan róm,
svörtum birti sjóla þeim
satt og rétt af hefndardóm.⁶⁵

[46. The stern lord had 30 men ride from there in the direction of the sound with the fire of shields [SWORDS], and Tólýrus (=Talirus) was the name of the one in whom he had most faith in any difficult moment.

47. The warrior rode a large beast directly until he found the place where the army waited upon the road before them, the breakers of spears came together.

65 *Ambáles rímur*, 205–06.

48. He fully and completely found out about and got knowledge of the people who had arrived, and that it seemed that the evil lord would not get to choose any good outcome.

49. He then raced quickly back to camp with the already-mentioned news, made known to that dark king truly and clearly the avenging judgement which awaited them.]

The corresponding passage in AM 521 b 4to's text of *Ambáles saga* reads thus:

Liet kongur giora so sende hann xxx manna þa sem best treistu sier Sa hiet Taulirus sem firer þeim var, hann sat a Góðum reidhiortt og sem hann sa herbuder kongs Tamerlaus reid hann sem adrer sende menn ad hertioldumm og villd[e] vita huor þiod þetta være og sem hann fieck það ad uita og so lijka huor huor [sic] sa være sem hernum stjrde og það Tamerlaus kongur være kominn hefnda ad vitia bastinus konge firi Jll verk sijn reid Taulirus heim aptur og kunngiordi allt þetta.⁶⁶

[The king thus did the following: he sent 30 of the men who trusted him most. Talirus was the name of the one who was their leader. He sat upon a fine steed, and when he saw King Tamerláus' war-tents, he and the other men rode up to those tents and wanted to know who those people were, and when he found that out, as well as who it was that was in charge of the army, and that King Tamerláus had come there to take revenge upon King Bastíanus for his evil deeds, Talirus rode back again and made this all known.]

The *rímur* thus mention that Tólyrus/Talirus was sent out to do reconnaissance and succeeded in his mission, acquiring the relevant information and returning, although without any dialogue mentioned. The text of the saga in AM 521 b 4to tells pretty much the same story, and while it is possible that Taulirus/Talirus got his information through actually conversing with members of the camp (it is said, after all, that he rides up to the tents), it is by no means certain and he might have simply gotten close enough

⁶⁶ Uecker, ed., *Der nordische Hamlet*, 156–57. I have slightly adapted Uecker's text, removing the repetitions which occur there due to inclusion of catchwords.

to eavesdrop and spy. It is only in AM 521 c 4to that Talirus is received into the camp and has an actual conversation with Ambáles as the camp's representative. Likewise, it is only in AM 521 c 4to that an olive-branch is mentioned.

The aim here has not been to determine the relationship between the different texts of *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rímur*. Nevertheless, if the text in AM 521 c 4to is dependent upon the *rímur* or the other prose text, then the scribe has clearly made significant additions.⁶⁷ Alternatively, if the text in AM 521 c 4to stands before the other versions in the textual tradition, then it has retained a number of interesting details which have been lost in the later versions. In either case, source material has been made use of, but preexisting scholarship on *Ambáles rímur* and *Ambáles saga* provide little help in identifying it. That is because most preexisting work has focused on a comment in the *mansöngur* [approx. poetic introduction] to one of the fitts of the *rímur* which reads 'Að sönnu téðan sagna þátt / sá eg títt að vana; / í þýzku máli eg hef átt / áður forðum hana' [In truth I was in the habit of looking at the account in question. Earlier on, I had it in the German language].⁶⁸ Based on this comment it has often been suspected that *Ambáles rímur* (and thus by extension *Ambáles saga*) build upon a German source. Since it is specifically the more traditionally Amlethus/Hamlet features which have interested scholars, speculation about the German source has focused on the epitome of Saxo previously attributed to Thomas Gheysmer which was published in Low German in 1485.⁶⁹ That work could certainly have influenced the sections of the saga which correspond more closely to material found in the *Gesta Danorum*, but there is no known source, German or otherwise, which mixes material about Amlethus with material about Timur. It may be that such a composite source exists but is as yet unidentified, but it seems more likely that the Icelandic authors responsible for the *rímur* or sagas are also responsible for joining these two traditions together in literary form. Accepting this

67 In favour of this interpretation are the details in AM 521 c 4to which seem to be errors but where a more correct form appears in AM 521 b 4to and the *rímur*. For example, in the first passage quoted above Bastianus is said to be besieging Constantinople with 4,000 men, a not particularly impressive troop, as compared to the more hyperbolically impressive 400,000 men in the other two versions.

68 *Ambáles rímur*, 225.

69 See Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, 260–73, for both the Latin and Low German texts.

latter hypothesis, it is still hard to say where the information on Timur comes from, since the treatment is so idiosyncratic that much of it may be original. Nevertheless, as I have hoped to show in the discussion above, those creative choices seem to be responding to and consciously subverting traditions about Timur such as those which we see in *Oddverjaannáll*. With such a wealth of sources on Timur which could have been used (as we saw above), it would be risky to claim any direct connection between *Oddverjaannáll* and *Ambáles rímur* and *Ambáles saga* (especially the form the text takes in AM 521 c 4to), but nor can such a connection be ruled out, and by putting these texts side by side our reading of the latter two is certainly enriched.

The question still remains as to why in this version of Amlethus' story the British king is swapped out for Timur and, moreover, why Timur is rehabilitated. There are a number of possible answers to the first question, not the least likely of which is that Britain was simply deemed too pedestrian. Many sagas written in the post-medieval period revel in the use of exotic locations and characters, and Tamerláus of Scythia may simply have been more captivating to Icelandic audiences. In answering the second question, it is fair to say that the demonising of a Turkish ruler and consequent elevation of Timur fits neatly with the political imagination of late-seventeenth-century Icelanders. The North African pirates who raided coastal locations around Iceland in 1627 were generally called *Tyrkir* (hence the attacks were called *Tyrkjaránið*).⁷⁰ North Africa was under Ottoman rule, and thus an Ottoman leader could be seen as an enemy. An Icelandic scribe with knowledge that an Ottoman leader had been defeated and humiliated in battle by Timur could well choose to make literary use of the latter figure and, although not Christian, present him as a tool of God. Þorsteinn Helgason has described how Icelanders in the seventeenth century made use of writing as a kind of collective therapy for dealing with the trauma of the *Tyrkjarán*.⁷¹ In such a context it seems reasonable that Timur could be rehabilitated for Icelandic audiences. After all, common wisdom has it that the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend.

70 For several contemporary sources on the Turkish Abductions see Jón Þorkelsson, *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi, 1627*, Sögurit 4 (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1906).

71 Þorsteinn Helgason, "Historical Narrative as Collective Therapy: The Case of the Turkish Raid in Iceland," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 22 (1997): 275.

This said, we should not imagine that Timur is being exonerated of all his savagery, especially since the battle which follows ends with Tamerláus defeating Bastíanus and then imprisoning him and torturing him mercilessly. But it seems clear that a more ambiguous picture of Timur emerges, one which does not deny his brutality but balances it out with his respect for the rules of fair combat and both justifies his actions (as vengeance for his sister's rape and defense of Christian people) and contextualises them (being less serious than the brutality carried out by Bastíanus Ottomanus). Tamerláus is not a Christian king, as Ambáles ends up being, and so he is not at the top of the hierarchy laid out in the saga, but nor is he at the bottom with the heathen Ottoman king, Bastíanus.

To summarise, this article has shown that *Oddverjaannáll* most likely makes use of Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* or a work derived from it in the section which describes Timur. A number of other entries around the year 1400 seem likewise to make use of a source stemming from Franck's writings. Moreover, the writers of *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rímur* seem to have had access to a source similar to the description in *Oddverjaannáll* and consciously adapted it to present a version of Timur (Tamerláus) who is more heroic than the original tyrant. Thus we see Icelandic writers of the sixteenth century working with new and unexpected mainland European historiographical texts and Icelandic writers of the seventeenth century reworking annal material for changing times and audiences. And these modifications mean that Timur, in his new incarnation, really does represent the 'Wrath of God'.

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SUMMARY

Keywords: annals, post-Reformation sagas, *rimur*, Hamlet, Saxo Grammaticus, representations of the East, Ottomans, Tamburlaine

Timur was a renowned Central Asian conqueror who fascinated Early Modern writers, and this article takes up the question of the source of the description of him found in *Oddverjaannáll*. Robert Cook, in an article from 1985, suggested several possible candidates. These are analysed and a new candidate is proposed, that being Sebastian Franck's *Chronica, Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell* (1531). Following this, an example is given of how such historiographical material came to be used in saga- and *rimur*-literature of the seventeenth century, namely in *Ambáles saga* and *Ambáles rimur*. These works adapt the well-known story of Hamlet, but

have him sent to Timur (Tamerláus) instead of to the King of Britain. An analysis is made of how the representation of Timur in these works (in particular in the witness AM 521 c 4to) functions as a kind of vindication of the earlier gruesome accounts of Timur the tyrant. Moreover, an attempt is made to explain how such a vindication would have been welcome in an Iceland reeling from the recent *Tyrkjarán*.

ÁGRIP

Timur, 'Reidi Gudz': Óþekkt heimild *Oddverjaannáls* og endurmat á harðstjóra í *Ambáles sögu* og *Ambáles rímum*

Lykilorð: annálar, sögur eftir siðaskipti, *rímur*, Hamlet, Saxo Grammaticus, lýsingar á Austurlöndum, Ottómanar, Tamburlaine

Timur hét sigursæll konungur í Asíu sem fræðimenn á árnýöld voru áhugasamir um. Honum er lýst í *Oddverjaannáli* og í þessari grein er grennslast fyrir um það hvaða heimild liggi að baki þeim fróðleik sem þar má finna. Áður hafði Robert Cook bent á nokkra möguleika í grein sem birtist 1985. Þær heimildir sem hann nefnir hef ég athugað en engin þeirra er nán hliðstæða textans í annálnum. Ég legg í staðinn til að heimildin sé *Chronica* eftir Sebastian Franck sem prentuð var 1531 en þar koma fram öll lykilatriðin í lýsingu *Oddverjaannáls*. Ýmislegt fleira í annálnum gæti verið af sömu rót runnið.

Í seinni hluta greinarinnar fjalla ég um það hvernig fróðleikur um Timur hefur verið nýttur í *Ambáles sögu* og *Ambáles rímum*. Þessi verk segja söguna um Amlóða eða Hamlet en hér er það ekki Bretakonungur sem aðalpersónan sækir heim heldur Timur eða Tamerláus. Ég fjalla um þá mynd sem birtist af Timur í þessum heimildum, einkum *Ambáles sögu* í AM 521 c 4to. Sjá má að myndin af Timur er hér geðþekkari en í eldri ritum og hann birtist ekki aðeins sem blóðþyrstur harðstjóri. Nú vissu menn að Timur hafði barist gegn Tyrkjum og má geta þess til að eftir Tyrkjaránið hafi íslenskum höfundum legið heldur betra orð til allra andstæðinga Tyrkja.

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