

## 6 Hegel and the Disappearance of Islam

and so Goethe turned to the Orient and with his *Divan* delivered a string of pearls [*eine Perlenschnur*], which in its sincerity and rapture of the imagination surpasses everything else.

—Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*<sup>1</sup>

As a beginning to our study of the polyphony of voices found amongst Hegel's various responses to the Muslim world, we could do worse than start with this single term—"string of pearls". Hegel's admiration for Goethe is well known—he famously considered himself to be the poet's spiritual son—and it is hardly surprising to find his esteem for Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, essentially a fusion of Oriental and Occidental metre and motif, expressed in these terms. It was not, however, the only time Hegel used the phrase. Another very different book also received the same compliment from Hegel—a book, this time, not of fusion but division: Herder's story of the Spanish reconquista, *Der Cid*. Hegel saw in Herder's account of the driving out of the Moors from Christian Spain a "flower of national medieval heroism", a "string of pearls . . . rich in content and full of multifaceted interest in love, honour, family pride and the rule of kings in the struggle of Christians against the Moors".<sup>2</sup> Two literary strings of pearls for Hegel, then; one bringing poles together, the other pushing them apart. Two poems loved and admired by Hegel—one attempting to blur boundaries, the other celebrating their rightful restoration.

The point, in one sense, is a minor one, and yet it is indicative of a much larger series of tensions within Hegel. The Persian poets, fanatical/hospitable Arabs and "raw" Turks we find in Hegel—and the multiple contexts they bring with them—partly reflect an already well-researched set of ambiguities in Hegel towards Christianity, the French Revolution, Judaism, the ever-present father-figure of Kant and the whole idea of 'Germanness' (which Hegel occasionally referred to not as *Deutschtum* but rather *Deutschtumm*—not 'Germandom' but 'Germandumb'). Our examination of the different voices Hegel used when writing about Muslims—the registers of Enlightenment, religion, aesthetics and race—will try to elucidate and account for these complexities by carefully paying attention to the modality of Hegel's prejudices.

### HEGEL AND THE NON-EUROPEAN: SOME CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS

The classic image of Hegel as an infinitely systematic philosopher, sweeping up the manifold contingencies and particularities of world history into

one gradual universal direction (essentially that of German Protestant Idealism), has certainly become a synonym for the archetypal Eurocentric thinker. This image does both justice and injustice to the work of Hegel. The notorious way in which continents such as Africa and faiths such as Islam simply ‘disappear’ within Hegel’s unfolding World-Spirit needs no apologists, nor do his overall dismissive remarks of Ottomans as ‘barbarians’ and his explicitly racist attitudes towards other peoples. Even scholars profoundly sympathetic to Hegel—such as F. C. Beiser—acknowledge his pronouncements on the Chinese, Indians and native Americans to be examples of “the very ethnocentrism from which historicism should liberate us”.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, our chapter on Hegel will not be offering the picture of a ‘misunderstood’ thinker.

What has also been taking place within Hegel scholarship, however, is a gradual reformulation and refinement of the perceived movement of Hegel’s Eurocentric thought. On a practical level, the critic Bernasconi has drawn attention to how the 1822–1823 lectures on the philosophy of history had more pages devoted to the Orient than the Greek/Roman/European sections put together, a fact which reflected Hegel’s own “extensive reading” about the Orient and which Hegel’s editors considered to be “wearisome” and unnecessary.<sup>4</sup> Some of Hegel’s most famous analyses—the dialectic of master and slave, for example—have been relocated against a much wider background of empire and colonialism (Buck-Morss), whilst the theme of empire itself has been used to show how the manifestation and expansion of the Idea itself in Hegel acted as a tacit metaphysical justification of European colonialism (Serequeberhan). In an analysis of the relationship between negativity and empire, the flight and return of Spirit to self in the *Phenomenology* has been intriguingly redescribed as the expansion of mobile capital and the subsequent “sedentary moment of settler colonisation” (Noyes).<sup>5</sup>

In all of these cases, the non-European in Hegel has come to represent not just a lamentably overlooked moment of marginalia, but rather a key context, even a negative but central operational function, in the work of Hegel. A similar ambivalence has been discerned by the smaller number of critics who have written on Hegel’s treatment of Islam. If Leuze considered the absence of Islam within Hegel’s plan of world religions “a fundamental weakness”, other critics (such as Schulín) tried to emphasize more positively the role of Hegel’s Islam as “the last teacher of the West”, whilst acknowledging the prejudiced way in which the rash, abstract, external expansion of Islam is set against the slower, more concrete and substantial development of the West.<sup>6</sup> Scholars such as Hardiyanto take this anachronistic version of Islam as a paradoxically preliminary and incomplete Christianity a step further, seeing an Islamic faith whose resemblance to (and awkward post-dating of) its Christian rival would forever create problems for Hegel. Others, concentrating more on Hegel’s literary endeavours, see within the thinker’s admiration for Persian poetry a form of compromise, as Hegel

allows poets such as Rumi and Hafiz a tentative place alongside Goethe on the lowest rung of the final phase of Romantic art (Stemmrach-Köhler).<sup>7</sup>

However easily the Euro-logocentric straw man of Hegel the Systematizer might lend itself to our twenty-first-century sensibilities—Marx’s Prussian tool, Kierkegaard’s blind teleologist, Derrida’s *agélastes*, Judith Butler’s storyteller—some caveats have to be enunciated before leaping with postcolonial glee upon Hegel’s emptying of Islam and effective non-recognition of the Ottoman world.<sup>8</sup> One of the first reservations to note would be a cynical, at times deeply contrarian streak in Hegel, a willingness to hold beliefs or positions which were not entertained by society at large. Whether it is a derogatory and clearly mocking reference to “we German scholars”, his contempt for Bavaria (which he often called ‘Barbaria’), his distancing from Fries’s anti-Semitism, his rejection of Schlegel’s vision of medieval Catholic *Germania* as “twaddle” which was “parroted” by north Germans who had never set foot in the south . . . all testify to a profound independent-mindedness in Hegel’s thinking, albeit fed by an equally profound mixture of anti-populism and anti-papism.<sup>9</sup> Hegel’s similarly fervent rejection of Romantic German nationalism as silly and shallow—he insisted he could only really savour the *Nibelungenlied* by “translating it into Greek”<sup>10</sup>—along with the constant charges of pantheism and even atheism which were brought against him in his final years,<sup>11</sup> do reveal an extremely critical edge to Hegel’s thinking. To understand how Hegel was able to switch off this critical gaze whenever he wrote—or chose not to write—about the Muslim world will be one of the tasks of our chapter.

A second note of caution to be introduced before speaking of Hegel’s use and abuse of the Muslim world lies in the indebtedness of his project to historicism, and his awareness of the dangers of historical projection. “We have to take history as it is”, Hegel tells us in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, “our task is to proceed historically, empirically”.<sup>12</sup> Hegel, like Herder before him, was keenly aware of how *chronos* and *topos* limit us both culturally as well as spatio-temporally—ancient Greece, we are told, is no more understandable to us today than “the perceptions of a dog”.<sup>13</sup> What we find in Hegel’s lectures is a sensitivity concerning the way historians bring their own categories (*Kategorien*) with them to the study of history, categories which in the very worst cases are merely “a priori fabrications” (*apriorische Erdichtungen*). This consideration of the epistemological finitude of the historian, however, whilst making Hegel very careful about how German historians treat ancient *Hellas*, appears to be momentarily suspended when writing about “uneducated peoples” such as the Arabs, or indeed the Turks, a *Volk* who “have shown themselves to be wholly incapable of culture”.<sup>14</sup> And so, as with Leibniz and Herder, we have a dedication to the empirical truth of historical subjects which seems to be contradicted by their actual treatment. Critics such as Beiser see some of the reductionist views on non-Europeans in Hegel as the unfortunate lapse of an otherwise commendable thinker—a failure on Hegel’s part, so

to speak, to be truly Hegelian and translate his own commitment to context and historical detail into practice. We will have to consider whether the opposite thesis—namely, that Hegel said what he had to say about non-Europeans precisely *because* he was so committed to the empirical—may not also have some part to play.

A final caveat lies in the sophisticated dynamism of the Hegelian movement of subjectivity, not to mention of history itself. This is not to shield some of Hegel's more unpleasant pronouncements with a smoke-screen of complexity (a version of the argument "Hegel cannot be racist because he is so subtle"), but merely to point out how any attempt to essentialize Hegel using words such as 'Christian', 'German', 'European' and 'bourgeois' will have to take into account the *process* of identity in Hegel—a feature whose politically interesting consequence is the open-endedness of beings. Of course, the constant creation of new modes of being through the subject's repeated encounters with the obstruction of alterity does not relieve Hegel of the charge of Eurocentrism—but it does make us ask more carefully what kind of *Europa* his progressive deletion of the non-European entails. Simply bringing on a vulgarized version of Hegel, stuffed full of 'End of History' and 'Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis' clichés, is not going to help us understand Hegel's Islam and the curious "labour of the negative" it performed in his work.

## HEGEL'S SOURCES ON THE MUSLIM WORLD: FROM SCHOOL SPEECH TO LOCAL NEWSPAPER

At present, driven back into its Asiatic and African quarters, and tolerated only in one corner of Europe through the jealousy of Christian powers, Islam has forever vanished from the stage of history at large, and has retreated into Oriental ease and repose.

—Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (1830–1831)<sup>15</sup>

One of the first references to Muslim culture in Hegel lies, oddly enough, in the text of Hegel's high school graduation speech (*Rede beim Abgang vom Gymnasium*), which the eighteen-year-old gave in the September of 1788. As high school students at that time had to choose a topic to give a short speech on before leaving for university, the teenage Hegel chose the state of education in Ottoman Turkey. Although only the last two sides of this speech have survived, it seems the essential drift of the address was a grateful celebration of the Schwabian school system, in contrast to the apathy of the Turkish authorities to the education of their people ("How clearly we see in this nation the terrible consequences of their neglect".<sup>16</sup>). The schoolboy Hegel refers to the "rawness of [the Turks'] character", and yet does not blame this backwardness on their "natural ability", but rather on the State's attitude towards that crucial word for Hegel, *Bildung*. Hegel's

earliest biographer, Rosenkranz, suggests the young philosopher probably acquired his knowledge of the topic from Rycault's *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire Ottoman*.

Hegel's school speech on the Turks is not merely of anecdotal value. It indicates how early in Hegel's intellectual life the Muslim space of non-Europe would be seen as a space inimical to culture. Of course, adolescent writings are hardly the key to a mature thinker's thought, and yet in Hegel's case it is significant that, in order to express gratitude for a "prince who is convinced of the importance of education" (*ibid.*), Hegel reached for a European account of a land where this was *not* so. For the rest of his life, the words 'Turk' and 'Barbarian' would forever be synonymous—the only positive point he ever conceded about Turks at all was written in 1831, the year of his death.

A brief glance at some of the sources Hegel used for his knowledge of the Muslim world, including some of the articles which appeared in the local newspaper he edited for over a year, throw an interesting light not just on the backwardness of Turks in Hegel's world-view, but also on his conviction of Islam's disappearance "from the stage of world history".

Inevitably, these sources divide into two—texts we know Hegel read because he cited them in his work, and then (less reliably) texts Hegel may have read, if only because we know he had them in his possession. In the catalogue of books compiled for Hegel's library in Berlin after his death, a number of Orientalist works can be found: Niebuhr, an early book on Habsburg Spain and the Ottoman Balkans by the famous historian Leopold Ranke (*Fürsten und Völker in Süd Europas* [1827])—Hegel had read enough Ranke to be able express ambiguous praise of his attention to detail in a late lecture<sup>17</sup>), not to mention the entire fifteen volumes of the German translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Possibly the most interesting title to be found amongst the books Hegel left behind is an Ottoman-friendly account of the Turks written by a former French consul to the Turkish city of Smyrna (Izmir), Charles de Peyssonel. Effectively a critique of another commentary on the Turks (this time written by a man called Volney), de Peyssonel describes Turkey as "a great and illustrious nation" populated by a "spiritual and intelligent people".<sup>18</sup> The critique de Peyssonel makes of his rival commentator is interesting—whilst de Peyssonel certainly offers no impassioned defense of the sophistication of Ottoman culture (as Goethe's Diez had in the last chapter), he is still angry with Volney for having no knowledge of Turkish, and subsequently no real knowledge of the Ottomans ("Has he studied the Turks? Has he talked to the people of the place, with the members of the government, with their literati?", p. 21). Had Hegel read the book, he would have witnessed the page-by-page demolition of one European's stereotypical and ill-informed views on the Ottomans by another. Naturally, we have no way of knowing whether Hegel ever even glanced through the book, apart from the fact that it sat on his library shelf for an uncertain number of years.

One historian whose work Hegel did know was the Swiss scholar and diplomat Johannes von Müller, whose *Universal History* (*Allgemeine Geschichte*) Hegel had personally requested in an 1817 letter, and recommended to Niethammer and Roth.<sup>19</sup> In von Müller, Hegel would have found not merely a fairly positive description of the Ottoman Empire (Turks are repeatedly described as fighting “heroically” *heldenmütig*<sup>20</sup>), but also an impression of its significance for modern European history—each of the last eight sections of Müller’s *History* has, without exception, a chapter on the Turks. The Turkish-Russian war of 1768 is given a good half-dozen pages, including a mention of Russian atrocities inflicted on the Turkish population (p. 578). Moreover, Müller’s historical accounts are often laced with anecdotes and stories which convey a sophisticated and witty impression of the Turks—for example, Müller tells us how the Grand Vizier Ibrahim, on learning of his imminent execution, refused to make the customary final prayer, with the remark: “I only have a minute to live—why should I take the trouble?” (p. 540). Whatever convictions Hegel might have had of the Turks’ barbarism and Islam’s contemporary irrelevance, it is difficult to imagine them coming from the *Universal History* of Johannes von Müller.

One might imagine Hegel’s unwillingness to attribute any degree of culture, humour or political significance to Europe’s nearest Muslim neighbours came from one of his most formative influences, Gibbon—after all, it was the English historian who famously attributed the decline of the Roman Empire to the rise of Islam (as Said himself points out<sup>21</sup>), and Hegel had read *Decline and Fall* in Berne when he was still in his early and impressionable twenties. Gibbon’s description of Islam as “one of the most memorable revolutions”,<sup>22</sup> his extended description of the Arabian climate and emphasis on the “personal free[dom]” of the Arab (p. 160) must have either influenced Hegel or reinforced a set of already similar associations in him. Once again, however, what Hegel would also have found in Gibbon is a much more complicated picture of the Turks than Gibbon’s critics generally allow. Although the Englishman certainly had plenty of negative things to say about the Ottomans—whose empire he described as “the growth of a monster” (p. 810)—Gibbon’s attention to detail results in a number of surprisingly positive moments in his depiction of the “barbarians”: the attention he gives both to the various Muslim–Christian alliances of the period (such as that of Kantakouzenos with Umur of Aydin, p. 812) as well as the many Christians who fought for the Turks (pp. 837, 840); his sober and fair portraits of sultans such as Bajazet (pp. 822–24, 841) and unusual emphasis on their education (p. 859). None of this appears to have had any influence on Hegel, whose “Turkish emperors” were of the kind that saw and fell in love with Christian maidens, spent four weeks of infatuation with them and then had them killed before moving on to the next.<sup>23</sup> It was as if Hegel had absorbed the symbolic content of Gibbon, so to speak, but left out the minutiae.

Out of fairness to Hegel, this picture of a thinker who only selected the nuggets of negativity he needed from his reading of the Muslim world, but left out the positive, should not be exaggerated. In the articles of the *Edinburgh Review*, for instance, especially in the years Hegel read it with particular diligence (1817–1820), it is difficult to find any positive information Hegel might have ‘filtered out’: tales abound of Tartars and Kalmucks who “stew their meat between their bums” before eating it, predictably savage and bloodthirsty accounts of Turks and Albanians, underpinned by descriptions of Venice as “the great bulwark of Christendom . . . against the advances of the Mahometans”.<sup>24</sup> To a lesser extent, the same might be said for some of the sources Hegel used for his abrupt and extremely dismissive history of Arab philosophy. One such source was Johann Buhle, whose *Lehrbuch* Hegel drew on for his own lectures on the history of philosophy. Buhle’s conviction of the “fanaticism” (*Schwärmerei*) of the Oriental, and their blind admiration of and slavish dependency on Aristotle,<sup>25</sup> were unlikely to challenge any preconceptions about Arab thinkers Hegel had. It should also be said, however, that the more positive points Buhle makes about Islamic philosophy—his admiration for Averroes, the six pages he devotes to the “free-thinker” (*Selbstdenker*) Avicenna, and his lament that our estimation of Arab thought is limited by the few documents we have about it<sup>26</sup>—Hegel appears to have passed over, choosing instead to give Averroes and Avicenna one line a piece in his lectures.

The discernment and evaluation of influence (or, in our case, non-influence) in a thinker’s work is a speculative and serpentine affair, one which forever borders on the intuitive, at times even the apophatic. The aim of this section is not to convey how ‘evil’ Hegel was for ignoring his positive sources, but more modestly to show how Hegel’s attitude towards the Muslim world was neither textually nor epistemologically inevitable. Hegel’s savage Turks, fanatical Arabs and historically defunct Islam were interpretative choices, not ‘child-of-his-time’ consequences of his reading or *milieu*. The best example of the hermeneutical decision-making Hegel employed in his approach to the Muslim world—and his conviction of its disappearance “from the stage of history”—can be found in the articles Hegel himself had printed in the local newspaper he edited between March 1807 to October 1808.

The *Bamberger Zeitung* was a four-page provincial daily which Hegel took over after having just finished the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in Jena the previous winter. It was made up each day of a selection of different reports taken from a variety of newspapers, German and non-German, and compiled by the editor to produce an impressively cosmopolitan level of news for a local paper (reports came from as far away as Rome, London, New York, St. Petersburg and—on a regular basis—Constantinople).<sup>27</sup> For the purposes of our own chapter, three points are of relevance: firstly (and most significantly), the considerable level of coverage given under Hegel’s editorship to events in the Ottoman world. In some issues—such as April



6—news reports concerning Turkish events took up over *half* of the paper. An article from August 20, 1807, detailing the successor to the overthrown Sultan Selim III, took up over two pages—basically the entire inner section of the paper. At least once, sometimes twice a week, Hegel included for his Bamberg readership a substantial report on some aspect of Ottoman politics—ongoing tensions between Turks and Serbs, developments in the war between Russia and Turkey, diplomatic negotiations with the English, changes in administration, executions of viziers.<sup>28</sup> If Hegel's Islam had disappeared from the stage of history, it certainly did not vanish from the pages of the *Bamberger Zeitung*.

The second point of relevance concerns the level of detail the reports on Turkey in Hegel's newspaper displayed, a profusion of Muslim names and Turkish terms which would not be equalled today in any European newspaper, national or provincial. In one October issue, for example, we find a remarkably long list of Turkish names provided to outline the changes made in the Ottoman cabinet:

In the second half of September several important demands and changes took place in the Royal offices of the Ottoman court, amongst which being the appointment of the recently-dismissed Grand Vizier Halim Ibrahim Effendi as Pasha of Saloniki; one of the last supporters of the *nizam-cedid* . . . Celebi Mustapha Effendi, became Kyahaya Bey (Minister of the Interior). In his place as Terfana Emini, Chancellor of the Admiralty, came Yusuf Agdian Effendi. (October 28, 1807)

One has to wonder what the local Bamberger made of such a flood of exotic particulars. The comprehensiveness of the reports was not simply limited to names—in the month of August alone we find some fairly in-depth descriptions of Wahabi victories over the Ottomans (August 23), a detailed account of the mechanisms behind the conservatives' coup against the Sultan (August 20) and the entrance of Sultan Mustapha IV into an Egyptian mosque (August 23), not to mention some lengthy descriptions of how "the constitution of the Ottoman Empire should be re-installed" (August 22). All of these Hegel, as editor, had to read and proofread (or in some cases translate from the French) for his local readership.

A third and final point of relevance concerns the perspective or bias of the Ottoman reports Hegel collected from different newspapers. Although Hegel promised, on taking up the job, not to allow his own political opinions to disturb the "impartiality" of the newspaper, scholars have shown Hegel's own Napoleonic sympathies to have played a significant part in bolstering the paper's already pro-French bias.<sup>29</sup> Hegel's own low opinion of the Ottomans, however (in 1802 he considered the "Turkish Sultan" to be the head of "an unrestricted despotism"<sup>30</sup>) did not produce an overwhelmingly diabolical picture of the Turk in his newspaper—on the contrary, some of the articles Hegel chose to reproduce in the *Bamberger*



*Zeitung* were actually quite pro-Turkish. Amongst the reports Hegel culled and inserted during his editorship, we find criticism of the “deceitful proposals” (*hinterlistige Vorschläge*) the English cabinet made to the Turks in their negotiations (October 2), an account of the Russian destruction of the Ottoman-held island of Tenedos and the burning of its houses (October 23), a sympathetic report of how 270 Turkish soldiers were disarmed and then killed by Serbs (April 5). Some of the reports were even written by Turks themselves—a detailed two-page account of the struggle between conservatives and reformists in the Ottoman capital appeared in the *Bamberger Zeitung* on August 22, 1807, written by an anonymous Ottoman and dated “in the year of the Hegira, 1222” (how many of Hegel’s Schwabian readers would have understood this is hard to say).

The period Hegel occupied the editorship of the *Bamberger Zeitung* (1807–1808) was a particularly crucial moment for the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan Selim III was in the middle of trying (with French assistance) to bring in Western economic and military reforms into the Muslim empire, reforms were strongly opposed by the conservative *ulema* and which became known as the *nizam-cedid* or “new order”. The term *nizam-cedid* appeared a number of times in the *Bamberger Zeitung*, and given Hegel’s own Francophilic efforts to reform the various German versions of the *ancien regime*, he could hardly have been disinterested in the loosely analogous version of his struggle taking place in Istanbul. Hegel, as a firm supporter of the Napoleonic cause, would also have been aware of the fact—as his own newspaper put it—that the Ottoman state showed a tremendous “preference and bias” (*Vorliebe und Parteilichkeit*) for the French, and their modernizing reforms were deeply influenced by them.<sup>31</sup> The considerable amount of coverage Hegel, as editor, gave to Ottoman Turkey’s reform struggles may well have been made with this particular unfolding of the *Weltgeist* in mind.

We have dwelt at some length on Hegel’s knowledge of the Muslim world, and particularly on Hegel’s knowledge of Ottoman events, primarily because Hegel wrote so little about it. An absence or omission means nothing in itself, until one learns more about the background against which it is set. The disappearance of Hegel’s Islam from the stage of world history (*von dem Boden der Weltgeschichte*)—the fact that Hegel hardly remarked at all upon the Ottomans—means relatively little until the greater store of knowledge Hegel could have drawn on is brought to mind. In his editorial capacity alone, Hegel must have read at least eighty articles on the Ottoman world between March 1807 and October 1808. His non-philosophical interest in the Ottomans would continue long after—as late as 1829, we find Hegel remarking in a letter how, reading a newspaper together with Schelling in a Karlsbad coffeehouse, they learnt of the taking of Adrianople and the end of the Russo-Turkish war.<sup>32</sup> In the very last year of his life (1831), Hegel criticised the English treatment of Irish Catholics with the reproach that “even the Turks have mostly allowed their Christian/Armenian/Jewish

subjects the use of their churches”.<sup>33</sup> Hegel’s writings may well have been largely Turk-free, but the spectre of an established, sophisticated and distinctly unbarbaric Muslim culture next door to Europe would forever cause problems for the Christian and European bias of his teleology.

## HEGEL THE ENLIGHTENMENT THINKER: ISLAM AS INCOMPLETE AND ABSTRACT *AUFKLÄRUNG*

The individual, the Muslim, is not like the European, who has a variety of viewpoints. If the European is a convolution of diverse relationships, the Muslim is one whole and only this one.

—*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*<sup>34</sup>

When some of the adjectives Hegel attributes to Islam are listed next to one another—abstract, energetic, sublime, lethargic, fanatical, pure, negative, poetic, free and savage—we can begin to see how many different registers Hegel used to talk about Islam and its followers. If in 1821 Arabs are described as an “uneducated people” (*ungebildeten Völkern*<sup>35</sup>), a year later in the lectures on world history they are responsible for “the blossoming of poetry and all the sciences”.<sup>36</sup> Like Herder before him, Hegel had some difficulty synthesizing his feelings towards a faith which was sometimes a disseminator of culture, and sometimes an annihilator of it.

When Hegel the Enlightenment thinker—by which we mean, the interlocutor of Kant, Fichte and Schelling, the Hegel whose keywords were *Bildung* and ‘consciousness’, the Hegel whose goal for mankind was the self-comprehension and actualization of freedom through successive meditations with Otherness—when Hegel as a thinker of freedom and the individual wrote about Islam, probably the single feature he mentioned more than anything else was its abstraction. In the lectures on religion, Islam is seen as a faith where “humanity relates itself to the One as purely abstract self-consciousness”.<sup>37</sup> After 1817, Hegel appears to have emphasized this Islamic hatred of detail and particularity whenever he mentioned the faith—be it in the pages of the *Enzyklopädie*, or any of his lectures on aesthetics, world history or the philosophy of history.

In constantly using the term ‘abstract’ to critique Islam Hegel is, of course, reiterating his own criticism of Kant. When we read Hegel’s description of the spirit- and content-emptying negativity of the Islamic One, it calls to mind his own remarks on Kant’s noumenal reality—the ‘thing-in-itself’, and Hegel’s reservations: “It is easy to see what is left [over], namely, what is *completely abstract*, or totally *empty*, and determined only as what is ‘beyond’; the *negative* of representation”.<sup>38</sup> Emptiness, abstraction and negativity: three qualities shared by both Kantian and Islamic resistance to representation. For the third time (after Herder’s Prussian prophet and Goethe’s Koranic categorical imperative) Kant and Islam are brought

together—this time not to decry a besotted readership or emphasize a universal ethic, but to express frustration at a certain epistemological renunciation. At times, Hegel makes the point quite explicitly; in one 1824 lecture, we are told how Islam “is the religion of the Enlightenment, of reflection, of abstract thinking, which means in fact that the truth cannot be cognized, cannot be known”.<sup>39</sup> This aversion to the particular, this insistence on the emptying process of abstraction, is what relegates both Kant and the Koran to the status of preliminaries with regards to the greater this-worldly sensitivity of Hegel and the Bible.

For Hegel the philosopher, Islam would forever be this monochrome, amorphous, expansive entity, a monodimensional power whose explosive growth in the Mediterranean lay precisely in an absence of complexity—Islam being, Hegel insists, a “more primitive” system than that of Christianity.<sup>40</sup>

This lack of inner richness and depth, which Hegel was sometimes able to redescribe positively as the “self-identical clarity of Islam”,<sup>41</sup> was also valid for Muslims themselves. It is in this sense that Hegel’s European identity formed a clear sub-register within the rational vocabulary he used to talk about the Muslim world. The very Christian victory of Lepanto was a triumph not merely against Muslims and unbelievers, but also one which saved “the whole of Europe from the inundation of barbarians” (*die Überschwemmung der Barbaren*).<sup>42</sup> Hegel spends a page in the early *Spirit of Christianity* explaining how the individual Arab belongs to the whole, whilst the whole is simultaneously represented in the individual Arab—in contrast to today’s Europe (*im jetzigen Europa hingegen*), where every individual represents himself, and not the state to which he belongs.<sup>43</sup> Reflectivity, creativity and productivity also differentiates Europeans from Turks—whose baggy trousers, Hegel tells us, would be most unsuited to our “lively and busy” lifestyle<sup>44</sup>—and other non-Europeans. Nothing irritated Hegel more than the blurring of the present-day borders between Europe and Turkey. In 1809, while Hegel was still a schoolteacher in the southern German town of Nuremberg, the Napoleonic war against the Austrians was raging, and some of the local men were sent south to fight in Bavaria. Hegel learnt that many of the soldiers were convinced:

that they had long since marched through Bavaria, had also put Austria behind them, and now found themselves in Turkey, for the war was allegedly against the Turk. As it later emerged, these people hadn’t even left the borders of Bavaria, and so they mistook Bavaria for Turkey and the local Bavarians for Muslims! It is clear from all of this that we need to teach the geography of the Fatherland in the schools, in order to avoid similar misunderstandings in the future.<sup>45</sup>

Given that Hegel often considered Bavaria “Barbaria”, the remark is ironic (when Schelling gave a lecture there on his philosophy in 1807, Hegel said it was like producing wine in the Arabian desert<sup>46</sup>). However, for all his critique

of Kantian-Fichtean “monochromatic formalism”,<sup>47</sup> Hegel the Enlightenment thinker shared an equally Kantian desire to police and patrol the boundaries of Europe as a place of Reason, Reflection and Freedom. Unlike Kant, however (who was largely untroubled by philology), Hegel’s commitment to the empirical details of culture and context would make the *topos* of Europe more difficult to demarcate. Hegel’s remark is, of course, semi-humorous here—but beneath the joke lies the anxiety that the differences between Europe and non-Europe, between one stage of the World-Spirit and another, may be neither as visible nor as substantial as required. This anxiety is not simply Schlegel’s anxiety, the anxiety of etymology (‘What if the origins of Europe lie wholly outside Europe?’), but also a deeper sense of unease that development has taken place outside the areas Hegel designated, to the extent that one might confuse one stage with another, or not even see the difference at all. Regardless of whether it is Hegel’s late acknowledgment of Ottoman tolerance or, more anecdotally, his mistaking the Greek prince for “a Persian or a Turk” at the Vienna opera,<sup>48</sup> the attempt to imbue Europe with a sense of world-historical destiny would forever be unsettled by such insidious possibilities of similarity.

In fairness to Hegel, there were certainly moments when his Enlightenment voice appeared to see Christianity as just another religion alongside Islam, and was even able to mention injustices committed upon Muslims which a more Christian eye might have overlooked. In the early writings we see morality described as a central aim (*Hauptzweck*) of religion, with Christ and “Mahomet” mentioned in the same sentence<sup>49</sup>; in the lectures on the philosophy of religion, the “wars of Mohammedans” are placed alongside the “wars of religion between Catholics and Protestants” as parallel examples of what happens when faith becomes coercive state violence.<sup>50</sup> In the aesthetics lectures, moreover, both the Koran and “our New Testament” are said to be works which “limit themselves to the religious side”; both Islam and Christianity, we are told, fail to give enough independence and individual substance to their angels and other personified entities, which results in them being “cold and abstract”.<sup>51</sup> This occasional willingness to consider Christianity every bit as finite a phenomenon as Islam also leads Hegel to lament some of its historical failures, albeit in a much more moderate tone than Herder’s fiery anti-imperialist diatribes. The Spanish Inquisition is briefly condemned for its persecution of “local Jews, Moors and heretics”,<sup>52</sup> whose coercion ensured that “every Spaniard wanted to be of Christian blood” (*ibid.*). Hegel spares no criticism in describing the Crusades’ murder of Jewish populations and the sacking of Constantinople—the Crusaders finally reach their goal and bow down before the Holy Sepulchre “still dripping with the blood of the slaughtered inhabitants of Jerusalem”.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Hegel’s critique of the Crusades, unlike Herder, is primarily metaphysical, not humanitarian; the reproachable futility of the Crusades lay in its ignorance of the fact that “the definite embodiment it was seeking was to be looked for in subjective consciousness alone, and in

no external object” (ibid.). Hegel’s Crusaders, effectively, were looking for Truth in a tomb, instead of in themselves. For all the Enlightenment thinker’s genuine disgust at the sanguinity of the ‘Holy Wars’, their blindness to this ontological truth, rather than the massacres of Jews, Muslims and Eastern Christians, constitutes the “essential interest” of the Crusades.<sup>54</sup>

## HEGEL THE BOURGEOIS TOWNSMAN: ISLAM AS SOCIAL VACUUM

Abstraction swayed the minds of the Mohammedans . . . *La religion et la terreur* was the principle in this case, as with Robespierre, *la liberté et la terreur*.<sup>55</sup>

A consideration of Hegel’s social status—his middle-class family background of pastors and duchy administrators, his marriage into a minor aristocratic family and, ultimately, his status as a full professor in Berlin—is helpful in considering the political framework in which he occasionally chose to place Islam. This is not to reproduce Marx’s by now infamous reduction of Hegel to a mere tool of the Prussian restoration, but merely to point out how Hegel’s spiritual and intellectual investment in the social structure he served inevitably led him to view certain aspects of Islam as not only proletarian but fundamentally anarchic.

Although a sense of class certainly coloured Hegel’s descriptions of Muslims, there is nothing as explicit as the “Asiatic peasants” who marched upon Leibniz’s Vienna. Hegel’s references to Turks as “barbarians” and Arabs as “thieving” (*rauberisch*<sup>56</sup>) do suggest a generic mob-like entity, albeit one which probably had more to do with *ethnos* than Allah, particularly when we consider the strikingly milder tone Hegel adopts when writing about Persians. The Bashkiri Muslims who were advancing upon Hegel’s town in 1813 were certainly seen by Hegel as animals, although this is hardly surprising, given wartime conditions and Hegel’s own sympathy for their enemy, Napoleon. In May 1813, Hegel and his wife were in Nuremberg where a large Prusso-Russian force was in the vicinity, an alliance of the Prussians and Tsar Alexander I against the French. In the Allied armies were thousands of Russian Muslims—Bashkiri Turks from central Asia for the most part, the very same Bashkiris Goethe had received a copy of a page of the Koran from as they passed through Weimar that year. It is interesting to compare the two men’s reactions—whereas Goethe had arranged the local school to be temporarily converted into a mosque for the Bashkiri officers, both Hegel and his wife were filled with fear and dismay. Hegel, in a letter to his friend Niethammer, even relates a strange dream his wife had:

she dreamt she found herself in a huge camp just outside Paris, full of wild soldiers, Cossacks, Prussians, all mixed together. She was ter-

rified—but you rode through the turmoil on a horse next to her and made a way through; whenever they hemmed close around her, you reached down from your horse and gestured, that she was under your protection . . . I was a little concerned in this story about the fact that I didn't appear in it at all. My wife excused herself by saying that I was part of her in the dream; and it certainly pleases me to think that under your protection you brought us home to safety through all those Chuvashes and Bashkiris.<sup>57</sup>

Through a sea of largely Muslim and Cossack soldiers, Hegel's friend guides his wife. The philosopher's account of his wife's dream, and the sexual threat implicit as the crowd of "Chuvashes and Bashkiris" gathers around her, offers an interesting comment on what Hegel doubtless saw as the reactionary gathering of Slavic/Asian forces to stop the Napoleonic movement of history. Without plunging into too deep a psychoanalytical reading, the emasculating consequence this has for Hegel himself (which he admits to at one embarrassed point in the letter) reveals a telling anxiety about Hegel's own inability to control events.<sup>58</sup> Contrary to what he had hoped, the Napoleonic armies of Hegel's *Weltgeist* were wiped off the map by the Russian Tsar and his army of Cossacks and Bashkiris. The "turmoil" of the chaotic, pressing mob of Russians and Muslims, jostling around his innocent wife, encapsulates the kind of feelings Hegel had about a modern, democratic Europe which had to emerge against a whole series of feudal despotisms, both internal as well as Oriental.

Hegel was neither an anarchist nor a devoted monarchist but what we would probably call today a bourgeois liberal democrat. The complexity of Hegel's various political positions have already been remarked upon—the Hegel who could effectively side with King Wilhelm I against democratic reform (in 1817) was also the Hegel who confessed, every year, to toasting the French Revolution on the anniversary of the Bastille.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the university professor who could illegally paddle down a river in the middle of the night to visit the jail window of a student imprisoned for political reasons was also a *very* well-paid academic who (in the words of one biographer) led a "cozy, 'Biedermeyer' lifestyle", was well integrated into the better social circles of his city and enjoyed a position of considerable prestige and hierarchical power.<sup>60</sup> Hegel's bourgeois politics, in this sense, was the politics of a lawyer's son—the cause of advancing the interests of an emerging middle class at the expense of an antiquated and premodern aristocracy, a cause whose emphasis on *Bildung* would forever distance it from any notion of populism or 'will-of-the-people'. Any consideration of Hegel's pronouncements on Robespierre and Islam—on the "Revolution of the East"—have to keep this tension between revolution and reform in mind.

Whenever Hegel's bourgeois fears came to the fore in his treatment of Islam, he gave a political twist to the Islamic version of Kantian formalism

and abstraction he had already formulated, radicalizing it further still and ultimately seeing in the emptiness of Islam a kind of socio-political vacuum in which everything was levelled. The oneness of the Islamic God led to “the destruction of all differences” (*die Zerstörung aller Unterschiede*<sup>61</sup>)—a definition through which Islam did not simply threaten Hegel’s society, but much more fundamentally challenged his entire notion of identity. In Islam:

All bonds disappear. In this oneness all individuality of the Orient falls away, all caste differences, all birthrights. No positive right, no political limitations of the individual is available. Property and ownership, all individual purposes are null and void . . . and this invalidity, in manifesting itself, becomes destructive and devastating.<sup>62</sup>

Hegel appeared to draw his conviction of Islam’s radical antipathy to class not merely from the *Bilderverbot* and a theological emphasis on monism, but also from historical precedents. The Ottomans and the Mameluks—both being, in Hegel’s words, “dynasties founded by slaves” (*ibid.*)—served as well-established examples of a kind of anarchic tendency within Islam. To Hegel, for whom the words ‘master’ and ‘slave’ clearly had a very particular (dialectical) resonance, this erasure of the difference between *Herr* and *Sklave* was tantamount to semantic nihilism, one which threatened to transform history from a progressive development of opposites into an endless series of tautologies. In Hegel’s Islam, “the individual can be a slave one moment and a prince over far-reaching kingdoms the next” (*ibid.*). Hegel’s denial of history to Islam stemmed, in part, from what he perceived to be its erasure of the very social differences which enabled Hegel’s concept of history to progress.

Clearly, Hegel’s association of Islam with the French Revolution drew on a long tradition of Orientalizing social revolt going back to Kant and Luther (in the wake of the Peasant’s Revolt of 1525, Luther said their leader “wanted to become a new Turkish emperor”<sup>63</sup>). What also links Hegel to this tradition, however, is a conviction of the nomadic, errant nature of the ‘Mohammedan’, a primordial homelessness which found its precedent in Lutheran definitions of the Arabs as a people “who do not stay in one definite place”,<sup>64</sup> and whose constantly mobile indifference to place and context inspired both the bourgeois anxieties and (as we shall see) the Romantic proclivities of Hegel at different times. Hegel’s conviction of the dizzying Heraclitean flux of Islam is striking—he returns to its detail-blurring vortex again and again:

With all the passionate interest he shows, the Mohammedan is really indifferent to this social fabric, and rushes on in the ceaseless whirl of fortune . . . on this boundless sea there is a continual onward movement; nothing abides firm.<sup>65</sup>



In the lectures on the history of philosophy, where Hegel essentially comments on Maimonides' paraphrasing of the Ismaili philosophers (even to the extent of using Hebrew terms in place of the original Arabic—*Medaberim* for *Mutakallim*, *Assaria* instead of *Asharites*), the Ismaili tenet that everything is possible in the mind (a man can be as big as a mountain, a flea as big as an elephant) leads Hegel to a judgement of "complete errancy" (*vollkommenen Unbestand*), a "perfect dissolution of all contexts".<sup>66</sup> For Hegel, it did not matter whether this studied evaporation of the particular was theological (as with the Ismailis or the *Bilderverbot*) or political, as in the case of Mohammed's "revolution"—its occurrence infinitized human possibility in the worst possible way, turning both God and man into an Oriental *tabula rasa* onto which any fanatical credo could be scribbled and instantly acquire the status of Truth. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel had insisted that "contextualizing oneself with others is the end of being for oneself".<sup>67</sup> Hegel's dedication to this word context—*Zusammenhang*—as a kind of bond which replaces our self-identity with an interactive and mutually dependent one, perhaps best explains why the nomadic, classless, image-hating, context-fleeing 'Mohammedan' appeared to give the university professor, in certain moments, such cause for concern.

## HEGEL THE "LAST CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER": ISLAM AS COMPETITOR AND JEWISH VARIANT

With the rise of Protestantism, all schisms within the Catholic Church came to an end. Now the truth of Christianity is being proved, but we don't know for whom—for we don't have the Turk to deal with.

—*Aphorisms* (1803–1806)<sup>68</sup>

Before examining what Hegel had to say about Muslims when his Christian voice found its moments of primacy, we should issue a crucial caveat—namely, that Hegel saw his own Protestant Christianity as largely synonymous with a vocabulary of Enlightenment and education ("Our universities and schools are our churches"<sup>69</sup>), and sometimes even seemed to see himself as a Luther figure, teaching philosophy to speak German.<sup>70</sup> Of course, Hegel's own conviction of his thought-system's religious compatibility was far from accepted in his day—Kierkegaard offering probably the most famous objection to Hegel's relegation of Faith to a lower rung beneath Philosophy; nevertheless, Löwith's definition of Hegel as the "last Christian philosopher" indicates a thinker who saw a close relationship between the advance of modernity and the advance of the Protestant faith. The kind of moments we found in Leibniz and Kant—Muslims sometimes as enemies of Progress, sometimes as enemies of Christ—are not as clearly separable in Hegel. For Hegel, the doctrine of the Trinity was itself a moment of progress in the development of the World-Spirit, a "life-process . . . in which

the universal places itself over and against itself".<sup>71</sup> It is in this sense that Islam's rejection of the divinity of Christ as the embodiment of the universal in the particular was both a denial of Christian doctrine and a refusal of this necessary step towards Absolute Knowledge.

Having said this, there are moments in Hegel's oeuvre where Muslims emerge primarily as non-Christians, and occasionally even as anti-Christians. If Hegel the Enlightenment thinker was a reader of Fichte, Kant and Schelling, then Hegel's Christian identity was a devotee of Tasso and Ariosto. In such moments, an emphasis shifts from Islam as an incomplete, almost 'preliminary' transcendental monotheism to a competitive, oppositional one. In the 1824 lectures on religion we find:

In [the Mohammedan religion] Christianity finds its opposite [*Gegensatz*] because it occupies a sphere equivalent to that of the Christian religion [*in gleicher Sphäre*]. It is a spiritual religion like the Jewish, but its God is for self-consciousness only with the abstract knowing spirit . . .

The antithesis consists in the fact that in Christianity spirituality is developed concretely within itself and is known as Trinity, as spirit; and that human history, the relationship to the One, is likewise a *concrete* history . . . The religion of Islam, by contrast, hates and proscribes everything concrete.<sup>72</sup>

The nature of this "equivalent sphere" which Christianity shares with Islam is twofold. The first meaning is the one Hegel deliberates upon—Islam and Christianity as two universal faiths which have not replicated Judaism's mistake of staining an otherwise pure transcendentalism with an all-too-terrestrial particularity (the attachment to a particular land and people). The second, unspoken meaning of Hegel's "sphere", however, which Hegel does not deliberate upon, is intended in a more literal sense—a geographical contiguity, one which turns Islam from a similar yet metaphysically flawed monotheism into a religious, economic and military rival. No one would ever guess such tensions from the notorious paucity of attention Hegel gives to Islam in his treatment of world religion (effectively three sides out of over six hundred pages); Hegel responded to the problematic actuality of Islam in his lectures on religion with the same tools with which he responded to the actuality of the Ottomans in his lectures on history—namely, reduction and circumvention. And yet a whole series of scattered remarks throughout his work testify to an awareness of the rivalry of Islam: the various references to Islam's desire for "world dominion",<sup>73</sup> an acknowledgment of Islam's more numerous adherents—and an equally brief acknowledgment of Islam's having come *after* Christianity, an early affirmation of the need to convert "Jews and especially Mohammedans" (and even an ironic speculation that the "Turkish Kaiser" could become Pope), not to mention an awareness of how "Christian chivalry" was responsible for "driving out

Moors, Arabs and Muslims in general from the Christian lands”.<sup>74</sup> Although the Enlightenment Hegel saw the Crusades in general as a metaphysically futile exercise, an irreducibly Christian element within his persona would always respond to the ‘liberation’ of Jerusalem or Roland’s struggles against the Saracens with a certain fervour.

Hegel’s Christian identity also emerges in the way he occasionally lumps Jews and Muslims together in the same Christ-denying category, albeit for a variety of different, fluctuating reasons: their common need for conversion; the possibility of their statelessness as peoples; a predominance of fear, not love, in their relationship to God; the evaporation of the individual within their respective religions—and a corresponding emptying of the Jew/Muslim’s interiority (“Jews and Arabs are only to be noticed historically and externally”<sup>75</sup>); most importantly, both worship a God “without any content”.<sup>76</sup> Hegel takes the Kantian emphasis on the emptiness of the Jewish/Islamic God and turns it this time not into political subversion but metaphysical blindness, quoting with approval Böhme’s “you blind Turks, Jews and Pagans”<sup>77</sup> as a reproof for their common rejection of the Trinity. Thus, an ignorance of the true meaning of the death of Christ—as a moment where “God has made himself identical with what is alien to him in order to put it to death”<sup>78</sup>—becomes coterminous with an ignorance of how identity incorporates negativity through the othering of itself. Not only does Hegel Christianise the Judaeo-Islamic inability to fully grasp the particular, he also translates their classic obstinacy to the divinity of Christ in terms of his own system. Spiritual ignorance becomes philosophical ignorance.

The moments in which Hegel sees the Muslim as a more recent version of the Jew are quite striking, even if a notion of race and *Sprache* here is as much at work as a notion of faith. In Hegel’s potted history of Islamic philosophy, Arabic terms are not merely referred to in Hebrew, but are even introduced to the German reader with Hebrew characters in brackets—the Mutazilites (מטאזיליטות), the Asharites (אשריטות) and the Mutakallimun (מוטקאללמון).<sup>79</sup> Even taking into account Hegel’s reliance on Maimonides as a possible explanation for the otherwise absurd step of supplementing Islamic terms with their Hebrew ‘originals’, it seems clear Hegel (who seems to have had a minimal knowledge of Arabic<sup>80</sup>) saw no great disparity in using Hebrew to explain the philosophy of the Islamic tradition.

Despite the common blindness to the concrete development of the Idea which Hegel attributes to both Jews and Muslims, there are a number of moments where Muslims are privileged over Jews as being not blind but merely myopic. A passage from the 1822 lectures on history sums up best the hierarchy of the three religions:

The One of the Orient is much more the One of Judaism, which, completed in Islam [*im Islam vollendet*], becomes the religion of the Orient.

Known as this One, as inwardly determining itself in Christianity, it is the other means of completion. This Oneness finds its fulfilment and determination ultimately in Christianity.<sup>81</sup>

In one sense, Hegel's Islam can be seen as an improved version of Judaism (being, as Hegel puts it, "cleansed of any nationalism"<sup>82</sup>) and also an incomplete version of Christianity. It is no longer limited "to a particular people"<sup>83</sup> and since it, like Christianity, has annihilated any particularity in its concept of God, it finds itself at a halfway point between the prototype of Judaism and the Ideal of Christianity—a transcendentalism laudably cleansed of any terrestrial particularity but which, however, has yet to develop a *concrete* spirituality. By this time (1824–1827) Hegel had encountered and become familiar with a number of Sufi writings (through the translations of Hammer and Rückert). As a central idea in Sufism is the interdependence of the transcendental God (*tanzih*) and the immanent (*tashbih*), it is interesting to see how Hegel consciously decides to leave his interpretation of an Islam obsessed with abstraction as it is, even though at the same time in his aesthetics lectures, as we shall see, his theories on the development of romantic poetry were having to be modified to accommodate what Hegel termed "modern Muslims".

### HEGEL THE ROMANTIC: ISLAM'S SHIFT FROM MONSTROUS CONQUEST TO BLOSSOMING CULTURE

Although Hegel continued, throughout his life, to see Muslims in general as "uneducated peoples" (1821), "savage" and "lacking reflection" (1824), and Arabia itself to be a "realm of fanaticism" whose cities were attacked by "thieving Arabs" and which "even today are swarming with . . . roaming nomads" (1830), when it came to the question of aesthetics Hegel followed convention by adopting a very different voice.<sup>84</sup> "Mohammedan" poetry, we are told in the *Encyclopaedia*, offers an awareness of the One "in its most beautiful purity and sublimity".<sup>85</sup> In the lectures on aesthetics, Arabs have "a poetic nature", one capable of producing a canon reminiscent of "the romantic character of Spanish chivalry".<sup>86</sup> No longer savages lacking reflection, Persians and Arabs provide us through "the Oriental splendour of their images, the free sanctity of their imagination, a shining example for the present itself and today's subjective inwardness".<sup>87</sup> This by-now familiar coexistence of brute and sage, fanatic and poet, we shall now examine—and in particular, two questions: how did Hegel's poetic-Romantic vocabulary contradict and vie for primacy with his other voices? and how did Hegel's aestheticisation of the "Mohammedan" differ from its precedents in Goethe, Schlegel and above all, Herder?

To a limited extent, Hegel's Romantic approach to the Muslim world was in convergence with his other discursive identities—those of

Enlightenment, religion and race. The “Mohammedan” disdain for representation and evacuation of the deity which could facilitate the blind devotion of the fanatic (not to mention the anarchic rage of the revolutionary) would also be the basis for the faith’s “grandiose sublimity”.<sup>88</sup> The absence of an image, in other words, may have brought about a negative freedom, but it also enabled a very artistic one. As we shall see in the next section, some contestable element of race also seems to be involved in Hegel’s discussion of the innate sublimity of Arabs (in which he follows Herder), not to mention in Hegel’s fairly striking sympathy for Persia and Persians, a sympathy not necessarily connected to their Islamic faith.

When Hegel’s gaze towards the Muslim world was directed by the priorities of the aesthetic, a number of its aspects either modified themselves, shifted their emphasis or, in some cases, were wholly transformed into something completely different. Fanatical deeds became acts of sublimity, devastating conquests morphed into moments of extraordinary expansion; thieving bandits and swarming nomads took on a sublime, almost mystical aspect, to become Ossian-like heroes at one in the desert with their tent, horse and open sky.<sup>89</sup> For the Romantic Hegel, the freedom of the Arab was a *liberté* closer to that of Rousseau than Robespierre. The Hegel who had understood Islam to be a primitive opposite of Christianity, and who could delight at the struggle of El Cid against the Saracens in the defense of a Christian Europe, suddenly becomes a sensitive observer of the affinity between Arab and Gothic architecture in Spain, of the heavy and formative influence of Arab poetry on the “Christian Occident” and of the “blossoming” of Andalusia and the many Christian scholars who studied Arabic and Arab learning there.<sup>90</sup>

The Islam which, in the lectures on history, is so “destructive” and “devastating” (*zerstörend, verwüstend*),<sup>91</sup> vies in the same text with an Islam which “blossoms” (*blühte*) and is always rejuvenating (*verjüngend*)<sup>92</sup>, so mixed do Hegel’s responses to the Muslim world become. When Hegel writes of how the “humblest Saracen could look upon the Caliph as his equal” (*ibid.*), it is not difficult to imagine how some of the more ambiguous feelings Hegel had towards the Romantic fervour of his own revolutionary youth might not have persisted in his descriptions of Islam. As with Herder’s confused description of Mohammed as trader/prophet/poet, Hegel is torn between the critical depiction of a negative, destructive fanaticism—one which had its origins in a series of “monstrous conquests” (*ungeheure Eroberungen*)—and a distinctly Romantic enthusiasm for the rapidity and magnitude of Islam’s expansion (“Never has enthusiasm . . . produced greater deeds”<sup>93</sup>). In a text such as the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, a curious parallel movement seems to take place, as a whole variety of different adjectives—“monstrous” (*ungeheuer*) and “noble” (*edle*), “enthusiasm” (*Begeisterung*) and “fanaticism” (*Fanatismus*)—seem to pull Hegel in different directions. One

moment, we have a religion whose “energy . . . enters into secular life with a purely negative purpose”<sup>94</sup>; two pages later, the negative purpose is capable of producing moments of unprecedented cultural, artistic and civic magnificence:

Where, however, a noble soul makes itself prominent—like a billow in the surging of the sea—it manifests itself in a majesty of freedom, such that nothing more noble, more generous, more valiant, more devoted was ever witnessed.<sup>95</sup>

Defenders of Hegel will insist to see a contradiction here is to wholly underestimate Hegel’s own awareness of the ambiguous consequences of historical phenomena—in particular, how a religion of sublimity can be both culturally productive and spiritually fanatical. And yet the emphasis placed on destructiveness and negativity at the beginning of Hegel’s section on Islam would unprepare even the most sympathetic reader for the Arab profusion of arts, architecture and sciences which subsequently takes place—and which Hegel describes as a “flourishing” and a “blossoming”. Somehow, Hegel’s own dedication to the teleological inevitability of Christianity would have to deal not only with his own empirical commitment to history, but also to those moments of cultural and military superiority which a more ‘primitive’ religion had given birth to. Amongst Hegel’s many voices, his Romantic identity provided the vocabulary most likely to acknowledge, and even admire, such moments.

Hegel’s idealization of the Arab and his philological sensitivity to the non-European influences on European literature and art was primarily indebted to Herder and, ironically, Schlegel (whom Hegel detested and whose *History of Ancient and Modern Literature* he had clearly read). However, there are two points on which Hegel’s poetic response to the Muslim world differs from the kind of stylizations we find in Herder and Schlegel: first of all, Hegel almost completely resists the temptation to see Mohammed and the birth of Islam as a politically interesting form of proto-nationalism. Whereas Herder, Goethe and Schlegel had all seen Mohammed as someone who had brought his *Volk* together through the instrument of language, Hegel’s decision to interpret Islam as the un-Jewish antithesis of nationalism and the transcendental embodiment of negativity prevented him from such Romantic, anachronistic projections of national consciousness onto an seventh-century Arab faith. Hegel’s omission of this Romantic gesture, it could be said, does seem to suggest a severing of any contemporary political relevance the narrative of Islam might have had for his readership.<sup>96</sup>

Conversely, in the realms of his aesthetic theory, Hegel’s poeticization of the Muslim world goes in precisely the opposite direction. In his appreciation of the Persian poets Rumi and Hafiz, Hegel follows Goethe (and departs from Herder and Schlegel) in a striking acknowledgment of

Muslim poetry's relevance for present-day poetics. The general scheme of Hegel's aesthetic theory will be familiar to many: the primary phase was the *symbolic*, where the corporal or particular form overwhelms the Idea it is manifesting (Hegel allotted Egyptian, Hindu, Hebrew and 'Mohammedan' poetry to this stage). Symbolic poetry tries and fails to find "that perfect unity of inner meaning and external shape"<sup>97</sup> which really belongs to the second category of art, the *classical*. In the classical (Greek and Roman), a "harmonious unity of content and form" is achieved (*ibid.*); however, for Hegel, this perfect balance between *Äußere* and *Innere* is not the final stage of art in its gradual approach towards the Absolute. The category of *romantic* art, as the moment when the Idea exceeds its representation and "takes flight out of externality back into itself" (*ibid.*), constitutes a new "inwardness" which Hegel saw exemplified in Shakespeare and the Dutch masters.

Hegel's encounter with Persian poetry, both through the *Divan* of his beloved Goethe and through the translations of Rumi and others by Rückert and Hammer, upset what we might tentatively term the Euro-Christo-centric direction of his aesthetic theory—where the Absolute moves from the symbolic peripheries of Egypt, through classical southern Europe, towards its culmination in the romantic traditions of the Christian North. This moment of 'upsetting' should not be exaggerated—as one of the conditions of modern romantic art is a new-found inwardness, a notion of depth and interiority Hegel's Islam hardly excelled in, "Mohammedan poetry" is still largely seen as belonging to the primary stage of the symbolic. Goethe's gesture of East–West fusion, however, certainly made an impact upon Hegel—in an 1828 lecture he was able to declare:

Goethe's West-oriental *Divan* sprang from a Westerner incorporating something Eastern . . . we can feel there the eastern independence of freedom in the smallest things. The substantial element here is also very much present for us today.<sup>98</sup>

The scholar Stemmrich-Köhler, in an exhaustive study of the various versions of Hegel's aesthetics lectures, has argued that Muslim poetry appears to have acquired, for Hegel, the modified status of a symbolic art form revived under the conditions of the romantic (p. 182). Persian poets such as Firdusi, in particular, were not simply another primitive stage of Oriental pantheism, but also were also "fruitful for the modern" (p. 198). For the thinker who was able to leave Islam out of his study of world religion—and the Ottomans out of history—it remains significant that only in an *aesthetic* sense could the contemporaneity of the Muslim world be acknowledged for Hegel. The realm of poetry, unlike those of economy, history or theology, was a relatively safe one, where a foreign culture might be allowed to share a moment of teleological influence without too many problematic implications.



## HEGEL AND RACE: ISLAM AS CAUCASIAN RELIGION, MUSLIMS AS WEST ASIANS

Having seen Islam as a crude form of Kantianism, a difference-levelling anarchism, a rival to Christianity, a variation on Judaism and a magnificent experiment in sublimity, Hegel's interest in race (*Rasse/Geschlecht*) leads us to a final permutation in the various patterns we have been analysing—that of Islam as a faith belonging primarily to a Caucasian (*Kaukasische*) set of peoples.

The question of race in Hegel is a touchy one. A number of critics (most notably Bernasconi) have not only begun to emphasize the notion of race in Hegel, but have also argued that the Eurocentrism of Hegel's thought is essentially structured by an understanding of race.<sup>99</sup> This argumentation has found some resistance from a number of scholars—McCarney, most recently, having preferred to speak of a “geographical materialism” rather than an obsession with *Rasse* in Hegel, and choosing to cite in Hegel's defense the philosopher's opposition to slavery, emphasis on climate rather than blood and conviction of Greece's African influence.<sup>100</sup> The aim of this final section, however, is not to participate in this debate, but rather to examine the points on which an understanding of race in Hegel overlaps with and colours his approach to the Muslim world.

Broadly speaking, Hegel divided humankind into three racial groups: the Ethiopian or African race, the Mongol (in which Hegel, contra Schlegel, included both Indian and Chinese peoples) and the Caucasian race, a term Hegel borrowed from the anthropologist/anatomist Blumenbach.<sup>101</sup> Hegel's remarks concerning Africans are notorious enough not to require any elaboration—effectively he saw them, in intellectual and spiritual terms, as grown-up children; the “Mongol” races, on the other hand, whilst still meriting the term ‘childish’, show the beginnings of an awareness of spirituality, but one still tied to a physical, corporeal understanding of it. Genuine history (as opposed to what Hegel termed ‘unhistorical history’<sup>102</sup>) can only really be said to begin with the Caucasian race, a racial group to whom belonged not simply Europeans but all three major Muslim peoples, Arabs, Persians and Turks. The “Caucasian race” itself had two aspects (*zwei Seiten*)—one European, the other ‘West Asian’ (*Vorderasien*), a difference which Hegel saw as “coincid[ing] with that between Christians and Mohammedans”.<sup>103</sup> Muslims and Christians, in other words, were racial cousins, sharing a common, Caucasian source:

No colour has any superiority, it being simply a matter of being used to it, although one can speak of the objective superiority of the Caucasian race as against that of the Negro. Caucasians, Georgians, etc., are descended from the Turks, and it is amongst these peoples that the finest species are to be found. The finest colour is that in which what is internal is most visible, the colour which is determined outwards,

in an animal manner, from within. . . . In what is flesh coloured . . . spirituality [is] so much the more recognisable. It is this condition, that of what is internal, of animal being and spiritual inwardness making itself more visible, which constitutes the objective superiority of the whiteness of the skin.<sup>104</sup>

It is interesting to see how Hegel employed his faintly Aristotelian privileging of actuality over potentiality—the insistence on all inwardness expressing itself through outwardness which Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, had objected to—to justify the white skin as an outward emanation of spiritual purity. Darker coloured skins are, metaphysically considered, incomplete actualities. What is also striking is the way Turks are seen as Caucasians by Hegel, not Mongols; Hegel was certainly aware of the Turks' central Asian background (in one list of folk songs, he put "Turkish" alongside "Tatar" and "Mongolian"<sup>105</sup>), and many of the qualities he attributes to the Mongol race he also gives to the Turks—a nomadic, destructive nature, a disinclination to build or produce culture. Hegel even used the same word—*Überschwemmung*—to describe the conquests of Turks and Mongols as they spilled over into other lands. The Turks, however, were also Muslims and, as Islam was a Caucasian religion, their faith appears to have been sufficient (at least in this instance) to bring them into 'our' ethnic fold.

How did Hegel's Mohammedans change when they became Caucasian West Asians? What aspects of their character did he emphasize—and which ones did he overlook—when words such as "race" and "ethnic group" (*Menschengeschlecht*) were foremost in his mind? One answer to this is that the racial status of Hegel's Muslims, when emphasized, occasionally brought them over to the 'side' of Christian Europeans, particularly in comparison with 'lower' races such as Mongols or Africans. In his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel writes about the wild and uncontrollable nature of the "Negro" (*der Neger*):

there is nothing in his character which sounds human. The extensive reports of missionaries confirm this perfectly, and Mohammedanism appears to be the only thing which has brought them some degree of education [*Bildung*]. The Mohammedans also understand better than the Europeans how best to penetrate the interior of the continent. This level of culture [the Muslims have brought] can be better recognised in the religion.<sup>106</sup>

A number of points emerge here: first of all, how the expansion of Islam into Africa, far from being a "monstrous conquest" or an explosion of fanaticism, actually becomes a disseminator of *Bildung* and a civilizing influence, a purveyor of *Kultur* to the North African coast. Islam, in other words, is helping Africa to move into history—from the ahistorical darkness in which Hegel had notoriously placed it. As we saw in the first chapter, this

gesture is also Leibniz's—the Leibniz who could acknowledge Islam's help in the abolition of Africa's idolatrous, animistic practices—and yet the keywords of *Bildung* and *Kultur* in the passage suggest an Islam which is not merely paving the way for Christian missionaries, but which is providing a superior (Caucasian) religious culture, monotheistic and transcendental, which the fetishistic negro has yet to acquire. The remarkable absence of any competitive tone in this proselytizing scramble for Africa underlines a clear logic: when the race is inferior and its culture 'lower', Islam cleanses and teaches; when the race is superior and its culture 'higher', it conquers, floods and swarms. It is in this sense that Islam's provenance as a Caucasian religion gives it the status of a 'pre-colonizer'—whether it is paving the way for missionaries in Africa or the English in India, Hegel's triadic understanding of race (African/Mongol/Caucasian) appears to have diminished Islam's competitive Otherness in certain moments.

An element of race, and how race made Hegel's Muslims 'more like us', also emerges in the case of Persia, and Hegel's overall positive treatment of it. If Turks are incapable of culture and Arabs forever prone to fanaticism, it seems fair to say Hegel's treatment of Persia and Persians hardly ever strays into the negative. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, spurred by the discovery of Sanskrit and Avestan's proximity to German and Latin (through figures such as Jones and Schlegel), a number of thinkers were looking to Persia as the original homeland (*Urheimat*) of the German people. The philologist Adelung (whom Hegel had read) argued as early as 1806 that Persians and Goths enjoyed a "common derivation" (*ursprüngliche Abstammung*<sup>107</sup>), whilst one of the key texts in Hegel's Oriental research—von Hammer's *Geschichte der schönen Redekünste Persiens* (1818)—had called Persia "a high intellectual-culture" and a "near-relative of the West".<sup>108</sup> Hammer had even described the Persian epic the *Shahname* and the German *Nibelungenlied* as the sagas of two blood-related peoples (*stammverwandte Völker*).<sup>109</sup> Hegel certainly never went as far as explicitly calling Persia an ancient Teutonic homeland, but his designation of them as "the first historical people",<sup>110</sup> his denial of a Caucasian identity extending anywhere east of Afghanistan, and his appreciation of the Persians' whiter skins in comparison to Indians and Mongols strongly suggest some form of racial sympathy for the Persians. The fact that Hegel referred to "Mohammedan Persians" (and not Persian Mohammedans) also seems to underline how Hegel saw Persians as a *Volk* coloured by an Islamic identity, but not necessarily constituted by one in the same way his sublime/fanatical Arabs were.

Hegel talks about Persians like he talks about no other Muslims. Bearing in mind his wholesale dismissal of Turks and ambiguous portrayal of Arabs, it is difficult not to be impressed by the way he weaves poets such as Rumi, Nisami and Firdusi in and out of analyses filled with a whole variety of references to European literature. On one page of the aesthetics lectures, for example, in a discussion on the relative symbolical value of the organic and non-organic in art, a line from Firdusi is quoted in the

same paragraph as Virgil, Calderon and Shakespeare's Richard II—for a poet whose faith had long since withdrawn from history, this was some concession.<sup>111</sup> Persians, as we saw in the last section, seem to be the only Muslims Hegel allowed to challenge the European hegemony of the present, the only Muslims whose contemporary literature he ever referred to and whose influence he conceded some potential usefulness in. Alongside the conveniently apolitical category of the aesthetic, some Sufi similarities (encountered in the translations of Rückert, Görres and Hammer) to transcendental/immanent syntheses in Hegel's own thought, and the considerable influence of Goethe, Hegel's perception of the Persians' ethnolinguistic proximity to Germans must have played some part, however small, in their idealization.

Within the crystalline structure of Hegel's thought, the light of Islam found itself mirrored and refracted through a number of constantly shifting facets. Sometimes these facets converged harmoniously to produce a single, focused direction—a Christian/philosophical response to the denial of Christ's divinity, for example, or an Enlightenment/Romantic consensus on the inherently poetic (and therefore sensually irrational) nature of the 'Mohammedan'; at other times, Hegel's many facets sent back what they encountered in oblique, errant directions, producing idiosyncrasies, ironies, even contradictions—Romantic narratives of expansion and conquest would dazzle and conflict with Enlightenment deplorations of fanaticism and bourgeois fears of volatility, the conviction of Muslim savagery and backwardness would diverge strikingly from a philologist/historian's indebtedness to the genealogy of cultures.

Given the range and variety of these oscillations, these conquests which are sometimes remarkable, sometimes monstrous, these voices which can praise the glorious struggle against the Moors one minute, and dwell on the Arab origins of chivalric poetry the next, the slightly Foucauldian question arises of how interconnected Hegel's various compartments really were—or indeed, whether there is any nexus at all called 'Hegel' around which such loosely delineated sub-identities might be arranged. One tentative answer, which might at least demarcate a space in which Hegel's many voices were able to speak, could be that of a textual memory; if we were to understand a thinker as, amongst other things, an intensely *lexical* phenomenon, an absorber, modifier and redistributor of the written, then we might think of Hegel's multiple identities as a collection of different readers, whose various textual memories come to the fore at different times. The "Europe" Hegel had in mind as reader of Tasso/Ariosto was a very different one from that conceived by the reader of ethnologists such as Blumenbach/Elphinstone/Adelung; the word 'Oriental' summoned different landscapes for the reader of Kant/Fichte/Schelling and than it did for the reader of Goethe/Hammer/Rückert. Conflicts, in this sense, might have occurred between different bibliographies and the landscapes and feelings each one brought with them. A thinker is never, of course, merely the sum of what s/he reads,

nor are philosophers ever simply steered mnemonically by their libraries. As a means of understanding the lexical memory (or amnesia) of a certain moment, however, a consideration of the multiple libraries Hegel carried around in his head might help us understand how he could write such different things about his *Morgenland* at different times.

## 7 Marx the Moor

“And without total abandonment of the law of the Koran [argues opposition MP Cobden], it was impossible to put the Christians of Turkey upon an equality with the Turks.” We may as well ask Mr Cobden whether, with the existing State Church and laws of England, it is possible to put her working-men upon an equality with the Cobdens and the Brights?

—Marx, *The Eastern Question*, p. 260

Marx’s gesture here—that of turning an overconfident and unreflective Orientalism back onto its European author—fundamentally colours his entire approach to the Muslim world. His question to the opposition MP, deliciously Islamicising the British legislature and Church of England, exemplifies the strategy of *tu quoque* Marx often used in dealing with the Western critique of Islam: how can the English hope to judge the Ottomans, when they themselves have their own version of an Anglican ‘ulema preaching an Anglican Koran? The difficulties in writing about Marx and Muslims spring from all of the ambiguities, possibilities and latent prejudices of such a gesture. On the one hand, Marx’s fierce and uncompromising anti-imperialism, his relentless indignation at the injustices inflicted by a whole triad of imperialisms (Tsarist, Mid Victorian, Napoleonic) upon Arabs, Indians, Turks and Chinese, sets him off from every other major nineteenth-century thinker as an extraordinarily independent moral voice. Accompanying this admirable critique of colonialism, as numerous commentators have pointed out again and again, is a teleology of ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’ often differing little in character from those of the imperialists themselves. This ambivalent relationship towards European modernity—employing the Orientalist tropes and teleology of the modern to attack its capitalist/imperialist manifestations—will provide an interesting parallel to Nietzsche’s own Orientalist defense of the Oriental.

The biography-defying richness of Marx’s life and the irreducibility of his enormous oeuvre also supply a set of tacit yet incommensurable factors colouring the attitude Marx cultivated towards the religion and followers of Islam: from Marx’s own nickname ‘the Moor’, the *Arabian Nights* stories he read to his children at bedtime, the comparisons to a Turk he received from several quarters (most notably from the MP Urquhart, who said he had an intelligence worthy of one), to the irony of his only visit ever to a Muslim country (Algeria) in the final months of his life.<sup>1</sup> The cumulative intimacy of such minutiae does force us to consider, once again, what it means to say a thinker thought *x* or *y* about a particular subject. In the case of Marx, who could call Turkey “a compact . . . mass of Mussulman