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Protestant Islam in Weimar Germany: Hugo Marcus and “The Message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Europe”

In 1932, the German poet, philosopher, and political activist Hugo Marcus (1880-1966) proposed a remedy for his country’s ongoing crisis: mass conversion of Germans to Islam and the establishment of an Islamic state. More allegory than solution, Marcus’s “The Message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Europe,” is an imaginary dialogue between two old friends—a Christian European and a Muslim long resident in Europe.¹ Holding up this mirror to society to illuminate its shortcomings, Marcus uses the Christian to explain how the crisis from which Germany suffers is not merely political and economic, but religious, intellectual, and cultural. The Great War of 1914-18 has left Europeans with “shattered faith in mankind.”² In the subsequent upheaval, “How many millions of Europeans have just now lost their old line of direction and are looking about anxiously for a new source of guidance among the ruins of their erstwhile beliefs? Where do they find it?” The Christian turns for this to his friend’s faith: “There is, however, an old saying: *Ex Oriente Lux* [Light comes from the East], and there are, more especially at the present time, many people throughout the Western countries who are looking to the East for the satisfaction of their religious hunger.”

But rather than an “Eastern” Islam, the Christian’s understanding of that religion is a surprisingly Eurocentric and even German one. Europe, “in its greatest times and through its greatest men, got so close to Islam as almost to shake hands with it.”³ During the era of Johann

¹ Marcus, “The Message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Europe.”

² *Ibid.*, pt. 1, 223.

³ *Ibid.*, 284.

Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), German Europe had reached the heights of its spiritual development. Its thinkers gathered in all the wisdom of humanity, promoted tolerance and religious freedom, and “looked on all humanity as a big brotherhood, just as Islam did.”⁴ None of the Enlightenment thinkers, moreover, “was a better Muslim than the greatest man of those days, the German Goethe.” Goethe’s poems about Muhammad, and his claim that all the monotheistic religions were equally valid paths to God “sound like the words of a real Muslim.” Islam is not only the religion of the German past, Marcus concludes, but also, given its faith in the intellect and in progress, “the religion of the future.”⁵

A proposal for mass conversion to Islam and establishment of an Islamic state does not figure in the historiography of Weimar Germany. Primarily this is because while many of the new political notions of the future that Weimar writers contemplated have been explored, scholars have paid less attention to the spiritual and religious utopias envisioned in the 1920s. This article engages with the question of German responses to the rupture of World War I and the realm of imagined political possibilities in Weimar Germany by focusing on one such utopia overlooked in historiography, the German-Islamic synthesis as advocated by Hugo Marcus.

In his mosque lectures and publications, including his own conversion narrative, Hugo Marcus promoted the utopian project of an Islam for Germany, demonstrating the similarities between Muslim and German values and philosophy—especially as represented by Nietzsche—and presenting the “Muslim” views of Muhammad and Islam held by Goethe as a precedent for his own. Although scholars have grappled with Goethe’s views of Islam,⁶ none have explored

⁴ Ibid., 285.

⁵ Ibid., 286.

⁶ Especially Katherina Mommsen, see below.

how members of the first generation of German Muslims engaged with his work. Marcus used Goethe's "conversion" to make a bold argument about German and Islamic cultures. What Marcus envisioned was an Islam rooted in Goethe's Weimar classicism in the Enlightenment era. He saw being German as viewing the world in the Muslim Goethe's terms; for Germans, being Muslim was to read Islam in a Goethean way.

Rather than seeing converts such as Marcus in an instrumental way as "mediators" between foreign Muslims and local Christians, we should see these new Muslims as playing an active role responding to the crisis in Germany society.⁷ Marcus's astonishing analysis of the crisis reflects the broader debate about the future of German society and historical revisionism that marked Weimar Germany. Facing utter and complete change, Germans debated the means of rebuilding society.⁸ According to Marcus's acquaintance Herman Hesse, affected by "the death and dismantling of the culture into which the elder among us were raised as children" and the loss of "the universal foundations of life, culture and morality: religion and customary morals," Germans longed for a way to satisfy their own and society's search for "new forms of religiosity and community," meaning and harmony.⁹ What could best speak to the general "impatience and disillusion with both received religious creeds and scholarly philosophies" and the "demand for new formulations, new interpretations, new symbols, new explanations"?¹⁰ If the

⁷ Germain, "The First Muslim Missions on a European Scale: Ahmadi-Lahori Networks in the Inter-War Period," 105; Motadel, "Islamische Bürgerlichkeit: Das soziokulturelle milieu der muslimischen Minderheit in Berlin, 1918-1939."

⁸ Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, 2, 39.

⁹ Hesse, "The Longing of Our Time for a Worldview," 365-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 366.

end of the war served as a historical rupture, “at once the site of the invalidation of the past and the point of departure for the future,”¹¹ then what should that future look like?

Peter Fritzsche observes that in Weimar Germany “renovation and crisis went hand in hand,” and that the era’s “consciousness of crisis” produced a sense of “exuberant possibility.”¹² Rather than perceiving Weimar “crisis talk” as defeatist, Kathleen Canning notes its “positive and productive associations,” providing Germans with “confidence in their own capacity to change, innovate, and even surmount crisis.”¹³ In other words, “a crisis can evoke not only the pessimistic sense of a threat to the old order but also the optimistic scenario of a chance for renewal.”¹⁴ In this turbulent era, marked by its iconoclasm and syncretism, just as radical artists created “the multiperspectivism of montage,” and people with wildly divergent aims deployed the Nietzschean transvaluation of values, intellectuals blended contradictory elements into blueprints for the future.¹⁵ One such paradoxical utopian vision brought Islam together with German Enlightenment culture and romanticism. Hugo Marcus, rather than accept that Enlightenment values had been proven false, or that German culture was bankrupt, reevaluated the ideas and contributions of the greatest German thinkers, especially Goethe, in order to make

¹¹ Fritzsche, “The Economy of Experience in Weimar Germany,” 369.

¹² Fritzsche, “Landscape of Danger, Landscape of Design: Crisis and Modernism in Weimar Germany,” 44-45.

¹³ Canning, “Introduction,” 3. Canning is referring in particular to Föllmer and Graf, *Die ‘Krise’ der Weimarer Republik. Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters*, 7, and idem, “Einleitung: Die Kultur der Krise in der Weimarer Republik,” 10-11, 21.

¹⁴ Graf and Föllmer, “The Culture of Crisis in the Weimar Republic.”

¹⁵ Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, “Preface,” xvii-iii.

them relevant and useful for stepping back from the moral abyss and providing for a spiritually and politically sound future. Islam, “the religion of eternal self-renewal,” belonged both to Germany’s past and to its future, according to Marcus. It was the country’s only salvation.

Hugo Marcus’s Approach to Islam

Weimar Germany witnessed a “thousand different forms and degrees” of religious and philosophical speculation, “a gigantic wave” encompassing “American Christian Science and English theosophy, Mazdeanism and Neo-Sufism, Steiner’s anthroposophy, and a hundred similar creeds,” new doctrines of faith, and an “awakening of the soul, burning resurgence of longings for the divine, fever heightened by war and distress.”¹⁶ After World War I, Germany “was filled with saviors, prophets, and disciples,”¹⁷ some of whose ideas reflected transnational intellectual interactions between Germans and South Asians.¹⁸

One such new creed was Islam, and one expression of it that took hold in Germany came in the form of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at-e-Islam (Ahmadi Movement for the Propagation of Islam, hereafter Ahmadi), based in British India. Ahmadi Muslims established their second mission in Europe in Germany after World War I to serve the suddenly significant Muslim population in Berlin, made up of Africans, Europeans, Middle Easterners, Central and South

¹⁶ Hesse, “The Longing of Our Time for a Worldview,” 366-7.

¹⁷ Cited in Fritzsche, “The Economy of Experience in Weimar Germany,” 370.

¹⁸ See Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire*; and idem, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism*.

Asians, numbering for the first time in the thousands, and to convert Germans to Islam.¹⁹ This branch of the Ahmadi had been founded in Lahore (today in Pakistan) by Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) in 1914 as an offshoot of the late-nineteenth-century reform movement of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) of Qadian (today in India), near Lahore, whose followers saw him as the savior, Jesus Christ reincarnate.²⁰ The Ahmadi engaged in a universal mission to renew Islam, defend it from Christian missionaries, and propagate a tolerant, rational, and progressive Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Having first taken over control of England's only mosque, at Woking in Surrey, near London,²¹ Ali sent missionaries to Berlin in 1922 to convert Germans to Islam.²² In 1925, the editor of the Ahmadi's UK-based *Islamic Review* boasted that in the new "mission field" in Berlin, "twenty-five converts have already turned to Islam."²³ By 1932, the missionaries claimed the number had grown to one hundred.²⁴ Among the neophytes the Ahmadi considered Hugo Marcus "the most valued prize of our Mission in Berlin."²⁵

¹⁹ Clayer and Germain, "Introduction."

²⁰ Backhausen, *Die Lahore-Ahmadiyya-Bewegung in Europa*, 9-24; Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900-1947*, 76-7, 97-8, 100-1, 139-42; and Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, esp. 105-18.

²¹ <http://www.shahjahanmosque.org.uk/>

²² Ahmad, "A Brief History of the Berlin Muslim Mission, 1922-1988."

Note that this branch of the Ahmadi rejects Ahmad's claims to prophecy.

²³ Kamal-ud-Din, "Note: The Berlin Mosque."

²⁴ Thus according to Ahmad, "A Brief History of the Berlin Muslim Mission." This seems an exaggeration. In these years one comes across the same ten converts in mosque publications and

Marcus committed to many different circles, movements, and ideologies over the course of his eighty-six years. These included the Stefan George Circle, the homosexual rights movement centered in the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (WhK) (Scientific Humanitarian Committee, established 1897) of his fellow activist of Jewish background Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935),²⁶ pacifism centered on the literary journals of life-long friend and

organizations: Hugo Hamid Marcus, Sheikh Omar Schubert, Mustapha Konieczny, Hikmet Beyer, Fritz Amin Boosfeld, Chalid Albert Seiler-Chan, Faruq Fischer, Huda Johanna Schneider, and Baron Omar Rolf Ehrenfels. The exact numbers of Muslims and converts cannot be determined, since Islam was not (and is not yet today) a recognized religion in Germany given community status.

²⁵ Editor's note to Hugo Marcus, "Muhammad's Personality: The First Democrat-Prophet." The Ahmadi boasted of converting this "scion of a high German family, a Ph.D. of Berlin University, a scholar of distinction and author of good many books." Editor, "Islam in Germany: Great German Scholar Won."

²⁶ For Marcus's relationship with Hirschfeld, see Hans Alienus (pseudonym for Hugo Marcus), "Erinnerung an Magnus Hirschfeld. Zum 30. Todestag—14. Mai 1935," 6. On Hirschfeld see Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld: A Portrait of a Pioneer in Sexology*; Herzer, *Magnus Hirschfeld: Leben und Werk eines jüdischen, schwulen und sozialistischen Sexologen*; Herrn, *100 Years of the Gay Rights Movement in Germany*; Dose, *Magnus Hirschfeld: Deutscher—Jude—Weltbürger*; Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, 19-25; Mancini, *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom: A History of the First International Sexual Freedom Movement*; and Dose, *Magnus Hirschfeld: The Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement*.

fellow homosexual rights activist of Jewish background Kurt Hiller (1885-1972),²⁷ and Islam. Retaining membership in the Jewish community while converting to Islam in 1925, Marcus was one of the leading German Muslims in the Islamic community centered on the first mosque in Germany established by Muslims, the Berlin mosque completed in 1927 by the Ahmadi. In his capacity as chief editor of the Ahmadi journal, *Moslemische Revue* (Muslim Review, 1924-40, circulation circa 1,000)—in which he published nineteen articles between 1924 and 1933, the most by far by any German author; chairman of the Deutsch-Moslemische Gesellschaft (the Society, 1930-38); frequent lecturer at the Society’s monthly public “Islam Evenings” (attended by an audience up to four hundred);²⁸ and editor of a Qur’an translation and commentary (1939, in 3,000 copies) Marcus played a key role in articulating the meaning of Islam for Germans.

Although he was introduced to Islam by Muslims, with one notable exception, Marcus’s Islam is strangely devoid of Muslims. It includes nothing from the Islamic past, save Muhammad’s era, and no Islamic thinkers, aside from the reported speech (Qur’an and *Hadith*)

²⁷ In his 1969 autobiography, *Life Against the Times*, Hiller mentions “It is worth noting that in the course of working for Hirschfeld’s Committee (WhK) I got to know a number of precious personalities,” including Marcus. Hiller, *Leben gegen die Zeit*, 1:74. See also *Ibid.*, 107 and 408. Hiller’s 1908 expansion of his dissertation *Das Recht über sich selbst*, (*The Right over Yourself*) challenges the criminalization of male homosexuality, and his 1922 book § 175: *Die Schmach des Jahrhunderts!* (*Paragraph 175: The disgrace of the century!*) is a seminal work in the homosexual rights struggle. Hiller led the WhK from 1929 to its closure in 1933.

²⁸ It is not possible to determine how many lectures he gave at the mosque. Over three dozen lectures on Islam are found among his personal papers, several of which were published as articles in the *Moslemische Revue*.

of Muhammad. Not only is his Islam reduced to the founding text and founder's life, but the analysis and interpretation of them are based on a single source: Goethe, rather than a Muslim thinker from a Muslim-majority land. Thus, for example, his discussion of the difference between prophets and reformers in his analysis of Muhammad²⁹ is similar to Goethe's discussion of the difference between prophet and poet in the "Notes and Commentary" section of Goethe's poetry cycle *West-östlicher Diwan* (1819; *West-Eastern Divan*). Although Muslims had been present in Germany since the seventeenth century—namely, Muslim royal retainers and soldiers fighting on behalf of various German princes, and Prussia, including against Napoleon—Marcus never mentions the actual Muslims praying, fasting, battling, dying, and being buried in German soil during Goethe's era. Marcus does not refer to any Muslim but the prophet. He never quotes from a single Muslim philosopher. He takes the Qur'an and the life of the prophet as everything one needs to know to be a Muslim. He is advocating a German Islam without a Middle Eastern component.

Marcus's is a very Protestant Islam, because he crafts his own interpretation of Islam based solely on the Holy Book and the life of the prophet. In his essay "Islam und Protestantismus" ("Islam und Protestantismus"),³⁰ he divides religions into two types, the "mystical" and the "rationalistic." Doing so enables him to make an analogy between the great European religious schism between "mystical" Catholicism and "rationalistic" Protestantism and the supposed schism between "mystical" Buddhism and "rationalistic" Islam. Calling Islam the "Protestantism of the East," he argues that "Islam is the earliest Protestantism, a Protestantism

²⁹ Marcus, "Muhammad's Personality: The First Democrat-Prophet, The First Cavalier-Prophet,"

1.

³⁰ Marcus, "Islam und Protestantismus."

appearing one thousand years before Protestantism in the West.”³¹ In order to make the comparison more concrete, he draws contrasts between rationalistic religions, which unite worldly and sacred power; and mystical religions, which focus only on the sacred.³² He draws parallels between Islam and Protestantism, noting that these two rationalistic religions stripped religion of miracles and magic, abolished ceremony, music, and icons. Similar to this article in a short biography of Muhammad, he draws parallels with Luther by claiming Muhammad is the “First Reformer.”³³ Crucial to understanding his vision of Islam is his claim that Islam and Protestantism both established “a priesthood of all believers.”³⁴ With this statement, Marcus explains why he is able to jettison 1,300 years of Islamic thought. The believer reads the holy text, finds his own personal interpretation, and passes over all others in silence.

Without naming a single Muslim philosopher or theologian, Marcus passes over the succeeding millenium of Islamic thought after Muhammad’s era, picking it up again as the Islamic heritage passed from the Arabs in Spain to the Spanish Jew Spinoza.³⁵ The Muslims in Spain shared their intellectual treasures and their philosophical and scientific culture with Jews, such that it is “no wonder that the descendants of the expellees kept alive the intellectual heritage

³¹ Ibid., 17.

³² Ibid., 19.

³³ Marcus, “Muhammad’s Personality,” 1-2, 6. “But Mohammad is not only a prophet, for one of his most important tasks consists in bringing back to life the revelation of his predecessors in its original purity, in perfecting it and revising it in the spirit of his age and people. It means that Mohammad is also a Reformer.” Ibid., 1.

³⁴ Marcus, “Islam und Protestantismus,” 21.

³⁵ Marcus, “Spinoza und der Islam.”

that their ancestors had gained from the Muslims.”³⁶ Spinoza then influenced all subsequent German philosophers, including Goethe. As Marcus writes, “Goethe venerated Spinoza, Lessing endorsed him. And Hegel and Schelling would be unthinkable without him. Indeed, precisely the specifically German profoundness [*Tiefsinn*] characteristic of these philosophers is largely rooted in Spinoza.”³⁷ The Islamic heritage—passing through Spinoza—“entered the German spirit and helped to determine German destiny,” because Bismarck read Spinoza.³⁸ And then Marcus, born only a decade after the founding of the Second Reich, read Goethe. Marcus perceives of himself as a latter-day Spinoza, the un-Jewish Jew presenting Islam, as filtered through Goethe and his own philosophic lens, to Germany.

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 10.

³⁸ “If the Jew Spinoza had absorbed the Islamic world view and heritage, via Spinoza this Islamic heritage entered the German spirit and helped determine the German destiny. Because among the great proponents of Spinoza was Bismarck. Spinoza was probably the only philosopher he read. And Spinoza’s teaching of self-preservation, self-fulfillment and the noble self-love of the I was surely not without influence on Bismarck the politician. The establishment of the German empire crowned his aim to make the monarchy, and later the German federation, as strong “in itself” as possible. But the higher self-love taught by Spinoza that Bismarck realized in the German Reich is indeed a basic pillar of Muslim thinking. We all know that the Muslim can approach the Divine only through self-fulfillment of all his attributes. But we draw the historical conclusion: Via Spinoza and Bismarck Islam has itself helped build the German Second Reich in 1870.” Ibid., 10-1.

A Jewish Reading of Islam

To understand Marcus's conversion to Islam one gains little insight from scholarship that views conversion of German Jews to Christianity as an act of radical assimilation and integration. Todd Endelmann argues that most Jews who converted to Christianity in modern Europe did so as "a strategic or practical move," leaving the fold primarily for "nonspiritual reasons," driven by ambition, a search for fame, or status.³⁹ They converted to Christianity to overcome "social discrimination and cultural stigmatization," as well as "legal disabilities" and even violence.⁴⁰ Rather than choose to become Christian, a road taken by thousands of German Jews motivated by careerist, romantic, cultural, and national motivations, in the words of Deborah Hertz, "a complex mix of opportunity and discrimination" from the end of the seventeenth century through his conversion,⁴¹ Marcus chose to become Muslim. He was secure enough in his Germanness to choose a very newly established minority, rather than the majority religion, which other Jews thought offered them the surest path to feeling that they were becoming more German, and to full acceptance as a German by others, in good times and bad. Marcus was convinced that becoming Muslim he would not have to give up being German, unlike other Jews who became Christian in order to escape who they were. Marcus maintained membership in the Jewish community of Berlin for nearly a decade after converting to Islam. His conversion is thus

³⁹ Endelmann, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, 5, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴¹ Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*, 218.

atypical, and hardly an act of radical assimilation, for he did not cease to legally identify himself as a Jew nor end his formal ties to Judaism and Jews.

If Marcus's conversion to Islam was somewhat unusual for German Jews, his understanding of that religion was not. Susannah Heschel and others have written of the German Jewish (or more correctly, German-speaking Jews') cultural identification and fascination with Islam.⁴² From the early nineteenth century, German-speaking Jewish scholars and writers such as Abraham Geiger (1810-74), Heinrich Graetz (1817-91), and Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), who developed a form of Jewish Orientalism, felt deep affinities with Muslims, by perceiving Islam as rational and philosophical, the religion which promoted science, reason, and a free spirit of enquiry, and was also closest to the ideals of pure monotheism first introduced by prophetic Judaism.⁴³ After visiting Damascus in 1890 Goldziher went so far as to declare "I truly entered in those weeks into the spirit of Islam to such an extent that ultimately I became inwardly convinced that I myself was Muslim and judiciously discovered that this was the only religion which, even in its doctrinal and official formulation, can satisfy philosophical minds."⁴⁴ One also finds a liberal Jewish reading of Islam expressed by Orientalist Max Freiherr von Oppenheim

⁴² Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, and idem, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism"; Kramer, *The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*; and Kalmar and Penslar, *Orientalism and the Jews*.

⁴³ Lassner, "Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam," 106; Efron, "Orientalism and the Jewish Historical Gaze," 89; Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, 323-33.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Efron, "Orientalism and the Jewish Historical Gaze," 89.

(1860-1946).⁴⁵ Such an understanding of Islam compelled some Jewish contemporaries of Marcus, most famously, fellow philosopher and writer Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss, 1900-92), to formally and publicly convert to Islam.⁴⁶ Scholars and German-speaking Muslims today have taken Asad to be the prototypical “Western” convert to Islam and have imagined that his experience was normative and representative; considered “Europe’s gift to Islam,” and even “a Martin Luther for Islam,” he has been the subject of film; a prolific writer, journalist and intellectual, religious reformer and diplomat, Asad has long been the subject of popular and academic writing.⁴⁷

Asad, however, is an ironic choice for a model German-speaking Muslim. Converting in 1926, Asad “cut all mental and emotional ties to Western civilization, which he denounced as decadent and in decline” in order to become Muslim.⁴⁸ “Infatuated with almost everything Arab,”⁴⁹ and motivated by a belief that to accept a way of life as binding, one must “pursue it

⁴⁵ See Gossman, *The Passion of Max von Oppenheim: Archaeology and Intrigue in the Middle East from Wilhelm II to Hitler*.

⁴⁶ Asad, *The Road to Mecca*; Kramer, “The Road from Mecca: Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss)”; Windhager, *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad-von Galizien nach Arabien, 1900-1927*; and idem, “Vom Kaffeehaus an den saudischen Königshof - Leopold Weiss' (Muhammad Asad) Begegnungen in Wien und Berlin auf seinem Weg zum Islam.”

⁴⁷ Nawwab, “A Matter of Love: Muhammad Asad and Islam,” 161; Hofmann, *Religion on the Rise: Islam in the Third Millenium*; and *A Road to Mecca: The Journey of Muhammad Asad*, a film by Georg Misch (2008).

⁴⁸ Dubrovic, *Veruntreute Geschichte*, 48.

⁴⁹ Hofmann, “Muhammad Asad: Europe’s Gift to Islam,” 234-5.

among like-minded people,” Asad spent his post-conversion life outside of Europe. He became fully Muslim and left his Europeanness behind. Rather than being a bridge between East and West, Asad traveled from West to East and never looked back. For decades he lived like an Arab, wearing only Arab dress, speaking only Arabic, and marrying Arab women in order to become Muslim, perceiving an intractable chasm between the materialist “West” and the Muslim “East.”⁵⁰ Such an exoticizing, ethnic or race-based approach to religious belonging was not unusual for an era in which a European convert to Islam could boast that his change of religion was motivated by the fact that he would only be happy with dark skin, and looked forward to becoming browned by the sun after making the hajj so that he could paint his self-portrait, as a brown man in a white turban.⁵¹

Hugo Marcus would be a better standard for German converts to Islam to follow for Marcus came into contact with Muslims in Germany, and he never doubted that one could be German *and* Muslim, seeing correlations in basic approaches to life, and lived as a German Muslim, never leaving German-speaking Europe. Marcus interpreted Islam to show that Islam is compatible with German culture, values, and philosophy, rooted in Germany and German history. Unlike Asad, who sought to leave his previous Central European life behind in order to begin anew elsewhere as a Muslim, Marcus sought to reveal the convergences in German and Muslim history, culture, philosophy, and values.⁵² Moreover, rather than making himself into an

⁵⁰ Asad, *The Road to Mecca*, 49, 136, 185, 349.

⁵¹ Gioja, “Reasons for my Acceptance of Islam.”

⁵² Talal Asad, Muhammad Asad’s son, criticizes those who would see Asad as a bridge builder, for “he was concerned less with building bridges and more with immersing himself critically in the tradition of Islam that became his tradition, and with encouraging members of his community

Arab, like Asad, or seeing himself as a “noble oriental” straddling East and West, like an earlier generation of German-speaking Jews fascinated with Islam,⁵³ Marcus never doubted his ability to remain German and live in Germany after becoming Muslim.

This Jewish man’s life marked by an embrace of Islam and his becoming a proponent of a new way of life raises the question of how his participation in universal movements compares with that of other German Jews. In one sense Marcus’s move is familiar when we consider how German Jewish men of his generation have long been depicted by scholars. George Mosse famously argued that these Jews sought “a personal identity beyond religion and nation,” which led ultimately to a Left-wing identity.⁵⁴ Adam Sutcliffe concurs that Jews have played a disproportionate role in left-wing political movements and “have almost always been vigorously anti-clerical and are usually considered as antithetical to religion in every way.” Yet, “Despite their hostility to all traditional religious practice and their ambivalent or even hostile attitude to the Jewish collectivity,”—the thought of a long line of intellectuals from Spinoza, Saint-Simonist Gustave d’Eichtal, Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, Moses Hess to Karl Marx was infused with “the trace of a Jewishly religious approach to the ethical meaning of history.”⁵⁵ This was more evident for a later generation of Jewish intellectuals, including Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin, George Lucàs, and Gershom Scholem, who combined redemptive Jewish messianic religious

(Muslims) to adopt an approach that he considered to be its essence.” Asad, “Muhammad Asad Between Religion and Politics.”

⁵³ Kalmar and Penslar, “Orientalism and the Jews: An Introduction,” xviii.

⁵⁴ Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism*, 2.

⁵⁵ Sutcliffe, “Religion and the Birth of Jewish Radical Politics,” 34.

thought and radical secular utopian beliefs.⁵⁶ David Biale argues that from the seventeenth century through the twentieth century the most important modern Jewish secular thinkers rejected particularism associated with Judaism and embraced secular universalism instead.⁵⁷ He argues that “the vehemence with which some secular Jews reject Judaism and embrace abstract universalism certainly appears to be peculiarly—if not uniquely—Jewish.”⁵⁸ Thus, as Sutcliffe argues, Jewish espousal of universal views should be seen in dialogue with Judaism, “as an inversion of normative Judaism, rather than as an exit from it.”⁵⁹

Where does this depiction of German Jews leave Marcus? Why should Jewish utopianists only be associated with the Left and with secularism? And why should faith in eighteenth-century ideals ultimately culminate in a turn to nonreligious universalism known as socialism? Marcus, who was rather conservative, did not construct an identity beyond religion, for he converted to Islam.

Educated in a humanistic *Gymnasium*, Marcus remained devoted to the classic liberal formulation of *Bildung* as individual self-development leading to the transcendence of difference culminating in universal harmony and tolerance.⁶⁰ Yet unlike other Weimar-era Jews, Marcus saw *Bildung*'s perfect expression in Islam. Marcus's writings, especially his discussions of

⁵⁶ Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity*.

⁵⁷ Biale, *Not in the Heavens: The Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought*, 24-5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁹ Sutcliffe, “Religion and the Birth of Radical Politics,” 34.

⁶⁰ Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840*; and Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 32-3.

Goethe, are similar to Weimar-era German Jewish adulation of the writer who first formulated the concept of *Bildung*.⁶¹ Dissimilar to other Germans of Jewish background, however, Marcus analyzed Goethe's connections not with Judaism, but with Islam. He asserted he was attracted by Islam's *Bildung*, its encouragement of individual cultivation of reason and spiritual potential leading to a society founded on race-blind universalism. As many Weimar Jews adopted the antirational ideals of modernism, romanticism, Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), and Zionism (Jewish nationalism) instead,⁶² ironically, it is Marcus (minus the socialism) who best illustrates Mosse's German Jew who remains loyal to *Bildung* and dedicated to rationalism to the very end.⁶³

Nietzsche and Islam

In an essay titled "Der Islam und die Philosophie Europas" (Islam and European Philosophy), published in the *Moslemische Revue* in 1924 (with an English version appearing in the *Islamic Review* in 1925) Marcus reflects a liberal Jewish approach to Islam, but then takes it a step further. Marcus argues Islam is the most modern, progressive, advanced, and rational of religions. The reason is that Muslims are taught to use their reason to choose a practical path between extremes, and he notes parallels between Kant's ethics and the ethics of Islam, as well as drawing other parallels to Hegel and Nietzsche.⁶⁴ If Hegel envisioned history as a process of

⁶¹ See the collection of essays in *Goethe in German-Jewish Culture*.

⁶² Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*.

⁶³ Hermand "German Jews Beyond Judaism: The Gerhard/Israel/George L. Mosse Case," 240-4; Volkov, "German Jewish History: Back to *Bildung* and Culture?" 225-7.

⁶⁴ Marcus, "Der Islam und die Philosophie Europas."

steadily advancing consciousness, thus making all progress rational, Marcus argues Islam is the culmination of the progress of the intellect, for it “demands nothing of you which cannot be brought to agree with the human intellect,” as “all of its teachings are necessarily derived from Intellect.”⁶⁵ Moreover, he argues not only that Islam is the natural religion promoted by Kant, but that it is also in concord with Kant’s conception of cosmopolitanism, since its moral teachings offer a plan for the good of society and the love of mankind, and promote peace and world citizenship.⁶⁶ Referring to Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch* (superman), Marcus argues that like Nietzsche, Islam promotes self-discipline and self-reflection, leading to self-perfection. Islam is based on the control of the passions and emotions through a good will, analogous to Kant’s good will, the only real good in the world. As Marcus concludes, “One sees that there are everywhere points of coincidence between Islam and the deepest European [read: German] thought.”⁶⁷

Having briefly presented the alleged affinities between Islam and Nietzsche’s concept of the *Übermensch* in his 1924 overview of philosophy, in “Nietzsche und der Islam” published two years later, Marcus develops what he perceives to be further equivalences.⁶⁸ Here again Marcus’s writing promotes his claim that Islam is part of German cultural history. Between 1890 and 1945, Germans with extremely different utopian aims—anarchists, the artistic avant-garde, conservative revolutionaries, expressionists, feminists, futurists, nationalists, Nazis, religious reformers, sexual libertarians, socialists, vegetarians, *völkisch* groups, youth movements, and

⁶⁵ Marcus, “Islam and the Philosophy of Europe,” 295.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁶⁸ Marcus, “Nietzsche und der Islam.”

Zionists alike—selectively appropriated Nietzsche’s critical ideas to suit their widely diverging political and cultural projects for overcoming Germany’s problems.⁶⁹ Marcus did likewise and adopted Nietzsche’s method of syncretizing various strands of thought to create new values and norms. Moreover, Marcus’s turn-of-the-twentieth-century literary and formal education had been shaped by people inspired by the early Nietzsche, particularly the ideas in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872).⁷⁰ Marcus participated in the circle around the “prophet” and “poet-seer” Stefan George, which was inspired by Nietzsche’s call for a “rediscovered German spirituality on a new creative basis,” and then studied at the University of Berlin with the “Nietzsche enthusiast” Georg Simmel, who argued that Nietzsche had “criticized traditional morality . . . in order to make way for a superior morality.”⁷¹

In “Nietzsche und der Islam,” Marcus correlates Nietzsche’s best-known concepts—including the notions of the Dionysian and Apollonian spirits and the *Übermensch*—with Islamic ideas. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85),⁷² Nietzsche “established a bridge to the Orient” (i.e., the Islamic world), Marcus asserts, just as Goethe had done with his *West-östlicher Diwan*. Notwithstanding that the two authors had very different outlooks, both works’ central thrust is a reinterpretation of the thought of key Persian figures—Zoroaster for Nietzsche, Hafiz for Goethe.

⁶⁹ Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*, 7-8, 308.

⁷⁰ *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*.

⁷¹ Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 72, 41-2; Bestätigung, Königliche Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin. On Nietzsche’s influence in the Stefan George circle, see Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 71-84.

⁷² *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*.

In order to explore the connection to the “Orient,” Marcus discusses Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. Marcus presents Nietzsche’s distinction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian spirits, the former the passionate attitude to life of a heroic and tragic man, who, in order to experience ecstasy, doesn’t shy away from misery, death, and disappointment, which leads to both happiness and suffering. In contrast, the idyllic and ascetic Apollonian man, in order to avoid tragedy, forgoes moments of supreme happiness, avoiding extremes, “moderating his drive with reason in order to escape great suffering.”⁷³

Whereas Nietzsche argues that ancient Greek tragedy was the apex of art, because it perfectly harmonized these two elements, Marcus, fitting his aim to reconcile German philosophy and Islam, claims instead it is in fact Islam where “both perspectives are united. They complement each other.”⁷⁴ Bringing together Nietzsche’s finding that the culture of the Islamic world had a Dionysian core with Goethe’s depiction of an Apollonian East, Marcus then explains how Islam unites the two German writers’ approaches and the two fundamental principles:

The spirit of holy ecstasy fills Islamic devotion. It elevates the soul to a Dionysian condition that other religions lack. In the Muslim religious service, each participant takes an active part, with body and soul. By encompassing the entire human being, Muslim devotion elevates man to a Dionysian condition. By limiting ecstasy to religion, it

⁷³ Marcus, “Nietzsche und der Islam,” 80.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81. The deployment of the idiom was so widespread that even some Jews at that time argued Eastern European Jews were Dionysian and Western European Jews Apollonian; their synthesis would bring about a Jewish Renaissance in Germany. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 97.

remains within safe bounds. On the other hand, we notice in Muslim moral teachings a distinctly Apollonian attitude. Rational moderation is key here. Alcoholic intoxication is forbidden. Providing for others is demanded. Channeled into devotion, the Dionysian is banished from daily life. Daily life is under the sign of Apollonian thinking. In this way, Islam reconciles the two great perspectives.⁷⁵

The reader senses that one of the reasons Marcus is drawn to Nietzsche is the latter's celebration of non-Christian culture. For Marcus what was most attractive about Nietzsche's philosophy was his criticism of Christianity for its pessimism, its self-denial, as a religion that "says a 'no' to life," Subhash Kashyap writes. "It is a religion of decadents. It elevates the slave-virtues—meekness, humility, compassion, mercy, pity. It denies all the good, life-promoting instincts."⁷⁶ Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity, particularly its other-worldliness, focus on suffering and pity, and Christian-based morality, reflected and contributed to a widespread crisis

⁷⁵ Marcus, "Nietzsche und der Islam," 81-2.

⁷⁶ Kashyap, "Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche," 178. Iqbal wrote that Nietzsche's "voice is a peal of thunder. Those who desire sweet songs should fly from him. He has thrust a sword into the heart of the West, his hands are red with the blood of Christianity. He has built his house of idols on the foundations of Islam, his heart is a believer though his brain denies. . . ." Muhammad Iqbal, *Piam-i-Mashriq*, in Kashyap, "Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche," 179. Iqbal labeled Nietzsche "a faithless Muslim." Marcus, "Nietzsche und der Islam," 79. Nearly a century later, another European Muslim also sought to correlate Nietzsche's philosophical writings and Islam. See Jackson, *Nietzsche and Islam*.

of faith and search for other sources of spirituality in Germany. It led some Germans to “redirect and regenerate the religious impulse,” to develop “new configurations of faith.”⁷⁷

Marcus directed this impulse toward what was a new cult in Germany, Islam. A tragic-heroic rather than a superficial, rose-colored optimism is common to both the great German philosopher and Islam, he observes. “Make wings from your suffering!” and “We grow through those things that almost kill us,” Nietzsche writes. Likewise, Islam “teaches that we have to struggle hard to realize the good. God has given us all the conditions to excel. But we have to freely use them and intensify our powers.” Humankind must rise above simple contentment and the desire for self-preservation. “This is the same as Nietzsche’s teaching of man as something that has to be overcome through man himself,” Marcus claims. Islam believes in the unending possibilities of inward spiritual development, self-awareness, and self-mastery, in other words, in Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*.⁷⁸ Seeking convergences with this journey of self-cultivation, Marcus comments that “Islam, too, conceives the progress of humanity as the realization of God,” despite the fact that Nietzsche denied a progressive course of history asserting instead a kind of entropy where in the natural course of events the weak and herd-like conformers and their deadly and stultifying morality and tradition and institutions prevail. More important, Nietzsche explicitly linked the superman—who was beyond traditional Christian morality and measures of good and evil—with the *death* of God. But by the death of God, Nietzsche meant that the God of European Christianity had outlived His usefulness, for the “truths” of that religion were actually falsifications because they were otherworldly and utopian, rather than life-enhancing, which

⁷⁷ Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 201-2.

⁷⁸ Marcus, “Nietzsche und der Islam,” 82.

Marcus agreed with.⁷⁹ Moreover, slavish conformity to the Church and its dogma had led to a society that was “empty, materialistic, and despiritualized.”⁸⁰ Facing this crisis, Marcus would have Europeans adopt the God of Islam as the life-affirming principle that would enable people to live a vibrant, purposeful, spiritual life, a solution with which Nietzsche probably would not have agreed. As another scholar has noted in regard to a more recent Muslim adoption of Nietzsche, “Rather than seek to rehabilitate a decadent religion, Nietzsche’s free-Spirited experimenters would attempt to hasten the process of its creative destruction.”⁸¹

Be that as it may, Marcus appears as both “Islamist” and Nietzschean. This is revealed when one looks carefully at his envisioned utopia. The political aspect of Marcus’s utopia consists mainly of claims that all laws are spelled out in the Qur’an, and the governmental model is that of the leadership of Muhammad and the first community of believers in seventh-century Medina. For Marcus, Muhammad was a democrat, ruling only as “the first among those of equal birth.”⁸² The government Marcus envisions is a “democracy of aristocrats,” combining

⁷⁹ Some German Jews at the time also claimed the idea of the Übermensch to be a basis of Jewish faith as well, or used the concept to link Greek thought and Judaism. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany*, 99-100.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁸¹ McNeal, “Roy Jackson, Nietzsche and Islam.”

⁸² Marcus, “Muhammad’s Personality: The First Democrat-Prophet, The First Cavalier-Prophet,”

Nietzsche's "community of nobles" with Muhammad's aristocratic democracy, which is "an aristocracy of achievement" rather than an inherited aristocracy of class.⁸³

Mass conversion and the introduction of an Islamic state, Marcus contends, would transform Europe, bringing about a new era of peace, an end to party politics and to strife. It was also a way to revitalize Europe's spiritual life. Christianity had not only brought about mass death and destruction in the Great War, but is itself "dead"—Christians had killed their own construct of God and religion. Islam, on the other hand, is "the religion of eternal self-renewal,"⁸⁴ the path to revitalization.

⁸³ Marcus, "Nietzsche und der Islam," 83. "In truth, democracy and aristocracy are not at all two contrasts that exclude each other. The so-called liberal doctrine and its mixture of democratic and aristocratic components reveal this. Liberalism fights against all prejudices and barriers and demands equal opportunities for all. But it doesn't insist on the equality of abilities; rather, it desires the most superior abilities to triumph. The goal is an aristocracy of achievement, made possible by democracy. When accompanied by social measures, this aristocracy is the greatest basis of progress. But how was it possible for a contrast between democracy and aristocracy to arise? Hereditary aristocracy is the problem. What is needed is the reintroduction of the aristocracy of achievement, an inwardly genuine, individual aristocracy against the aristocracy of class." *Ibid.*, 84. Thus "the main principle for the envisioned government is 'All human beings are equal.' This is the teaching of the perfect aristocratic democracy, and Islam has set itself the task to realize it. And indeed, in the right mixture of aristocratic, democratic, liberal and social measures consists the well-being of each society." *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁴ Marcus, "The Message of the Holy Prophet," Part II, 273, 274.

Marcus does not envisage the annihilation of the past, however, but rather a return to the high point of German culture—Weimar classicism. Goethe, the titan of the Weimar Enlightenment, or *Aufklärung*, had effectively converted to Islam, he contends—and modern Germans would be well advised to do likewise. Marcus devotes more time to describing the past, detailing the affinities between Germanness and Islam, than to a very well spelled out blueprint for the future, which is why it should be read as an allegory rather than remedy, although he does advocate an Islamic state. But his understanding is based on his interpretation of Goethe’s approach to Islam.

Goethe as Muslim and Homosexual Role Model

For German converts to Islam like Marcus, Goethe attracted a considerable amount of attention, for the greatest German poet had great personal affinity for the Qur’an and Muhammad.⁸⁵ His praise legitimized Islam for Germans. Goethe has been called “the role model for a German Islam” for good reason.⁸⁶ While a few other German Enlightenment intellectuals, such as

⁸⁵ Two other Weimar German converts also publicized Goethe’s views on Islam and interpreted them as if the poet had virtually converted. See Ehrenfels, “Goethe und der deutsche Islam”; and Fischer, “Ist der Islam ‘unmodern’? Eine Parallele zwischen der alten Religion und dem heutigen Europa,” 71. See also Grützmacher, “Goethes Würdigung des Islam.” For more recent examples, see the various articles in *Islamische Zeitung*, Thema: Goethe, including Gross, “In Islam leben und sterben wir alle: Goethe, Wagner, Nietzsche, Rilke, Jünger und der Islam,” and Al-Murabit, “Goethe als Muslim” ; see also ibn Rassoul, *Bruder Johann Ibn Goethe: Die unbekannte Überzeugung des deutschen Dichters zum Islam*.

⁸⁶ von Arnim, “Goethe als Leitfigur eines deutschen Islam?”

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) depicted Muslims in a positive light in their work, as Katherina Mommsen has demonstrated, Goethe surpassed them, as “his statements are more daring and provocative than anything previously heard in Germany,” for he expressed “an exceptional empathy” for Islam and an “extraordinarily positive attitude toward it” throughout his life.⁸⁷ As a 23-year-old, he composed “Muhammads Gesang” (“Muhammad’s Song,” 1773), as a 70-year-old, he declared publicly that he contemplated “devoutly celebrating that holy night, when the Qur’an, in its entirety, was revealed to the Prophet from on high.”⁸⁸ In between, he “testified in various ways to his admiration for Islam,” such as in his incomplete “Muhammad Tragedy,” the “most remarkable act of homage that a German poet had ever rendered the founder of Islam.”⁸⁹

Above all, this sympathy is seen in one of Goethe’s greatest works, the *West-östlicher Diwan*, written with the aim of bringing about “a spiritual bridge from West to East,” which “includes the astonishing sentence: the writer of the book ‘does not even reject the supposition that he may be a Muslim.’”⁹⁰ In the *West-östlicher Diwan*, in which he adopts several Muslim

⁸⁷ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 157; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 70.

⁸⁸ Noten und Abhandlungen zum *West-östlichen Diwan*, quoted in Mommsen, “Goethe’s Relationship to Islam,” 12; idem, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 157; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 70.

⁸⁹ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 157, 194; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 88.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Mommsen, “Goethe and the Arab World,” 88, idem, “Goethe’s Relationship to Islam,” 12, and idem, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 157.

pseudonyms for himself, Goethe writes as both a Christian, German European, and as a Persian, Middle Eastern Muslim, “a thoroughly *hybridized* cultural figure.”⁹¹ Goethe enjoyed “playing the Muslim,” toying with the assumed boundaries separating Christians and Muslims, writing: “Who knows himself and others well/No longer may ignore:/Occident and Orient dwell/Separately no more./’Twixt two worlds I love the way/Back and forth a man may sway;/So between the East and West/Moving to and fro’s the best.”⁹² The poet enjoyed wearing a white turban of muslin (symbol of conversion to Islam) and claimed in the *West-östlicher Diwan* that it was better to wind a muslin cloth (as a Muslim emperor) than wear a crown (like a Christian king), for “muslin looks much better.”⁹³ In the last book of the *West-östlicher Diwan*, when at the gate of Paradise the poet (Goethe) is asked “Have you sure and certain ties/To our Muslim doctrine dear?”—he replies in the affirmative, “No more quibbling or delay! Go ahead and let me in.”⁹⁴ Most famously, the *West-östlicher Diwan* includes the poem “I find it foolish, and quite odd,/That stubborn folk seek to deny:/If “Islam” means we all serve God,/We all in Islam live and die.”⁹⁵ In “Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the *West-East Divan*,” Goethe

⁹¹ Bidney, “Introduction,” xxix.

⁹² “Who knows himself and others well,” Poem 242, *West-East Divan*, 167. This poem was not published by Goethe. See Mommsen, “Goethe and the Arab World,” 92.

⁹³ “Come, darling come! My cap needs winding well!” Poem 161, *West-East Divan*, 95. See Mommsen, “Goethe and the Arab World,” 86.

⁹⁴ “Admittance,” Poem 234, *West-East-Diván*, 154. See Mommsen, “Goethe and the Arab World,” 83.

⁹⁵ “I find it foolish, and quite odd,” Poem 128, *West-East Divan*, 78. In “Zu Goethe und der Islam—Antwort auf die oft aufgeworfene Frage: War Goethe ein Muslim?”

expresses admiration for Muhammad, an “extraordinary” man, whom he considered a prophet and not merely a poet, and says that the “truly sublime” Qur’an “attracts me, astonishes me, and in the end elicits my admiration.”⁹⁶

What has been largely overlooked until now is that in the 1920s and 1930s Marcus (and other German Muslims, as today) took Goethe’s encounter with and sympathetic view of Islam as precedent for their own, modeling their embrace of the religion on his “conversion.”⁹⁷ In fact,

Mommsen argues that the two Goethe quotes in particular—“that the author (of the West-East Divan) does not deny being a Muslim,” and “in Islam we all live and die”—have been misinterpreted to mean that Goethe was a confessing Muslim because they have been taken out of their textual context. The first is picked out of a passage which is intended to mean that Goethe writes as a traveler, who behaves in a foreign land like a traveler should—“when in Shiraz do as the Persians”—a statement made to provoke and raise the curiosity of Germans prior to the book’s publication. The second quote is connected to his universal critique of dogmatism and intolerance. He did not mean Islam as institutionalized religion, rather, submission to the will of God. Rather than speak about membership in a religious community, Goethe called on his acquaintances to accept human subservience to fate determined by a higher power—the same is true for all people, regardless of confession, thus intolerance and religious zeal are pointless, as no confession is superior.

⁹⁶ “Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the West-East Divan,” 191.

⁹⁷ “Muhammad’s Song” was published in the opening pages of the second issue of the *Moslemische Revue* in 1924, along with these quotes from Goethe’s 1827 conversations with Johan Peter Eckermann (1792-1854) concerning Islam: “As the basis of their religious training,

Goethe's religiosity was an extraordinarily complex phenomenon—despite professions such as those quoted above, he did not feel that he belonged to any religious institution, not even the Lutheran Church, into which he was born—he did not confess to any organized religion.⁹⁸ In considering him a secret Muslim, German converts overlook the objections the poet raised, ranging from his critique of misogyny as expressed in the Qur'an, and in the *Sunnah* and *Hadith*

they indoctrinate their young people first of all in the conviction that nothing could happen to a person that had not been determined long beforehand by a God who guides the universe; with that, they are prepared and at peace for their entire lives and need hardly anything more” and “You see that his doctrine lacks nothing, and that we, with all our systems, have come no further, and that no one can reach any further.” Goethe, “Mahomets Gesang”; and Sadr-ud-Din, “Goethe über die Moslems.”

⁹⁸ Mommsen argues his “truly positive” view was formed by the correspondance of what his tolerant Enlightenment teachers taught him and his own beliefs and thoughts; together they produced “a very deeply grounded sympathy” and that “deep sympathy resulted in such frank remarks.” Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 166; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 73. He repeated in his work his dictum that “everyone has a religion of his own, his own way of worshipping God.” Ibid., 168; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 74. And he spent his life developing his “own religion” incorporating various facets, from Christianity, pietism, mysticism, Neoplatonism, kabbalism, pantheism, and Islam, from which he identified especially with the belief in predestination and personal submission to fate. In short, “Goethe concentrated his attention on certain aspects of Islam because they were in accordance with his own thoughts and feelings.” Ibid., 201. Rather than convert to Islam, Goethe simply expressed how Islam and his *Weltanschauung* corresponded.

(practices and sayings attributed to Muhammad),⁹⁹ to the prohibition of wine and inebriation,¹⁰⁰ and to Muhammad's (and subsequent Muslims') antagonism toward poets and poetry.¹⁰¹ German converts also remain silent regarding the fact that wine, women, and song, and the celebration of man-boy love are the main themes of the *West-östlicher Diwan*.¹⁰² They avoid engaging with the

⁹⁹ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 362-405; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 174-97.

¹⁰⁰ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 405-36; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 197-213.

¹⁰¹ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 436-75; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 213-34. See especially in *Notes and Commentary* the chapters "Arabs," "Muhammad," "Caliphs," and "Mahmud of Ghazna," and in the *Diwan*, the "Book of Hafiz" and its poem, "Fetwa."

¹⁰² Goethe noted how one of the themes of this work is "the tender feeling for the beauty of the growing boy." Cited in Tobin, *Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe*, 44. In "Saki Nameh: Book of the Cupbearer," the wine-drinking, male Muslim tavern-goer overcome with "lover drunkenness" and the "charming boy" cupbearer, who serves him, his "darling of darlings," express their love for one another, in words and action. *West-East Divan*, Verses 194-217, pp. 123-39. As Goethe notes in his commentary to his work, "Neither intemperate propensity for half-illicit wine drinking nor delicacy of feeling for the beauty of an adolescent could be omitted from the *Divan*. But the latter had to be treated in all purity, in accordance with our morals." Goethe, *Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the West-East Divan*, 240. He then quotes examples from medieval Persian poet Saadi (1184-1291)'s *Rose Garden* (1258),

German poet's ambivalence, his "displaying attraction and repulsion," and explicit denial of core Islamic beliefs, some of which they also repeat.¹⁰³ Irrespective, however, of whether Goethe was a "secret" Muslim (an issue mainly for German converts to Islam), and of his representations of Islam and the "Orient" (a concern for literary scholars), the subject considered here is how Hugo Marcus used Goethe's reading of Islam to construct a vision of a German utopia.¹⁰⁴

including an incident where "an extremely handsome, graceful boy" "wholly enticed" him and another tale of male beauty and love between male friends. Ibid., 241-2.

¹⁰³ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 12. For example, by calling Muhammad the "author" of the Qur'an, Goethe denies that the Qur'an had always existed and was not created. Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 446; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 218. Marcus also considered Muhammad as the author of the Qur'an: "Mohammad produced the Qur'an. He dictated it to his friends. Entirely alone he completed that code. . . . Mohammad is therefore the first and only prophet who has himself composed a book of law. He is the first author, first literateur among the Prophets." Marcus, "Muhammad's Personality," 2.

Goethe could not accept the Islamic division of history between "the age of ignorance," before Islam and "the age of Islam," because for Goethe what mattered most was culture; if it blossomed, as in pre-Islamic times as manifested in its poetry, he claimed, it cannot be considered to have been at a low point. Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 437-9. For Goethe, Arab culture was greater before Islam than after.

¹⁰⁴ For an introduction to the debate concerning the relation between Goethe and Orientalism, mainly focusing on his *West-östlicher Diwan*, see Said, *Orientalism*, xxiv-v, 19; Kontje, *German Orientalisms*; Wilson, "Enlightenment Encounters the Islamic and Arabic Worlds: The German

Marcus compares himself to Goethe in his own conversion narrative:

In 1947, a German newspaper wrote that although I am a staid middle-aged man who carefully considers every step, after having read the Qur'an, I imprudently converted to Islam. In fact, already as a youth, when studying an old translation of the Qur'an in my hometown, I had felt it to be my innermost desire to learn about Islam. It was the same edition from which Goethe had become acquainted with Islam. Already back then the absolutely rational and at the same time lofty construction of Islamic doctrine made a profound impression on me, no less the powerful spiritual transformation that it effected in Islamic countries. In Berlin, I then had the opportunity to work with Muslims and to hear the enthusiastic and inspiring Qur'an commentaries that Maulana Sadr-ud-Din taught us. After years of active participation in the ideal efforts of this excellent intellect, I converted to Islam, which deprived me of nothing, for it allowed me to preserve the worldview that I had formed for myself. But in addition it gave me several of the most path-breaking human thoughts that have ever been conceived.¹⁰⁵

Marcus's conversion narrative is typical of the conversion narratives of his European and German contemporaries insofar as he depicts Islam as a religion "avoiding all dogmas that are incompatible with modern science," so that "in Islam there is no conflict between faith and

'Missing Link' in Said's Orientalist Narrative"; and May, "Goethe, Islam, and the Orient: The Impetus for and Mode of Cultural Encounter in the West-östlicher Divan."

¹⁰⁵ Marcus, "Warum ich Moslem wurde."

knowledge.”¹⁰⁶ Marcus cited the same reasons as other converts living in that era for accepting Islam: its rationalism, lack of dogma, its compatibility with modern science, lack of conflict between belief and science, its practicality as opposed to idealism, and its tolerance.¹⁰⁷

Yet Marcus’s narrative is unique in the way it describes the initial encounter with Islam. Other converts recount an experience occurring in adulthood, narrating an initial meeting with Muslims and Islam in an exotic, non-European locale, sometimes in the service of the empire in Africa or while stationed in the Middle East during World War I, usually set to a backdrop of the Arabic call to prayer in a mosque.¹⁰⁸ In great contrast, Marcus’s initial introduction is during his youth, when he studied a German translation of the Qur’an in his hometown library in provincial Posen (now Poznań in Poland). Not only does Marcus not have to travel to a Muslim-majority society to meet Islam for the first time, but Islam has already been made meaningful and understandable to him, for the Qur’an has been translated into German. There is no need for him to learn Arabic, Islam is manifest in his own language, without mediation. Moreover, Islam has been in his town for over a century: the Qur’an translation dated back to 1750 and was the edition from which Goethe also drew his knowledge on Islam. Thus the initial encounter is not mediated by an Arab or a Muslim in the Middle East, but is legitimized by Germany’s greatest poet.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁷ Rahman, “Why I became a Muslim”; Fisher, “Why Islam Appeals to Me”; Nicholson, “Some Reasons for Accepting Islam”; von Ehrenfels, who had converted in 1927, “The How and Why of Conversion to Islam”; and Robert, “Warum ich aus der römisch-katholischen Kirche austrat.”

¹⁰⁸ Schütz, “Wie ich Moslem wurde”; Saunders, “Why I Embraced Islam.”

Marcus's narrative then moves from teenage encounter in the German provinces, to meeting actual Muslims—at first the foreign students he tutored—in the German capital as an adult, a mature man in his mid-forties.¹⁰⁹ Two more steps were required before he became a Muslim. First, he worked with Muslims, and listened to the “inspiring” Qur’an commentaries of Sadr-ud-Din, the founder of the first Ahmadi Muslim Mission at Berlin. Again we see that Germanness is primary in his account. Having already read the Qur’an in German translation on his own as a teen, as an adult he listened to sermons about the Qur’an in German in Berlin in Germany’s only mosque. Finally, after years of working together with Sadr-ud-Din—as editor of the German-language mosque publications—Marcus embraced Islam. Adopting Islam, moreover, he claims, allowed him to preserve his former worldview. His conversion narrative, echoing his philosophical writing, argues that Islam and German values and philosophy converge.

In a lengthy lecture on Goethe delivered at the mosque in the 1920s and then reworked two decades later, Marcus explores Goethe’s main writings on Muhammad and Islam.¹¹⁰ He notes that “Goethe was rumored to have become a Muslim in his advanced age. Heinrich Heine talks of him as the grand old Muslim. Other, very different voices declare the same thing.” While “those voices have faded,” it is commonly known and accepted “that Goethe maintained a relationship with Islam that was very close, sometimes downright intimate. And for Islam, this is

¹⁰⁹Hildegard Rahet Scharf of Berlin was also introduced to Islam by a Muslim student in Berlin to whom she was giving German lessons. Scharf, Schneider, and Gohl, “Drei Europäerinnen Bekennen Sich Zum Islam,” 53-4. Saffiah Irma Gohl of Munich also narrates being introduced to Islam by an Egyptian student, which led to her conversion. *Ibid.*, 56-9.

¹¹⁰Marcus, “Goethes Begegnungen mit dem Islam.”

a fact of no little significance.” After World War II, Goethe, “was still being celebrated alike in Western as well as in Eastern Europe and America as the humanly richest and most interesting personality produced by the West, and as Germany’s greatest poet.”¹¹¹

Marcus notes that Goethe concerned himself with Islam in two periods of his life: “As a young man of 23, he began his studies of Islam. . . . As an old man of 65, he picked them up once more and completed them,” according to Marcus, by becoming Muslim.¹¹² Marcus is referring to Goethe’s composition of the Muhammad poem while young and the *West-östlicher Diwan* when mature. To Marcus, Goethe’s encounter with Islam was anything but superficial, for it was lifelong, and exactly like that recounted by Marcus in his own conversion narrative, for “already as a young man (Goethe) studied the Qur’an and assembled a collection of Qur’anic sayings, which he deeply engraved in his memory.”¹¹³ One of the Qur’ans that Goethe studied was the German translation published in Goethe’s hometown Frankfurt, “the city where the German emperors were crowned.” To Marcus, “this demonstrates that Islam was already beginning to attract the attention of Europe’s elite,” a group in which he includes himself. Exploring Goethe’s early work “Muhammad’s Song,”¹¹⁴ Marcus reads into the poem the Islamic theme, absent from the original, that humanity has distanced itself from God, yet still harbors a yearning for God, which God also shares. God therefore sends a prophet who can lead humanity back to God, but only when people actively endeavor to God’s path do they find success and salvation. As increasing numbers of people follow the prophet, the poem says, first his family,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1.

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁴ Goethe, “A Song to Mahomet.”

then his tribe, then his people, and finally the entire continent, all “blossom; mosques, castles, palaces, cities rise up from the earth; even a fleet connects the continents and carries the prophet’s and God’s fame throughout the world.” Marcus comments that Goethe celebrates Muhammad “as humanity’s greatest cultural carrier, and it is demonstrated how the submission to the will of God renders peoples great and fosters progress,” which is not quite what the poem is saying.¹¹⁵

Marcus emphasizes Goethe’s striking imagery. Muhammad is “the pure spring that gushes forth from the mountain of God. The small mountain brooks encounter this foaming source as it flows, then the great rivers, finally the proud streams of the plain pour into it, and in this way it finally broadens to the sea.” Marcus interprets this to mean that “if the spring is the prophet, the streams are the peoples, [and] the sea is the global Islamic brotherhood.”

Marcus explains that to grasp this poem in its full meaning, one needs to know that Goethe wrote it “the day after he had finished reading the [most] famous work of poetry German literature then knew: [Friedrich Gottlieb] Klopstock (1724-1803)’s, “Der Messias” (“The Messiah”).¹¹⁶ Marcus claims that “Muhammad’s Song” is Goethe’s response to Klopstock’s adulation of Jesus as Christ and the path to Heaven and God through Jesus’s divine mediation. It is obvious to Marcus that Goethe’s point of view is “also the Islamic point of view. And Goethe is right to proclaim it through the prophet Muhammad.”¹¹⁷ Marcus asserts: “In conversations and letters at that time, Goethe resisted nothing as bitterly as the teaching of Christ’s divine nature

¹¹⁵ Marcus, “Goethes Begegnungen mit dem Islam,” 5-6.

¹¹⁶ Klopstock published the last cantos of *The Messiah* in 1773; the first had been published twenty-five years earlier. He met Goethe in 1775.

¹¹⁷ Marcus, “Goethes Begegnungen mit dem Islam,” 6-7.

and the Pauline crucifixion.” For Goethe, Christ was entirely what he is for every Muslim: “a prophet and an excellent, extraordinary human being thoroughly worthy of admiration, but no God.” Marcus concludes “Goethe opposes the idea of Jesus being God’s son as much as any other superstition . . . Goethe is entirely on the side of Islam, [he] is indeed Muslim.”¹¹⁸

Marcus presents other writings in which Goethe appears to identify himself with Islam. One is the “Hymn,” based on the sixth Sura of the Qur’an, in which God reveals Himself to Muhammad by way of the sun, moon, and stars.¹¹⁹ Marcus explains that the significance of this poems lies in understanding Goethe’s opposition to “the dogmatism of Christianity,” and “above all against superstition.” Marcus uses this poem to present Islam as a religion of reason. Goethe “demands a modern worldview that does not contradict scientific insight,” which is “something he has in common with the rationalism of his era,” that of the Enlightenment. Marcus criticizes the adherents of the rationalistic Enlightenment, however, for to them, “the world changes, by way of scientific natural observation, into a vast soulless apparatus, into a great mechanical engine without feeling.” For Marcus, Goethe had a different worldview. While Goethe “is against false superstition and for a scientific worldview,” this “does not lead him to a world-machine, but to a loving God, whom one may gradually approach through contemplating the miracle of creation.” Thus, for Goethe, as for Muslims, “God does not disappear behind his works but brilliantly steps forward in them. And while rationalism only perceives a mathematical problem instead of the miracle, for Goethe it is clear that behind the mathematical problem there are final things that will never be soluble by scientific calculation.” With such thoughts, Marcus

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

notes approvingly, “Goethe walks the path of the human being [who is] at once self-confidently knowing and acting, and reverently bowing down and worshipping.”¹²⁰

Goethe, according to Marcus, wages the struggle against dogmatism in the two Muhammad poems. This was already conventional wisdom. But what makes Marcus’s argument unique is his claim that “what Goethe professes in these poems is also the perspective of Islam, which pursues its path to God between superstition and mechanical worldview.”¹²¹

“Muhammad’s Song” and the “Hymn” were precursors to a prose work, a tragedy, about the prophet, which Goethe began, but never completed. Marcus had to find a way to explain how Goethe, who had “never been capable of regarding Muhammad as an imposter,”¹²² could agree to translate Voltaire’s ostensible attack on Muhammad and the Qur’an, *Le fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophete* (1742)—which depicted Muhammad as “a tyrant and deceiver who abuses the credulity of his followers for his own egotistic purposes”¹²³—but fail to complete his own tragedy.¹²⁴ To Marcus, “Goethe thought so highly of Muhammad as to equate him with genius par excellence. . . . (Yet) tragedy represents the tragic downfall of a man; which occurs as a

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 222; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 102.

¹²³ Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 221; idem, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 101.

¹²⁴ Actually the problem for Goethe, as he relates in his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*), was that Muhammad was not only a prophet, but military leader and statesman, and Goethe’s conviction was that “the career of every religious prophet, who wants to convert the world to his belief by force endangers his integrity” Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 202.

consequence of his own guilt. Therefore, a dramatic hero is always burdened with a guilt that demands atonement and [that] finds it by way of his downfall.”¹²⁵ Marcus perceives that as a believer in Islam, Goethe could not accuse Muhammad of any kind of guilt. Goethe was “only capable of profound appreciation, and divine praise of the prophet.”¹²⁶ Goethe was thus unable to write the Muhammad tragedy because a tragedy always contains an indictment. And the charge he wanted to bring against the prophet Muhammad “crumbled in his hands.” The great drama remained unwritten. For Marcus, the fragments that remained of it were poetic compositions of great intrinsic value, which rather than containing an indictment, offer “the most profound appreciation and the highest praise of the prophet.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Marcus, “Goethes Begegnungen mit dem Islam,” 14-5.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15c.

¹²⁷ Katherina Mommsen offers a similar assessment of the work, as the best tribute to Muhammad paid by a German poet up until that time. Mommsen, *Goethe und die arabische Welt*, 194. Contra Marcus, Mommsen argues that to understand why Goethe did not finish this drama one has to consider the context of the poet’s life and work. Goethe was fascinated by “great men,” and also tried to compose dramas about Julius Caesar and Socrates which he never completed. He was also enthralled by characters in the Bible and aimed to write dramas about Ruth and Joseph, and several others, because he burned them before he went to the University of Leipzig in 1765. In 1770, before continuing his studies at the University of Strasbourg, he again burned most of his poetic works. He was still very young and full of ideas when he tried to create a “Muhammad” drama, while busy working as an attorney in Frankfurt. Katherina Mommsen, email communication with author, September 1, 2013.

Marcus not only ignores these practical reasons, but also fails to discuss how in his

Encouraging Marcus's attraction to Islam, and his insistence that Goethe was a Muslim, may also have been rooted in his own homosexuality and his perception that Goethe was a homosexual, too.¹²⁸ This perspective shaped Marcus's life and work. Marcus travelled to Italy to celebrate his twenty-first birthday in the summer prior to enrolling at Berlin University in 1901, because in his day, as in Goethe's, it was considered to be part of the "Orient" where love between males could be expressed without approbation.¹²⁹ For his *Italian Journey* Goethe chose

autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*, Goethe offers an explanation for why he attempted to write the tragedy. For part of the attraction to the life of Muhammad lay in Goethe's own experience with itinerant preachers and would be prophets, such as Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) and Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724-90), and although he does not mention it, the fact that many saw the charismatic Goethe as worthy of being a prophet. Much of his interest in Muhammad and "his work," the Qur'an, can be seen as part of his exploration of the line dividing the spiritual from the earthly, prophet from poet. Goethe perceived that in Muhammad's case, "violent pursuit of his purposes" inevitably casts a shadow on the divine doctrine, and "was convinced that the poet, limiting himself to artistic creativity, is better able to preserve the essence of the divine in its purity" than the prophet. Mommsen, *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, 97.

¹²⁸ On the link made between the Orient and sodomy in British and German literature, see Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*; Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean*; and Wilson, *Goethe Männer Knaben: Ansichten zur "Homosexualität."*

¹²⁹ Marcus traveled to the Isle of Capri and stayed at the luxury hotel Quisisana, where an older German man, steel magnate Friedrich Alfred Krupp (b. 1854), spent several months per year. A

Et in Arcadia ego as the book's motto, although originally he used the German translation, *Auch ich in Arkadien*, "Even I managed to get to paradise." As Robert Tobin has demonstrated, Arcadia is a link "between homosexuality and the Orient," which reaches as far north as Italy, "a homo-utopia, an Arcadia, where sexuality was freer."¹³⁰ Goethe's Italian journey is a journey of sexual awakening in a land which was "a site of homosexual desire in the minds of many eighteenth-century Europeans."¹³¹ Along with his artwork from the trip, including "images of male nudes with prominent genitalia" and erupting volcanoes, he included such couplets as this in his Venetian epigrams: "Boys I have also loved, But I prefer girls; If I'm tired of her as a girl, She can serve me as a boy as well!"¹³²

On the occasion of Goethe's two hundredth birthday in 1949, Marcus published "Goethe

little over a year after Marcus's stay at the hotel, in November 1902, the Social Democrat journal *Vorwärts* outed Krupp, alleging that he had sexual relations with local boys and men, and that his boyfriend was an eighteen-year-old barber and musician named Adolfo Schiano. Italian newspapers were also filled with these claims. A week later Krupp committed suicide. Herzer, *Magnus Hirschfeld: Leben und Werk eines jüdischen, schwulen und sozialistischen Sexologen*, 74-5.

¹³⁰ Tobin, *Warm Brothers*, 57.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹³² Quoted in Tobin, *Warm Brothers*, 97. This provides evidence of either his own experience, or at least his knowledge of homosexual sex practices.

und die Freundesliebe” (“Goethe and Homosexuality”) in the world’s leading homosexual journal, *Der Kreis*,¹³³ using a term for homosexuality (*Freundesliebe*) popular among early twentieth-century German homosexuals.¹³⁴ Marcus begins with Goethe’s motto: “I decided, in order not to envy others, to love boundlessly.” The article is a detailed analysis of homosexual themes in Goethe’s work, including the admiration of male beauty and homoerotic sensibility in *Letters from Switzerland*, the Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*, and the poem “To the Moon” (“An den Mond”); and the theme of pederasty in *Faust*, and “The Elf King” (“Erlkönig”). He applauds Goethe for having boldly stated, “In actual fact, Greek pederasty is based on the fact that, measured purely aesthetically, the man is after all far more beautiful, more excellent, more perfect than the woman. ... Pederasty is as old as humanity, and therefore it may be said that it is rooted in nature, although at the same time it is against

¹³³As was common in an era in which homosexuals were persecuted, Marcus wrote under a pseudonym, Hans Alienus. Alienus, “Goethe und die Freundesliebe: Zu des Dichters zweihundertstem Geburtstag.” On *Der Kreis* see Kennedy, *The Ideal Gay Man: The Story of ‘Der Kreis’*; Steinle, “*Der Kreis*”: Mitglieder, Künstler, Autoren; Portmann, “Konzepte männlicher Homosexualität in der Schweiz 1932-1967: im Spiegel der Zeitschriften ‘Freundschafts-Banner,’ ‘Menschenrecht’ und ‘Der Kreis.’”; Vena, “Etre homosexuel en Suisse : ‘Der Kreis’ et l’homosexualité en Suisse entre 1930 et 1960”; and Rupp, “The Persistence of Transnational Organizing: The Case of the Homophile Movement.”

¹³⁴ Tobin, *Warm Brothers*, 44-5. A young Marcus had declared that *Freundschaft* (homosexuality) is superior to *Liebe* (heterosexual romantic relations). Marcus, *Die Philosophie des Monopluralismus. Grundzüge einer analytischen Naturphilosophie und eines ABC der Begriffe im Versuch*, 67.

nature.”¹³⁵ If the desire for a younger man by an older man, Greek antiquity and culture, particularly the propensity for male-male love, and the cult of friendship were signifiers of homosexuality for Goethe, so too are they in the homoerotic fiction which Marcus published in *Der Kreis*.¹³⁶ Many of the stories appear in the Weimar genre of “queer Bildungsroman,” which chart the transplanted provincial protagonist’s (read Marcus’s) journey from hometown and bourgeois family relations (German-Jews in Posen) to Berlin and homoerotic entanglements.¹³⁷ Marcus discovered Goethe at a young age, in his words, “at a time when passionate friendships

¹³⁵ Alienus, “Goethe und die Freundesliebe,” 7. A young Marcus had also included pederasty as a major theme of his philosophical works, such as in Marcus, *Meditationen*, 199-200. Prior to World War One he also authored *Die Allgemeine Bildung in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft: Eine historische-kritische-dogmatische Grundlegung; Musikästhetische Probleme auf vergleichend-ästhetischer Grundlage nebst Bemerkungen über die grossen Figuren in der Musikgeschichte; Die ornamentale Schönheit der Landschaft und der Natur als Beitrag zu einer allgemeinen Ästhetik der Landschaft und der Natur; and Vom Zeichnerischen, Malerischen, Plastischen und Architektonischen in der Winterlandschaft; Zugl. e. Beitrag z. Klassifikation dieser Begriffe*.

¹³⁶ His homoerotic work published in *Der Kreis* between 1948 and 1958 includes “Ein Paar Schuhe. Ein Kapitel aus einem Roman von Hans Alienus”; “Licht fällt ins Fenster”; “Die Kirche zu den heiligen Brüsten der Jünglinge. Ein Blatt der Erinnerung an den 1. August 1914”; “Stärker als der Tod”; “In Geschäften nach Paris”; “Zwischen alten Papieren ein Blatt”; “Die einander bei Händen und bei Sternen halten”; and “Zufall und Schicksal.”

¹³⁷ Mancini, *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom*, 28.

(read: homosexual relationships) could not be talked about anywhere.”¹³⁸ Goethe’s works “have shone a light from his youth on all phases of his life and provided something unforgettable, since they touch on the highest meaning friendship may achieve. . .Goethe’s words are polar stars, which. . .manage to provide direction and orientation.”¹³⁹

Eastern Wisdom, German Wisdom

In Weimar Germany, writers sought to come to terms with the cataclysm of the Great War of 1914-18, perhaps especially to its defeat. “Into a middle-class world of order and stability, the brutal fact of millions of casualties had ruptured the historical narrative of progress and optimism that had reigned over European life in the pre-war epoch,” Charles Bambach writes. “The unspoken bourgeois faith in both the meaning and coherence of history had been shattered. The Great War brought in its wake a profound disillusionment with the pre-war liberal worldview of academic *Bildung* and a heightened awareness of the power and necessity of ‘destruction’ for any project aimed at cultural renewal.”¹⁴⁰ In order to reconfigure the cultural, political, social, and spiritual order, many sought to annihilate the past, which had brought them such defeat and catastrophe, and to immerse themselves instead only in “the new” and “the now,” while innovatively mapping out the future.¹⁴¹ Some, on the other hand, such as one of the first German Muslims, Hugo Marcus, taking part in the same innovative historical reevaluation, rather than

¹³⁸ Alienus, “Brief eines ‘Mitschuldigen,’” 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Bambach, “Weimar Philosophy and the Crisis of Historical Thinking,” 133.

¹⁴¹ Fritzsche, “The Economy of Experience in Weimar Germany,” 367-8.

casting off the inheritance of the past, sought to reclaim one era, Goethe's other Weimar, and to use its supposed Islamic values as a blueprint for a future utopia.

Marcus defined Islam in German ethical, philosophical, and cultural terms. Marcus's effort is distinct from that of other Muslims in Germany, such as the Sunni Muslims affiliated with the Islamische Gemeinde zu Berlin (Islamic Community of Berlin), who also offered Islam as a panacea for Germany in crisis, presenting Islam as a roadmap to perpetual peace, security, prosperity, and for the rebuilding of a shattered world,¹⁴² for their Islam was not correlated with German culture in any way. Marcus's interpretation is also distinct from that of his well-known contemporary, the South Asian Muslim philosopher, poet and politician Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938),¹⁴³ whose *Payam-e-Mashriq* (1923; *The Message of the East*), was composed as an answer to Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan*, as a dialogue between civilizations. For when the Muslim Marcus wrote about Islam, like other German intellectuals, he was staking a claim in the raging Weimar-era debate "over the most basic political values and beliefs, over what precisely should be the character of Germany in the twentieth century."¹⁴⁴

Even if his Islam was a decidedly German one, Marcus's promotion of Islam can be seen as part of the great fascination with "Eastern wisdom" in the Weimar Republic.¹⁴⁵ This was an

¹⁴² Höpp, "Zwischen Moschee und Demonstration: Muslime in Berlin, 1922-1930," 138.

¹⁴³ Iqbal studied Goethe and Nietzsche and earned a Ph.D. at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich in 1908. Like Marcus, Iqbal viewed Islam from the point of view of German philosophy. Kashyap, "Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche," 175.

¹⁴⁴ Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 106.

¹⁴⁵ Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair: Orientalism in 1920s Central Europe."

era of intellectual and spiritual crisis, when works such as Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918; *The Decline of the West*) and Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922) were best-sellers. Lecture series and novels about the Orient, and translations of eastern classics, mainly Indian and Chinese, such as Richard Wilhelms' translation of the *I-Ching* (1924), and the works of the Buddha and Confucius, became very popular.¹⁴⁶ This was in part due to their critique of European culture, religion, and the Western sense of confidence and superiority, which had been deflated by the Great War. Believing the spiritual world of their fathers to be dead, Germans sought consolation in a different way of knowing, in "Eastern wisdom."¹⁴⁷ Scholars have even called this "therapeutic orientalism," endeavors which helped Germans achieve salvation rather than gain true insight into "the East."¹⁴⁸ It is no coincidence that the first Buddhist and Islamic communities were established in Germany in these years.

It did not escape the attention of society newspapers and the many German visitors at the Berlin mosque—modelled after the Taj Mahal—that the first Muslims wore turbans as part of their formal dress and came from the East. The quirky bohemian and Eastern aspects of the Ahmadi mosque community may indeed be an accurate account of what attracted German intellectuals, including Hermann Hesse and Thomas Mann, to attend an occasional "Islam Evening" lecture given at the mosque by Marcus.

¹⁴⁶ On Wilhelms, whose German hero was Goethe, see Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 463-73.

¹⁴⁷ Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair," 352.

¹⁴⁸ T.J. Lears coined the phrase to refer to the Boston Brahmins. Quoted in Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 472.

It should be born in mind that Marcus argued that being Muslim one did not have to accept extra-European values as guidelines for life; rather, he localized Islam by interpreting it in ways that made it commensurate with his German worldview. As Suzanne Marchand points out, in reference to other Germans who sought Eastern wisdom, “It would, from our perspective, be relatively easy to find lingering Eurocentrism in all this work”¹⁴⁹ – but she does not emphasize it, as Hermann Graf Keyserling (1880-1946), for example, founder of the “Schule der Weisheit” (“School of Wisdom,” Darmstadt, 1920), which was “half Platonic academy and half Buddhist outreach program,” insisted on “Western confrontation with ‘Otherness,’” contrasting “Western spiritual shallowness” with “Eastern spiritual depths.”¹⁵⁰ Marcus’s take was not only Eurocentric, but German.

Like that of other Weimar-era Germans, the cultural work of Marcus was characterized by “first at casting aside older cognitive templates, then at retooling and recalibrating new ones.”¹⁵¹ Rather than jettisoning the older cognitive templates of German history en bloc, however, he chose to celebrate and retain the memory of one era—Goethe’s Weimar. Unlike other salvation-seeking bohemians of his day, Marcus seems anything but counter-cultural, affirming Germany’s cultural heroes and the supremacy of German thought. The “Message of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to Europe,” favors a “conservative revolution” which would bring to power a great leader who ends party politics, and class division, and establishes a society run

¹⁴⁹ Marchand, “Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair,” 353.

¹⁵⁰ Marchand, “Eastern Wisdom in an Era of Western Despair,” 349, and Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 482.

¹⁵¹ Fritzsche, “The Economy of Experience in Weimar Germany,” 360.

by an aristocratic elite.¹⁵² However, his imagined utopia is based, too, on the liberal principle that “all human beings are equal,” and which “fights against all prejudices and barriers and demands equal opportunities for all,” presumably, including members of society like Marcus—a homosexual Jew.

The Nazi seizure of power shattered Marcus’s dream of establishing a Goethean Islamic state in Germany. Other Germans no longer permitted Marcus to call himself a German, let alone a Muslim. To the Nazis he was a Jew, even after he finally renounced membership in the Jewish community of Berlin in 1936. His promotion of the rationalism of “Semitic” religion, here Islam, the inheritor of Judaism, fell on deaf ears in an era in which everything people such as Marcus considered “un-German—brutality, injustice, hypocrisy, mass suggestion to the point of intoxication” flourished.¹⁵³ Like his contemporary and German Jewish convert (to Christianity) Victor Klemperer (1881-1960) —who believed the Nazis were “un-German,” while he himself was “German through and through,” and sought escape in the midst of persecution in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought (his “a Voltairean cosmopolitanism”)—Marcus failed to understand how Germany could have changed so completely. Klemperer and Marcus could not comprehend how Germany could be taken over by a regime “which sees education, scholarship, enlightenment as its real enemies.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, what would have Kant, Lessing, and Goethe said

¹⁵² My thanks to an anonymous reader for highlighting the conservative nature of Marcus’s arguments.

¹⁵³ Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness, 1933-1941: A Diary of the Nazi Years*, 11.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 52, 54, 129, 272.

of an era in which Goethe's work was declared off limits to Jews?¹⁵⁵ As Klemperer notes, a history of Jewish efforts "on behalf of Germanness" after 1933 is "nothing short of tragic."¹⁵⁶

Following the pogrom of November 9, 1938, Marcus was brutalized at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, held in the barracks newly constructed for the thousands of recently arrested Jewish men.¹⁵⁷ Released from Sachsenhausen thanks in part to the efforts of his imam, he slipped over the German border to Basel, Switzerland, just before the outbreak of World War Two with the assistance of his international network of homosexual acquaintances.¹⁵⁸ Choosing to remain in Swiss exile, rather than return to a Federal Republic of Germany that persecuted homosexuals under Paragraph 175, as had Wilhelmine, Weimar, and Nazi Germany,¹⁵⁹ to the end of his long life, Marcus participated in a thriving homosexual circle in Zurich, maintained correspondance with Kurt Hiller, and published philosophical works that used examples from the homosexual

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹⁵⁷ Baer, "Muslim Encounters with Nazism and the Holocaust: The Ahmadi of Berlin and German-Jewish Convert to Islam Hugo Marcus," 163-4; for Marcus's account of the events of 1935 and 1938, see Marcus, "Lebenslauf."

¹⁵⁸ See Baer, "Muslim Encounters with Nazism and the Holocaust: The Ahmadi of Berlin and German-Jewish Convert to Islam Hugo Marcus." For Nazi relations with Islam and Muslims during World War Two, see Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*.

¹⁵⁹ Moeller, "Private Acts, Public Anxieties, and the Fight to Decriminalize Male Homosexuality in the Federal Republic of Germany"; Pretzel, *Homosexuellenpolitik in der frühen Bundesrepublik*; and Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany: Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945-69*.

rights struggle and Islam to prove their points.¹⁶⁰ And, as his continued promotion of Goethe demonstrates, shared Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954)'s call in *Die deutsche Katastrophe*¹⁶¹ to heal Germany (in this case the German-speaking world) through the creation of “Goethe communities” promulgating the great poet’s ideals.

¹⁶⁰ Marcus, *Rechtswelt und Ästhetik*, 6-7, 35-6; Marcus, *Die Fundamente der Wirklichkeit als Regulatoren der Sprache*, 26-7.

¹⁶¹ Meinecke, *Die Deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*; translated into English as *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

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