8 Nietzsche's Peace with Islam

> Still one final question: if we had believed from our youth onwards that all salvation issued from someone other than Jesus, from Mahomet for instance, is it not certain that we should have experienced the same blessings?
>
> —Letter to Elisabeth Nietzsche, June 11, 1865[1]

Nietzsche is twenty-one years old when, in this letter to a sister more convinced of the Lutheran faith than himself, he defends his reasons for abandoning the study of theology at Bonn. The letter, like most of Nietzsche's work, has nothing to do directly with Islam. And yet, in groping for an alternative metaphor to express what he felt to be the *provinciality* of Christianity, Nietzsche reaches for the name Mahomet. It is a gesture which cannot but have provoked the nineteen-year-old Elisabeth: the suggestion that their lives would not have been radically different had they been *Mohammedaner* must have had, at the very least, some intended shock value. This use of Islam as a tool for provinicializing and re-evaluating the "European disease" of Judaeo-Christian modernity was to be repeated in Nietzsche's works with surprising frequency.

To those unfamiliar with Nietzsche's work, the words "Nietzsche" and "Islam" appear initially incongruous. Despite well over a hundred references to Islam and Islamic cultures (Hafiz, Arabs, Turks) in the *Gesamtausgabe*, not a single monograph exists on the subject[2]; in comparison with the wealth of attention devoted to studies of Nietzsche and the 'high Orient' (Buddha, Hinduism, Japanese and Chinese philosophy), not a single article on Nietzsche and Islam can be found in any volume *Nietzsche Studien* up to the present day. The 'low Orient', to use Said's term, does not appear to have stimulated any significant critical interest.

This is a strange state of affairs, when one considers how important Islam was to Nietzsche as an example of "an affirmative Semitic religion".[3] Islam forever hovers in the background of Nietzsche's writing, both published and unpublished; whether it's a remark about the Assassins or a reference to the Prophet's alleged epilepsy, a desire to live in North Africa or a pairing of Goethe with Hafiz, the praise or Moorish Spain or a section on "Turkish fatalism", Nietzsche's interest in Christianity's combative Other appears to increase as the years pass by. "The Antichrist", Nietzsche's last finished work, devotes more attention to the enemies of the Crusades than any of his other books.

Nietzsche's fervent reading of Orientalist texts seems to underline this interest in Islam: Palgrave's "Reise in Arabien" in German translation (1867–1868), Wellhausen's *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (1884)[4], Max Müller's

Islam in Morgen- und Abendland, Benfrey's *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft und orientalischen Philologie* (1869)[5] . . . even when we encounter books in his notes which have no immediate relevance to anything Muslim—such as Schack's book on Spanish theatre—we find an interrogative "über den Islam?" scribbled after it.

Nietzsche's interest in Islam and Islamic cultures and his striking consumption of Orientalist scholarship was certainly driven by a resolve to employ such cultures as a barometer of difference—a ready at hand store of alternative customs and values to undermine the universalist claims of both European Christianity and modernity. This yearning to acquire what Nietzsche called (in somewhat Emersonian tones) a "trans-European eye"[6]—one which, presumably, would save him from the "senile shortsightedness" (*greisenhaften Kurzsichtigkeit*) of most Europeans—finds its most convincing expression in a letter written to a friend, Köselitz, in 1881:

> Ask my old comrade Gersdorff whether he'd like to go with me to Tunisia for one or two years . . . I want to live for a while amongst Muslims, in the places moreover where their faith is at its most devout; this way my eye and judgement for all things European will be sharpened. (own translation)[7]

There is, it should be said, nothing exclusively Islamophilic about this desire to leave Europe behind and live in a radically different culture—four years later, Nietzsche is saying the same thing about Japan in a letter to his sister.[8] What is interesting, however, is not just the considerable length of Nietzsche's proposed stay, but also the resolve to experience the most conservative environment Islam has to offer. There is a typically Nietzschean fascination with extremities here which the Islam of North Africa, Nietzsche feels, is able to provide—a desire to push one's homegrown European sensibilities to the limit, so that their overall rupture in an alien context might enable a radically new kind of knowledge. Not so much a better understanding of Islam, then, but Islam as a means to better understanding oneself. Nietzsche's attitude to Islam—indeed, to most of what he calls the "Orient" or "Morgenland"—almost always retains this ulterior, epistemological function.

Another reason for Nietzsche's inordinate and generally sympathetic interest in Islam may well spring from Nietzsche's own somewhat notorious discomfort with German culture, a form of ethnic and cultural *Selbsthass* which in the closing pages of the *Antichrist* becomes a definite rant ("They are my enemies, I confess it, these Germans: I despise in them every kind of uncleanliness of concept and value."[9]). This would certainly not be the first time in the history of German letters that an intense critique of one's immediate cultural environment and background moved a writer to exaggerated sympathies with a more distant culture. Heine comes to mind as the most obvious example of how such cultural claustrophobia can metamorphose into a longing for the Orient:

> I find all things German to be repulsive . . . everything German feels to me like sawdust.[10]

> Actually, I'm no German, as you well know . . . I wouldn't really be proud, even if I were a German. Oh they are barbarians! There are only three civilised peoples: the French, the Chinese and the Persians. I am proud to be a Persian.[11]

Of course, Heine's Judaism is of critical significance here and facilitates the repugnance he felt, at least in these epistolary moments, to all things German. Despite Nietzsche's claims of Polish lineage, his sense of being an outsider to German culture had to take another form—whereas Heine calls the Germans "des barbares" and deems Persians to be a "zivilisierte[s] Volk", Nietzsche's favourable disposition towards Islam stems from the fact that it is less 'modern', emancipated and democratic, and not more so. It is interesting, nevertheless, that Nietzsche's two favourite German poets both happened to be writers who dedicated significant sections of their oeuvres to the Islamic Orient.[12]

The fact that Islam traditionally occupied the peculiar place of historical opposition to both European Christianity *and* modernity means that Nietzsche's positive remarks concerning Islam usually fall into four related categories: Islam's 'unenlightened' condition vis–à-vis women and social equality, its perceived 'manliness', its non-judgementalism and its affirmative character—one which says "Yes to life even in the rare and exquisite moments of Moorish life!"[13] In all these remarks, a certain comparative tone is forever present, as if Islam was a kind of mirror in which the decadent, short-sighted European might finally glimpse the true condition of his decay.

In Nietzsche's various tirades against "the Christians of 'civilized' Christianity" and the so-called 'progress' of Europe "over and against Asia",[14] Nietzsche's sarcasm often enlists non-European or pre-European instances of a 'purer', pre-Enlightenment attitude to society. Muslims and Arabs, not surprisingly, often find themselves cited favourably alongside other ethnic groups and religions for not having succumbed to pitying and improving the lot of the masses (*das Gesindel*):

> Earlier philosophers (among them Indians as well as Greeks, Persians and Muslims, in short people who believed in hierarchy and *not* in equality and equal rights.[15]

> At the base of all these noble races is the predator . . . Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian vikings . . . on this essential point they are all the same. (own translation) [16]

It is interesting to see what kind of part Islam and Islamic cultures play in Nietzsche's history of *ressentiment*—where the weaker, life-denying, non-

Aryan values of chastity, meekness, equality, etc. were successfully substituted by the "rabble" in place of the stronger aristocratic (*vornehmen*) values of aggression, sexuality and hierarchy. Islamic societies, lumped together bizarrely with samurai, Norsemen, centurions and Brahman, represent a purer and, one feels, a more *honest* understanding of what human beings are. This idea of 'honesty' as being a distinguishing feature between Islam and the "mendacity" of Christianity will be repeated in Nietzsche again and again.[17]

This inclusion of Islam in the Nietzschean catalogue of more 'honest', pre-, non- or even anti-European societies offers two further points of interest: firstly, that Nietzsche's remarks do not greatly differ from the kinds of observations a whole century of European Orientalists were making about Arabs and Muslims in general—that Islam is incapable of democracy, that it is fanatical and warlike, that it is *Frauenfeindlich* and socially unjust, etc.[18] Nietzsche's only difference, ironically, is that he affirms these prejudices instead of lamenting them. Nietzsche, who had never visited a Muslim country and whose closest brush with the 'Orient' was never going to be farther than the 'southern' sensuousness of Naples, relied on a familiar canon of Orientalists for his information about Islam and Arab culture. The fact that Nietzsche's opposition to 'progress' led him to react positively to the kind of racial and generic defamations attributed to the Middle East by these 'experts' leaves us with an interesting dilemma: how do we interpret Nietzsche's anti-democratic, misogynistic but nevertheless positive characterisation of Islam? Do we condemn it for conforming to a whole set of nineteenth-century stereotypes concerning these cultures, or do we interpret it as an anti-colonialist gesture—turning around the heavy machine of European Orientalism and using it to launch an ironic assault on the very modernity which produced it?

A second and by no means unrelated point lies in the fact that Nietzsche's Islam is medieval. Partly because of the figures and events Nietzsche associates with it—Hafiz and the Assassins, feudal Arabs and Moorish Spain—and partly because of the feudalism and social structure which Nietzsche praises for being so untainted by any stain of European 'civilization'. At times, this association of Islam with the Middle Ages can even be quite explicit ("In Morocco", writes Nietzsche, "you get to know the medieval".[19]). Islam, in other words, is not just geographically but also chronologically outside Europe: it is an idea, one which belongs outside history, hovering immutably in an almost Platonic way on the edges of the Mediterranean, denied any notion of development or *Geschichte*.

Nietzsche's characterisation of Islam as a masculine or "manly" religion falls in line with this train of thought. That Nietzsche approved of a perceived Oriental subjugation of women is fairly well known—an attitude most famously expressed in the observation (from *Beyond Good and Evil*) that a "deep man . . . can think about women only like an Oriental".[20] Not surprisingly, "Mohammedanism" is also praised for knowing the true position of women:

> Mohammedanism, as a religion for men, is deeply contemptuous of the sentimentality and mendaciousness of Christianity—which it feels to be a woman's religion.[21]

The most obvious reasons why a Westerner might call Islam a "man's religion"—because of the perceived attitude towards women in Islamic society, and the famously documented references to women in the Koran—are never really examined by Nietzsche. Instead, Nietzsche appears to link Islam with masculinity for two different but connected reasons—because it *fights* and because, in contrast to 'womanish' Christianity, it *affirms*. Through scattered remarks, one can detect a militaristic perception of Islam on Nietzsche's part—an appreciation of the readiness of Islam to extol the defense of the faith (*jihad*) as a righteous deed. These remarks increase in number towards the end of the eighties, when Nietzsche's desire to understand exactly how the slave morality of Christianity came to triumph in Europe inevitably involves the fight against Islam and the *reconquista*. Thus we encounter remarks in the notebooks praising the proximity of the sacred and the sword in Islam, such as: "Comradeship in battle means in Islam fellowship in faith: whoever worships in our service and eats our butcher's meat, is a Muslim".[22] This conjunction of the holy and the bellicose appears to have fascinated the Nietzsche who, at least in some passages, seems to have seen war as the highest affirmation of life.[23] It comes as no surprise therefore that the Assassins—Hasan ben Sabbah's twelfth/thirteenth-century Ismaili sect of elite religious warriors who fought again the Crusades in Syria and the Abbasids in Iran—attract Nietzsche's attention for their combination of otherworldly devotion and "this-worldly" affirmation:

> When the Christian Crusaders in the Orient came across the invincible order of the Assassins, those free spirits *par excellence*, whose lowest rank lived in a state of obedience which no order of monks has ever reached. (own translation)[24]

These words, it should be said, belong to a passage where Nietzsche is admiring not so much the readiness of the Assassins to go to war, but the secret liberty of their esoteric doctrine: "Nothing is true. Everything is allowed". Nietzsche's derogatory comparison of the Assassins with an order of monks emphasizes his Islamophilic rejection of Christianity; the virility of these Persian warrior-monks, unchained to any principle or ethic, are proffered over and above the 'womanish' Christian monks, trapped within the narrow walls of their ascetic, life-fleeing dogmas. Nietzsche seems to have been interested in the possibility of Islam possessing a secret, fundamentally amoral premise—the idea recurs again in *The Gay Science*, this time not with a medieval militant group but an eighteenth-century Arabian sect, the "Wahhabis":

> Thus the Wahhabis know only two mortal sins: having a god other than the Wahhabi god, and smoking (which they call "the infamous way of drinking"). "And what about murder and adultery?" asked the Englishman who found this out, amazed. "God is gracious and merciful," replied the old chief. [25]

The astonished Englishman is Palgrave—Nietzsche had lifted the story out of the 1867 German translation of his *Travels in Arabia*.[26] It is not difficult to see what caught Nietzsche's imagination in both these cases of fundamentally esoteric nihilism: the paradoxical absence of values at the very heart of a faith built on rituals, a moral vacuum which (certainly in the case of the Assassins) does not paralyze action but on the contrary instigates and condones it. These Islamic warrior-monks, insists Nietzsche, are the true "free spirits" and not their cowardly European versions, who "haven't been free spirits for a long time, for they still believe in Truth".[27] It is difficult to think of any nineteenth-century thinker who would rate a medieval Muslim sect as more advanced than the *crème de la crème* of the European Enlightenment. "Has a European Christian freespirit ever lost itself in this sentence and its labyrinthine consequences?" (*Hat wohl je schon ein europaischer, ein christlicher Freigeist sich in diesen Satz und seine labyrinthinischen Folgerungen verirrt*?) (ibid.). Nietzsche's Islam, in other words, is a source of free spirits, a belief system which can produce cultures of moral and ethical flexibility. Nietzsche's generosity towards these knights of Islam does not extend towards their Christian counterparts, the "Switzers" of the Church,[28] whom Nietzsche considers to be nothing more than noble, Nordic animals who prostituted their aristocratic strength for pure material gain. Nietzsche's bias towards Islam is unashamed here, and clearly just as driven by a hatred of German Christianity as by a love of Shi'ia Islam or Moorish Spain; if Islam's advocacy of war is seen as characteristically affirmative and noble, medieval Christianity's equally strenuous advocation of the *Heiliger Krieg* is merely a 'trampling down' of stronger values by weaker ones, the victory of the *Chandala* and the rabble, so that "the whole ghetto-world [is] suddenly on top".[29] Evidently, what is war for an "affirmative Semitic religion" such as Islam counts only as the trampling of a herd for a "negative Semitic religion" like Christianity.

Nietzsche, in whose works not a single quoted line from the Koran is to be found (particularly not such familiar Koranic descriptions of the world as a "plaything and a distraction"), clearly felt there to be something essentially *life-affirming* about Islam. Never appearing even slightly troubled by the core meaning of the word 'Islam' (meaning "submission"), Nietzsche saw Islam more often than not as a faith which refuses to be ashamed of 'manly' instincts such as lust, war and the desire to rule over others (Islam is, after all, "the product of a ruling class"[30]). This resolve to extol the advantages of the Muslim faith at the expense of Christianity culminates

in probably the most significant passage on Islam Nietzsche ever wrote—section 60 of *The Antichrist*:

> Christianity robbed us of the harvest of the culture of the ancient world, it later went on to rob us of the harvest of the culture of *Islam*. The wonderful Moorish cultural world of Spain, more closely related to *us* at bottom, speaking more directly to our senses and taste, than Greece and Rome, was *trampled down* (I do not say by what kind of feet): why ? because it was noble, because it owed its origin to manly instincts, because it said Yes to life even in the rare and exquisite treasures of Moorish life!. . . Later on, the Crusaders fought against something they would have done better to lie down in the dust before—a culture compared with which even our nineteenth century may well think itself very impoverished and very 'late'.
>
> [. . .]The German aristocracy is virtually missing in the history of higher culture: one can guess the reason . . . Christianity, alcohol—the two *great* means of corruption . . . For in itself there should be no choice in the matter when faced with Islam and Christianity, as little as there should be when faced with an Arab and a Jew [. . . .] One either *is* Chandala or one is *not* . . . "War to the knife with Rome! Peace and friendship with Islam!": this is what that great free spirit, the genius among German emperors, Friedrich the Second, felt, this is what he *did*.

In this brief but extraordinary passage, Nietzsche basically declares Muslims to be 'one of us'. The *jasagende* culture of Islamic Spain is bundled together with the Renaissance as a late, doomed flourish of life-affirming thought, a kind of Nietzschean Prague Spring before the slumbering, suffocating weight of Christianity rolled in over it. The closeness of Nietzsche's own association with Islam in this text is particularly striking—closer even "than Greece and Rome", remarkable when one considers Nietzsche's Hellenophilia. Islam, in this context, almost has an Eden-like air about it, a last pocket of Nietzschean innocence before the "corruption" of Christian values. Even Nietzsche's familiar rejection of alcohol (a position reiterated several times throughout his work) seems to give an impression of Islamic sympathy, even if Nietzsche's antipathy towards alcohol has more to do with its metaphysical proximity to reality-denying Christianity rather than any perceived loosening of one's inhibitions.

'War on Rome, Peace with Islam'—when one reads such Turco-Calvinist assertions, remarks which exalt the status of Islam almost to a point of utter solidarity, it is difficult to resist the tempting hypothesis: had Nietzsche's breakdown not been imminent, would we have seen a work dedicated to Islam from his own pen—bearing in mind the steadily increasing number of references from the early eighties onwards, to Islam and the desire to see Eastern lands? If the answer to this question must lie in the negative, it is probably because Nietzsche says very little about what Islam *is*, but only

what it is *not*. Nietzsche's Islam is ultimately vacuous: a constructed anti-Christianity, admittedly associated with some figures and places, but fundamentally built on a certain *Gefühl*, one which feeds on anecdotes lifted out of Orientalist texts or gropes for symbolic figures like the Assassins or Hafiz in order to justify its assertions. Nietzsche's Islam never loses this combative, antagonistic function: Islam is incorporated into Nietzsche's vocabulary, adapted and utilised as a key motif in his argument, but never emerges as an object of interest in itself.

ISLAM AS JUST ANOTHER RELIGION

In the closing pages of his excellent study *Nietzsche and the Jews*, Siegfried Mandel concludes that "in choosing between . . . Jews and Arabs and between Islam and Christianity, [Nietzsche] chose Islam and the Arab". Although many of the ideas Nietzsche criticised in Christianity could also be found in Islam, "it did not suit Nietzsche's argument to note Mohammed's syncretic adaptations" of these Judaeo-Christian borrowings.[31] Whilst this conclusion is true to a large extent, Mandel does not really investigate the many moments in the *Gesamtausgabe* where Nietzsche does appear to categorize Islam unproblematically as just another offshoot of Judaism, alongside Christianity. In contradiction to the spirit of Nietzsche's positive remarks concerning Islam, what we find in these passages is rather a religion just as judgemental, manipulative, life-denying and dishonest as the Christianity it is compared alongside.

The first characteristic which appears to link Christianity with Islam for Nietzsche is the fact that one does not *choose* such faiths, but is rather born into them: "People become Protestants, Catholics, Turks according to their native country, just as one who is born in a wine-growing land becomes a wine drinker".[32] Protestants, Catholics, Turks—like its close relations, Islam is first and foremost a system of imposed beliefs one inauthentically adopts. The remark is early (October 1876) and orientates Nietzsche's general feelings about religion as a clever means of controlling and redescribing daily actions. Most of Nietzsche's derogatory or ambiguous remarks concerning Islam approach the faith from this premise of subtle control, even if the placing of Islam alongside other religions is not always consistent. In considering, for example, philosophers "from the Ural-Altaic linguistic zone" (by which Nietzsche presumably means Japanese as well as central Asian thought systems) "Indo-Germans" and "Muslims" are rather strangely categorized together as having a more developed "concept of the subject" than their 'Far Eastern' counterparts.[33] Nietzsche's point here is grammatical: the presence of a regularly used first- and second-person singular in Indo-European and Semitic languages facilitates the notion of *personal* obligation just as much in Stoicism and Kantian idealism as it does in Islam and Christianity. This idea of a common, unquestionable

morality—an "unconditional obedience"—in Western belief systems as different as "Stoics, the Christian and Arab orders . . . the philosophy of Kant" is often reiterated in Nietzsche.[34] Stoicism, we should not forget, was considered by Nietzsche to be the "work of Semites"—which is why we find the definition of the Stoic as "an Arabian Sheik wrapped in Greek togas and concepts".[35] Neither Islam nor Arabs are exempted from this blanket vilification of Semitism's God-centred imperative ("thou shalt"), which Nietzsche saw as no different in structure from the moral imperative of Kant ("I can therefore I must").

If Nietzsche feels religions—and their founders—to be of a fundamentally manipulative nature, neither Islam nor Mohammed enjoy any special allowances. Sometimes Islam is dismissed generically against a backdrop of world religions—in *The Gay Science*, for instance, where the subject is the "wisdom of all founders of religions" in the construction of prayer:

> Let them, like the Tibetans, keep chewing the cud of their 'om mane padme hum' innumerable times . . . or honor Vishnu with his thousand names, or Allah with his ninety-nine; or let them use prayer mills and rosaries: the main thing is that this work fixes them for a time and makes them tolerable to look at.[36]

Nietzsche's cynicism here extends just as much to the Sufi with his *tesibe* as it does to the Hindu chant and the *Ave Maria*. Prayer as no spiritual vehicle but rather a clever tactic to keep the attention of the simple-minded from wandering away from their day-to-day practices and onto the deeper *raison d'être* of what they do. In this passage, there is no temporal chart to show *how* these religions gradually used the quotidian habits of the common people to justify and strengthen their hold on them. Towards the end of the Eighties, however, Nietzsche seems to have felt that Christianity was the sole cause of a certain *metaphysical* corruption in Islam:

> Mohammedanism in turn learned from Christianity: the employment of the 'beyond' as an instrument of punishment.[37]

> *What* was the only thing Mohammed later borrowed from Christianity? The invention of Paul, his means for establishing a priestly tyranny, for forming herds: the belief in immortality—*that is to say the doctrine of 'judgement'*.[38]

As Orsucci has shown, Nietzsche stumbled upon this idea of the Islamic *jennet* and *jehennem* as a Christian borrowing in Wellhausen's *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*.[39] Two points are of interest: firstly, Nietzsche once again replicates in part the Christocentric assertions of European Orientalism which always depicted Christianity as the *fons et origo* of Islam—the only difference being that instead of crediting Christianity with a central influence

on Islam, Nietzsche *blames* it. Which suggests, secondly, that Nietzsche believed in the existence of an Ur-Islam which was originally uncontaminated by the 'womanish' (*weibliche*) metaphysics of Christianity and its obsession with the other world. An earlier Islam, perhaps, which was even more radically affirmative than the Islam Nietzsche sees in its current state. It is also interesting to note that Paul preserves his role in Nietzsche's work as the epitome of *chandala* corruption and deceit—not simply as the polluter and falsifier of Christianity, but the polluter of Islam as well. In this case, at least, the "syncretic adaptations" (Mandel) of Judaeo-Christianity Nietzsche is forced to admit to within Islam are redescribed as the corrupting forces of Pauline theology—leaving Islam as something higher and fundamentally different from its Jewish and Christian predecessors.

Nietzsche does not always talk about Islam in this way, however. In the frequent associations Nietzsche makes between Mohammed and Plato, no suggestion is made that the former learnt anything from the latter. Both figures are seen as original and rather cunning law-givers—gifted moralizers who knew how to use concepts such as 'God' or 'eternal values' to control people's consciences and acquire power. That Plato should be compared with Mohammed is hardly surprising: Nietzsche had always considered Plato to be an "instinctive Semite" (*Semit von Instinkt*) and a "symptom of decadence" (*Verfall-Symptom*), even if in some places the comparison does seem to be stretched to a peculiar extent:

> What wonder is it that [Plato]—who, as he himself said, had the 'political drive' in his body—tried three times to stage a coup, where a collective Greek Mediterranean state had just appeared to form itself? In this and with his help Plato thought to do for all the Greeks, what Mohammed did for his Arabs: namely, to control the day-to-day living and traditions, great and small, of everyone . . . a couple of coincidences less, a couple of coincidences more, and the world would have experienced the Platonisation of southern Europe. (own translation)[40]

If Nietzsche offers the Prophet Mohammed to us here as an Arab Plato, it is for three reasons. First of all (and here Nietzsche follows Herder and Schlegel) both figures have a talent for redescription—a singular ability for supplying a different, more attractive set of metaphors to describe the world of the common man. This does, of course, move somewhat nearer to the kind of eighteenth-century, Voltairesque stereotype of Mohammed as a cunning and manipulative impostor—even if Nietzsche had elsewhere dismissed Voltaire's assessment of the Prophet as a resentment against "higher natures".[41] Once again, Nietzsche seems not so much to be disagreeing with European Orientalism, but rather affirming and celebrating the very aspects of Islam they purport to deplore. There seems to be with both figures a common emphasis on rhetorical imagination—the founder of Islam and the pupil of Socrates both achieve success (like all "great reformers"[42])

by a certain understanding of the world as a constantly describable collection of circumstances. Secondly, both figures are interested in power—in 'truth' as a means to power. There is nothing exclusively Islamic or Platonic about this idea of concepts such as 'will of God' or 'truth' as a way of controlling the existences of lesser natures; on the contrary, Nietzsche often remarks how "these concepts are to be found at the basis of all priestly organizations".[43] Although Nietzsche most famously applied this cynical use of such beliefs to Christianity, neither Islam nor the Lawbook of Manu (Nietzsche's example of an "affirmative Aryan religion") are exempt from this understanding of religious language as pure *Machtpolitik*.

Finally, and most subtly, there lies in this passage the implicit association of Nietzsche's imagined *Platonisirung des europäischen Südens* with the spread of Islam. Plato's attempt to found a "Mediterranean state" in Sicily acquires all the overtones of a Greek Mohammed, attempting to unite and control his fellow Hellenes in the same way the Prophet, nine centuries later, would bring together and forge an identity for the Arabs. The fact that Islam gained a brief foothold in Sicily underlines the proximity of the analogy, even if Nietzsche fails to comment on this directly. This implicit association of the Islamic expansion with the historical success of Platonism appears at odds with Nietzsche's later depiction of Moorish Spain as a bastion against the life-hating dogmas of a reality-slandering belief system. That Islam is virtually redescribed here as an 'Arab Platonism' underlines the genuine ambiguities towards Islam in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche, as we have seen, considers Islam to be "an affirmative Semitic religion"; it remains difficult to say which of the two adjectives has the most importance for him. When Nietzsche needs a positive example of a Semitic faith to show by contrast how weak and malign Christianity is, Islam is invoked as a paragon of life-affirming values. When, on the other hand, a post-Platonic example of a cunning manipulator of the masses is required, Mohammed is presented as someone who uses the idea of an afterlife to control and subjugate his weaker brethren.

Taken all in all, Islam emerges in Nietzsche's work not as an affirmation of life in itself, but certainly the closest thing to a *jasagende* affirmation the Semitic religions have to offer. It is in this tone of unexpected merit, of comparative accolade, that Nietzsche lauds Islam—as a monotheistic metaphysics which, at least, is more life-embracing and 'manly' than its Judaeo-Christian sister faiths. This attitude of relative commendation is replicated in Nietzsche's praise of Hafiz, the fourteenth-century Persian poet. Just as Islam is a Semitic religion—but nevertheless an *affirmative* one, so Hafiz is presented to us not just as a Romantic, but as an affirmative example of Romanticism. Nietzsche's own definition of Romanticism as the "consequence of dissatisfaction with reality" is, in part, a response to Schopenhauerian pessimism.[44] Nietzsche's Romantic is someone whose gaze is constantly averted elsewhere, usually backwards, away "from himself and his world".[45] Nevertheless, as late as 1886 we find Nietzsche discerning

two ambiguous elements within Romanticism—a desire for destruction and change, and a parallel desire for eternity and being. To this second category belong Rubens, Goethe and Hafiz, artists for whom art stems "from gratitude and love".[46] The vein in which Nietzsche speaks of Hafiz here is the same in which he speaks of the "rare and exquisite treasures of Moorish life"[47]; Hafiz is associated with a this-worldly joy, a deification of the mundane, the transformation of the here and now, without succumbing to the Romantic weakness for deferral and postponement. In other words, Hafiz forms the 'acceptable' face of Romanticism, just as Islam forms the acceptable face of Semitism.

The question, however, remains: which Islam is Nietzsche's Islam? Epileptic prophets[48] or manly warriors? A carbon copy of Judaeo-Christian mendacity or a wholly positive, life-affirming faith? An Islam based on control and submission, or one of joy and celebration? The absence of any real substance to Nietzsche's understanding of Islam renders such questions superfluous; what we see in works such as *The Antichrist* is an interest in Islam which is ultimately semantic. Insofar as he saw Islam as a pool of signs and motifs to dip into and make use of for his own philosophical aims, Nietzsche differs from his Orientalist predecessors and their use of such imagery only in an exaggerated sympathy for Islam—a sympathy he expressed in his own unique and ultimately self-serving terms.