



## 4: Enlightenment Encounters the Islamic and Arabic Worlds: The German “Missing Link” in Said’s Orientalist Narrative (Meiners and Herder)

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THE CRITIQUES OF EDWARD SAID’S 1978 BOOK *Orientalism*<sup>1</sup> were many and varied, and some of them are addressed in the introduction to this volume. For the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant criticism is that Said did not adequately account for developments in the German-speaking lands.<sup>2</sup> Anticipating this criticism, Said attempted to justify his virtual neglect of the German heritage. He argued that he focused on Britain and France because they were “the pioneer nations in the Orient and in Oriental studies,” and also that “these vanguard positions were held by virtue of the two greatest colonial networks in pre-twentieth-century history” (17). Further, he attests that “the sheer quality, consistency, and mass of British, French, and American writing on the Orient lifts it above the doubtless crucial work done in Germany, Italy, Russia, and elsewhere” (17). This is certainly true, though Said introduces a slight note of contradiction when he speaks of the “doubtless crucial work” in these countries and then dismisses its quality. With respect to German scholars in particular, though, the salient point is that they were armchair Orientalists—and thus

the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subject of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual, the way Egypt and Syria were actual for Chateaubriand, Lane, Lamartine, Burton, Disraeli, or Nerval. There is some significance in the fact that the two most renowned German works on the Orient, Goethe’s *Westöstlicher Diwan* [*sic*] and Friedrich Schlegel’s *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder*, were based respectively on a Rhine journey and on hours spent in Paris libraries. What German Oriental scholarship did was to refine and elaborate techniques whose application was to texts, myths, ideas, and languages almost literally gathered from the Orient by imperial Britain and France. (19)





The mention of Goethe here is somewhat gratuitous, as it is in other parts of the book. However, whenever Said mentions Goethe, he implicates him solidly in the Orientalist project; for example, in a list of twenty otherwise French and British literary writers whose work is “especially rich and makes a significant contribution to building the Orientalist discourse,” Goethe’s name comes first (99).

Said changed his tone quite markedly in the preface to a 2003 reprint of his book (adapted in a newspaper article widely published in that, the year of his death<sup>3</sup>). Here he implies that the disconnect between German scholarly and literary interest in the Middle East and an imperialist colonial presence might actually be beneficial to a view of the Orient. For Said differentiates here between “knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war” (xiv)—the latter trend not unfittingly illustrated by the American invasion of Iraq. Perhaps surprisingly, Said then praises the German classicism and humanism of Goethe and Herder for its empathetic understanding of the Islamic world, particularly in Herder’s *Ideen* (1784–91) and Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* (1819). In fact, together with the Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim, Said sponsored an orchestra for Jewish and Arab youth called “West-Eastern Divan,” which first met in 1999 in Weimar (the 250th anniversary of Goethe’s birth, when Weimar was celebrated in the EU as European Capital of Culture). Barenboim explained his and Said’s motivations thus: “The reason we named this orchestra is because Goethe was one of the first Germans to be really interested in other countries—he started learning Arabic when he was over 60.”<sup>4</sup> In a measure of how “utopian” Barenboim deems the experiment and thus the heritage emanating from Goethe, he says he likes to call it “the sovereign independent republic of the West-Eastern Divan.”<sup>5</sup>

These comments might provoke a critique of how Said buys into the common German separation of Weimar Classicism from the world of politics and, in this case, sets it against the world of conflict and war (here, the Iraq war). And perhaps more importantly, someone like Todd Kontje, author of the recent book *German Orientalisms*, would certainly take issue with Said’s assertion that in their oriental studies Germans were not seeking “knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation”—for Kontje argues that German Orientalisms were very much part of the German search for national identity.<sup>6</sup> But these issues aside, the most relevant question is: Does Said present an accurate portrayal of “German encounters with Islam”? Of course, Said doesn’t claim to treat such a broad topic, but he does indeed give Weimar Classicism a privileged place in his enterprise of unabashed “humanism” (xvii). It is



thus perhaps appropriate to begin where Said does, with Goethe and the *West-östlicher Divan*, which, however, I will only touch on because it is treated more comprehensively elsewhere in this volume. Said cites in particular Goethe's project of understanding "Islamic literature" (xix)—but it is really Persian literature in which Goethe was interested, and in fact Islam does not come off very well in the *Divan*: such tenets as the prohibition of alcohol or of human images in art, and the Muslim notion of heaven, are roundly ridiculed, continuing a long tradition in Western literature and of course in the works of Hafis that Goethe takes as a model. Still, Goethe's view of Persian and Arabic cultures is certainly marked by the kind of attempt at empathetic understanding of an oriental culture, an understanding that Said valorizes, regardless of its limitations.

However, Said's view of German Orientalism must at least be *supplemented* by drawing attention to a less conciliatory trend in German culture, which reached its zenith at the end of the eighteenth century, and I would say that the other German writer he marshals, Johann Gottfried Herder, is implicated in this discourse, which we would have to call Orientalist. That this less conciliatory trend should be evident in the later eighteenth century at first seems strange, since this was a propitious moment for an improved understanding of Islam in the wake of the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> Earlier ages were of course infamous for their Muslim-bashing, intensified especially during the Crusades, though some chapters in this volume, among other contributions, demonstrate that the Middle Ages were hardly monolithically hostile to Islam. Later, the animosity and fear were stoked by the military threat from the Ottoman Empire, which has been called the most significant European issue in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries aside from the Reformation. This threat culminated in the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683, which led to the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. The danger did not suddenly end there, on the threshold to the eighteenth century, as one can often read: in the 109 years between the siege of Vienna and the treaty of Jassy in 1792, there were forty-one years of war between the Turks on the one hand and the Austrians or Russians on the other; and one of these wars, ending in 1739, resulted in territorial losses for Austria. However, by the 1760s and 1770s one can indeed say that the Turks no longer represented a serious peril for Christian Europe, and the result was a marked rapprochement between Islamic and Western European culture. The Russians did fight a further war with the Turks from 1768 to 1774, but the Ottomans were by this point so weak that they became a pawn in the conflicts among European powers and—this is crucial—entered into an alliance with Austria, which aimed to thwart Russian ambitions. In this period we find a kind of schizophrenic attitude toward Muslims (who were usually conflated with Turks): in cultural artifacts of all sorts, the image of the violent and usually lascivious Turk was still active, swinging his legendary saber and

slicing up Christians; but on the other hand we find a true turcomania in Western Europe. It was in France, the country friendliest to the Ottomans for geopolitical reasons, that *turquerie* originated and blossomed, as a result of the Turkish diplomatic missions to Paris as early as 1721 and 1742. Frederick the Great aimed at a Prussian-Turkish alliance just after the Seven Years War and hosted a huge Turkish diplomatic entourage in 1763–64. The Berliners were so taken with the exotic visitors that supposedly they went around wearing turbans and eating dates. Though this German encounter with Islam hardly went beyond a sort of exotic “costume,” it may have at least paved the way for a less crassly prejudiced encounter. This tradition of humanistic, enlightened openness to Islam resulted in attitudes that may have been contradictory but certainly were fundamentally different from the hostility of earlier centuries. In the eighteenth century there was even a certain pretense of seeing Orientals as superior to Europeans, in the tradition of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721). The image of the noble sultan, too, is a strange hybrid of the “noble savage” fashion, derived from North American and other peoples, and the persistent ideal of the European “enlightened” absolutist monarch.

This new turcomania fed into German classicism through the vehicle of the so-called Turkish opera.<sup>8</sup> In about a dozen European operas before Mozart’s famous *Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), there is a remarkably consistent plot. A Christian-European woman, after being abducted by pirates in the Mediterranean, or some such scenario, ends up as the captive of a Turkish sultan or equivalent figure; she may even become part of his harem. Her European lover or another Christian seeks to rescue her and sometimes succeeds, but usually fails because the plot is discovered. However, in the end the Muslim ruler shows a magnanimity that is often associated with Christian virtues, and he frees the woman and her would-be rescuers. The traditional negative characteristics of Muslims in Christian writings—particularly libidinal excess and a propensity to violence—are manifested at times in the sultan but are in general banished to the secondary figure, the guard of the harem or palace, usually named Osmin or Osman. From Gluck’s *Die Pilgrime von Mecca* (1764) to his wildly successful *Der Kaufmann von Smyrna* (1771) and Andras Franz Holly’s *Der Bassa von Tunis* (1774), from *Les époux esclaves* (1755) to *La schiava liberata* (1768), from Haydn’s *L’incontro improvviso* (1775) to Joseph von Friebert’s *Das Serail, oder die unvermuthete Zusammenkunft in der Slaverrey . . .* (1778), the plots show an amazing consistency that culminates in Mozart’s *Entführung*. Given that this discourse was “in the air,” so to speak, it is not unreasonable to see traces of it in three major works of German literature written around 1780. The most obvious is Wieland’s verse epic *Oberon* (1780), which, however, generally reverts to the negative characteristics of Muslims in its abduction plot. More interesting are the permutations of the theme in more canonical literature.

In Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise* (1779) the Christian Templar with a Muslim heritage struggles to free himself from his crusading ethos, but when he hears that Nathan's supposedly Jewish daughter Recha is actually a Christian, he reverts to the Christian prejudices with which he was brought up by his Templar uncle. He says that Nathan must have stolen or bought her—a conjecture for which he has no evidence at all, but which fits the pattern of the illegitimate capture of a Christian girl by an infidel, this time of course with the interesting twist that it is a Jew rather than a Muslim from whom the Christian must be rescued. And finally, Goethe provides another variation on the theme when, in *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (prose version, 1779), he portrays Greeks—that is, men who consider themselves superior to the Eastern barbarians—who hear that a Greek priestess is held captive on the island, and likewise assume—again based only on their prejudice—that she has been bought or stolen. This play is complete with a magnanimous infidel king who graciously allows the treacherous Greeks to return home with their countrywoman, who in fact did not need rescuing. In all of these works the supposedly inferior culture turns out to be at least as enlightened as the supposedly superior culture, and often more so. In the opera *Adelheit von Veltheim*, composed by Christian Gottlob Neefe to a libretto by Gustav Friedrich Großmann, the pasha fends off the gratitude of the Christians after forgiving their treachery to him with the following words: “Alles, was ich von euch heische, ist: denkt zuweilen daran, daß ihr in der sogenannten Barbarey einen Menschen und einen Freund gefunden habt. . . . Doch, das erlaubt mir euch zu sagen, daß ich, so zu handeln, wahrlich nicht aus der Geschichte eurer Eroberungen fremder Welttheile erlernt habe.”<sup>9</sup> Compare this with the sarcastic words of Thoas in Goethe's play, referring to the brutal history of Iphigenie's own, supposedly superior, Greek family:

Du glaubst, es höre  
Der rohe Scythe, der Barbar, die Stimme  
Der Wahrheit und der Menschlichkeit, die Atreus,  
Der Grieche, nicht vernahm?<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, in Lessing's sources for *Nathan*, the noble spirit of Saladin and his tolerance of Christianity under his rule in Jerusalem contrast glaringly with the brutality of the Crusaders toward Muslims after their earlier conquest of the city. As we saw, these relatively positive portrayals of Muslims and especially Turks are full of contradictions; in particular, it is by no means a clear case of a sympathetic encounter with Islam. A good illustration of this is the requisite wine song in the operas; habitually, the Muslims complain about Mohammed's prohibition of alcohol and proceed to imbibe all they like, often getting quickly drunk because they are not used to drinking alcohol. Goethe's poetic persona in the *West-östlicher Divan* also inveighs against this prohibition (especially in the “Schenkenbuch”),

and one can see not only the Persian literary heritage at work here but also the German discourse represented in the wine songs that seem to mock Islam. But the advance that these works represent over the purely negative representations of Muslims in pre-Enlightenment writings and images should not be underestimated.

Older views, however, are clearly still present among other German writers in the eighteenth century, and consideration of this continuing discourse is necessary to a balanced assessment, because it rounds out Said's rather rosy, even idealistic image of the German counter-Orientalist heritage. Among this regressive literature on Islam in the eighteenth century there are of course conservative theologians like David Friedrich Megerlin, who first translated the *Koran* into German from the original (in 1772), and who did so explicitly in order to refute this "Lügenbuch" of the "Antichrist" Mohammed; in his preface, he prays to God "diesem gewaltthätigen Reich [that is, the Ottomans], und seiner abergläubigen [sic] Religion im Koran, bald ein *Ende* zu machen, daß die gedruckte [sic] *Griechen* und andere Christen, so unter seinem *Joch* seufzen, befreiet [werden] [cf. the abduction operas!], und das *Licht* des Evangelii wieder hergestellt werde; wo es durch die *Türken* nach und nach ist ausgelöschet worden"; and in case this isn't clear enough, he calls openly for a new war, in which the Turks will be defeated.<sup>11</sup>

More disturbing than such openly reactionary relics, however, are the explicit practitioners of Enlightenment. Most striking among these is Christoph Meiners (1747–1810).<sup>12</sup> A Göttingen professor of philosophy since 1772, he counted himself an adherent of Enlightenment<sup>13</sup> and was even one of the leading members of the secret society of Illuminati.<sup>14</sup> And yet, as Susanne Zantop writes, "his anticipation of nineteenth-century biological theories make[s] him a crucial link in the emergence of modern racism."<sup>15</sup> He is credited with being the first to divide all mankind into two races, the Caucasian and the Mongolian.<sup>16</sup> In dozens of essays in his journals, the *Göttingisches Historisches Magazin* (1787–91) and the *Neues Göttingisches Historisches Magazin* (1791–94), Meiners, who never left Europe, "analyzed" non-European cultures on the basis of published travelogues of others (he did write an account of his journey to Stuttgart and Strasburg,<sup>17</sup> so at least he counted himself among the ranks of travelers, even if not world travelers). This chapter will argue that in some of these writings Meiners anticipates the most distasteful of the French and British Orientalist discourses.<sup>18</sup>

The key piece is the article "Über die Natur der morgenländischen Völker," published in his journal in 1790.<sup>19</sup> Meiners has a sweeping definition of Orientals, ranging from the northwest African peoples to the Hindus and the Tartars. Nevertheless, he makes the brazen claim that all these people demonstrate commonality in all their cultural aspects, a uniformity that is downright "verwundernswürdig" (386). And he locates

the differences between these oriental peoples and the “aufgeklärten Nationen unsers Erdtheils” squarely in their senses and nervous system (“die Organisation ihrer reizbaren und empfindlichen Theile”; 401), from which their mental and emotional makeup and thus their behavior derive. Their senses, he claims, are “um viele Grade schärfer, und besonders gröber, als die der Europäischen Völker” (402). What he really means by this is that “die Morgenländer [sind] viel weniger empfindlich, als die Abendländer” (403). “Wenn aber auch die trefflichsten Beobachter der orientalischen Völker,” Meiners writes,

nicht so übereinstimmend in ihren Zeugnissen für die ungewöhnliche Gefühllosigkeit der Morgenländer wären, so würde man doch dieses ursprüngliche Gebrechen der Bewohner des Orients aus ihrem Betragen im Glück und Unglück, im Tode, in Martern, und bey Beleidigungen, aus ihrem ganzen äussern Benehmen und Lebensart, aus ihrer Verfassung und ihren Gesetzen, vorzüglich aber aus ihren Strafen und Züchtigungen schliessen können. (403)

It is the capacity to sustain physical punishments that interests him most. He elaborates: “Wegen ihrer geringern Empfindlichkeit ertragen sie [that is, “die Morgenländer”] die willkürlichsten Erpressungen, die schimpflichsten Mißhandlungen, die grausamsten Verstümmelungen, und Todesstrafen, die ihnen von ihren Königen und deren Dienern zugefügt werden, wie Fügungen des göttlichen Willens, oder eines unvermeidlichen Verhängnisses” (405)—and of course we see here that with “divine will,” religion begins to play a part in the interpretation of the Orientals’ ability to withstand punishment. However, even here Meiners insists on the primacy of the inherited character of the Orientals over their religion as a decisive factor in their constitution. He mentions that some observers attribute the supposed apathy of Orientals to Mohammed’s teaching of inexorable fate. To this argument Meiners responds that many Christians, too, have such fatalist beliefs, and yet Christians behave much differently than Muslims. He claims, therefore, that “*Mahomet* schöpfte die Ergebenheit in sein Schicksal aus der Natur seines Volks; und alle seine Anhänger bestätigten seine Lehre durch ihr Leben, nicht weil er sie zuerst vorgetragen, oder so kräftig empfohlen hatte, sondern weil sie eine natürliche Folge der geringern Empfindlichkeit, der Trägheit, und Beschränktheit ihres Geistes war” (411).<sup>20</sup> But if it suited his purposes, Meiners could indeed marshal the influence of Islam in his explanation of the oriental character. In the course of his argument that Orientals are less tender to family members than Europeans, he mentions a possible counterargument, namely, the charitable kindness of Muslims. But Muslims’ benevolence, he says, is not a result of their sympathy with the misfortune of others but rather “weil Mahomet es ihnen vorgeschrieben hat, und weil sie glauben, durch solche Stiftungen und Allmosen die Schuld der



Sünden zu tilgen, die sie durch blutige Erpressungen, und unrechtmässig erworbenes Gut auf sich geladen haben” (435). Thus, when assessing the impact of religion on cultural and racial character, or vice versa, Meiners is simply unperturbed by lack of consistency, using whatever argument he wishes in order to diminish the qualities of the oriental peoples, and specifically Orientals defined as Muslims.

Of all these qualities, it is the imperviousness to physical pain that occupies Meiners the most—he had devoted an entire article to it two years earlier,<sup>21</sup> reveling in lurid descriptions of the most horrid tortures and punishments to which Orientals can be exposed. He singles out the Turks for special mention for their “Geduld” when subjected to brutal torture (413). The corollary to this characteristic is the claim that Orientals themselves are so brutal that they carry out the cruelest torture without the slightest sign of abhorrence: “Die Araber können nicht nur ohne Regungen von Menschlichkeit unschuldiges Blut vergiessen, und vergiessen sehen, sondern sie finden auch ein tigerartiges Wohlgefallen an blutigen Hinrichtungen, und langsamen Martern” (440). And in this particular case Meiners asserts that this ingrained brutality does not derive from Islam, indeed is contrary to it: “Selbst *Mahomet* konnte die unauslöschliche Rachgier, die in den Herzen der Araber, wie anderer Morgenländer brennt, nicht besänftigen” (440).

The result of this line of argument soon becomes evident. Meiners cites the French travel writer Poiret to the effect that

Der Stock und Säbel . . . sind die einzigen Mittel, wodurch man von den Arabern das Nothwendige erhalten kann. . . . Um bei den Arabern eine gewisse Achtung zu erlangen, oder sonst etwas zu erhalten, muß man sich sehr hüten, die Höflichkeit, die unter den gesitteten Völkern eingeführt ist, oder Freundlichkeit und Dankbarkeit zu erweisen. Alsdann glauben sie, daß man sie fürchtet, und sie werden nur um desto stolzer, unverschämter und hartnäckiger im Abschlagen derjenigen Dinge, warum man sie gebeten hat. Wenn man aber ein drohendes Aeussere annimmt, wenn man ihnen als unumschränkter Herr befiehlt, und sie als einen elenden Haufen von Slaven behandelt; so werden sie nachgiebig, küssen die Hand ihres Tyrannen, und begegnen dem gemeinsten Türkischen Soldaten als ihrem Herrn. Schläge sind daher bey den Arabern ein nothwendiges Cärimoniel.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, Meiners is citing a French source here, so perhaps we are crediting him with too much Orientalist verve. But he clearly endorses Poiret’s views and cites a Danish travel writer to clinch the point.<sup>23</sup> His conclusion: “Die einzigen Triebfedern der Morgenländer sind Furcht vor Strafen, und Hoffnung von persönlichen Vergnügungen oder Vorteilen” (446). And in his essay on punishments he claims that not only





German princes who rule Slavic peoples but also Europeans in the West and East Indies are “forced” to use horrible punishments on the natives.<sup>24</sup> Finally, he explicitly defends colonialism: while some colonial masters have abused their power over natives, he says, “es giebt doch auch mehrere Beyspiele, daß Europäer über ganze Völker, oder wenigstens über zahlreiche Pflanz-Oerter, eine unumschränkte Gewalt nicht bloß zu ihrem gegenwärtigen Vortheil, sondern auch zum Glück ihrer Unterthanen ausgeübt haben.”<sup>25</sup>

It is thus clear that Meiners has laid the groundwork for dominating Orientals: they can be ruled if they are subjected to harsh physical force, and in fact they force their colonial masters to use such measures. And because he has pointed out throughout his essay that Orientals perversely refuse to adopt technological and scientific advances from Europeans, he even delivers—albeit implicitly—a legitimation for European domination of these lands, which Orientalist discourse viewed as a “civilizing” influence. But who is to take on this role of firm but benevolent colonizer? At the end of the essay on the nature of oriental peoples, Meiners’s arguments take an unexpected turn. He speaks of the European peoples who have intermixed most with Orientals: Spaniards, Portuguese, and Italians, peoples who therefore have retained many oriental characteristics discussed in the article. Then he writes: “Unter den morgenländischen Colonien [!], die sich unvermischt erhalten haben, verdienen die Armenier, und Juden die meiste Aufmerksamkeit” (454). He devotes the rest of his remarks almost entirely to the Jews. He says that by looking at the Jews, who have lived in Europe much longer than the Armenians, one can gauge most clearly the influence of climate on the blood of entire peoples. And though the Jews have been Europeanized to a certain extent, he claims, they are still more similar to the peoples in which they have their origins: that is, they are chiefly oriental. The article then takes a strange turn. “Der gegenwärtige Aufsatz,” writes Meiners, “enthält manche Data zur entscheidenden Beantwortung der Frage: ob die Fehler, die den Juden von allen Europäischen Nationen so viele Jahrhunderte lang sind vorgeworfen worden, Folgen ihrer Lage, oder Aeusserungen ihrer angestammten Natur sind”—note that he doesn’t even question whether these faults exist. He not only clearly sides with the biologist interpretation but also claims that “in den letzten Zeiten der Widerwille gegen die Juden um desto allgemeiner und lebhafter geworden ist, je genauer man sie beobachtet, und ihre Wirkungen auf die Länder, wo sie bisher Schutz genossen, kennen gelernt hat” (454).

It almost seems as if Meiners turns out to have been writing an article not about Orientals in their Arabic or Muslim guise, but Jews as Orientals—but as we shall see, there is a crucial connection between Jews and Arabs or Muslims in his argumentation. Anti-Semitism, Meiners argues, is objectively justified by empirical observation; and with his remark that the

Jews have “until now” (*bisher*) enjoyed protection in Europe he suggests fairly clearly that this toleration of them ought to end. At the very end of the essay he then makes this assumption explicit.

Ich werde in der Folge, wenn ich alles beysammen habe, was zu einer solchen Untersuchung gehört, auf die Frage zurückkommen, ob das allgemeine Beste es erfordere, oder gestatte, daß man die Juden fernhin schütze, bis sie den Völkern, unter welchen sie wohnen, ähnlich geworden seyn, und bis sie willig und fähig seyn werden, alle Pflichten nützlicher Bürger zu erfüllen, oder ob es besser sey, ihnen zu rathen, daß sie sich in ihrem alten Vaterlande ein neues Jerusalem erbauen, und ein neues Reich errichten. Wenn die Juden so viel Muth, als die alten Griechen, oder Sachsen, oder Normänner hätten; so müsten sie schon lange daran gedacht haben, das gelobte Land den Händen der wenigen elenden Räuber zu entreissen, die in dem von ihnen verödeten Palästina übrig geblieben sind. (455)

The formal uncertainty of the first sentence of this passage is undone by the second sentence, which makes clear that Meiners favors a return of the Jews to Palestine. This is a rather bizarre turn, and it creates a complicated situation. Meiners had spoken of “colonies” of Jews and Armenians in Europe, almost as if that colonization justified a reciprocal colonization of Palestine. The colonization of Palestine will, however, be carried out by a people that is both partly Europeanized and essentially Oriental, the Jews. The envisioned colonization forestalls the assimilation of Jews, the legitimacy of which Meiners questions by asking if Europeans are even “permitted” to promote it. Thus Jews should be returned to their homeland, where they really belong. This argument, of course, was to become the familiar groundwork for Zionism, though naturally not with the underlying justification based on the supposed “faults” and biologically determined alienness of the Jews; and it was a major solution to the “Jewish question” in nationalist anti-Semitism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In that guise, this notion prefigures biologically conceived anti-Semitism of the virulent modern variety, which of course also entertained the notion of sending the Jews back to Palestine because of their inborn faults.

This ideological underpinning of the colonization of Palestine must be seen as a variant of Orientalism, regardless of its unusual recourse to Jews as colonizers. For in Meiners’s perspective the Jews are hybrids—they can be seen as a partly European people, but their Oriental nature provides the unique justification for this colonization, since they would be merely reclaiming their ancestral homeland. The Muslim peoples, for their part, provide legitimacy for the project because of three inborn characteristics: first, their inferiority to Europeans—meaning that the Europeanized Jews would presumably bring them cultural, technological, and scientific

advances; second, they are a people easily dominated by force; and third, they are “thieves” (*Räuber*) who have stolen the Holy Land. This last is of course the granddaddy of all pretexts for colonizing Palestine, beginning with the medieval crusading ideology that was based on Muslims supposedly desecrating Christian holy sites that they illegitimately held in their power. In sum, Meiners finds Orientals lacking in “humanity” (*Menschlichkeit*),<sup>26</sup> so that these three justifications for dominating them can be summed up by saying that Orientals are not full human beings but a sort of subhuman—the classic modern legitimation for conquering such *Untermenschen*. And finally, in his essay on the causes of despotism, Meiners claims that enlightened peoples do not need despotic rulers and in fact tend to limit their princes’ powers, but that “edlere Menschen und Völker [können] gegen Unedle eine willkührliche, zwingende, und wenn man will, widerrechtliche Gewalt zum Besten der Gezwungenen, und Unterworfenen ausüben.”<sup>27</sup> Here, too, he explicitly marshals the argument about subhuman people: “Je thierischer Menschen sind, desto mehr muß man sie nach Art der Thiere behandeln, und je weniger moralische Bewegungs-Gründe vermögen, desto mehr muß man offenbare Gewalt zu Hülfe nehmen.”<sup>28</sup>

Christoph Meiners, then, lays claim to being an adherent of Enlightenment, but he is clearly implicated in the worst sort of Orientalist discourse. In the larger scheme of things it would be easy to dismiss him as an exception, a racist crackpot who had no following—and indeed, it does seem that the humanist discourse in the Turkish operas that I have described, and in Herder and Goethe, whom Said valorizes, was much more dominant in German culture. On the other hand, Meiners’s influence was not insignificant. He published dozens of books,<sup>29</sup> and in them he recycled the arguments from his essays (though sometimes revising his views). He attracted enough attention that his journal was reviewed harshly by none other than Georg Forster, who had taken part in James Cook’s three-year second voyage around the world and thus had considerably more direct experience of non-European worlds than Meiners. Forster attests that Meiners was well known—and much criticized. Meiners himself reports on the success of his writings and blames the decline of his reputation on the French Revolution with its ideas of equality, so that “man hörte nicht mehr, wenn ich bewies, daß die Neger, die Amerikaner, u.s.w. von Natur weit unter den Europäern stünden. Man entbrannte vor Unwillen darüber, daß ich die Rechte des Adels vertheidigte, und mich sogar gegen eine plötzliche Aufhebung der Knechtschaft der Neger erklärte. Unter den modischen Schriftstellern war keiner in seinen Angriffen auf mich heftiger und seichter, als der jüngere Forster”<sup>30</sup>—and with this association Meiners clearly attempts to discredit the by-then-infamous revolutionary Forster, even though Forster’s critique of Meiners predates his radicalization. It seems, then, that Meiners did indeed have a

following, but it seems equally clear that he was increasingly marginalized in the liberal epoch; an early, brutal review of the first issues of his new journal in the influential Jena *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* seems to have more or less annihilated Meiners's reputation in the learned world.<sup>31</sup> Still, there is a disturbing connection to Weimar Classicism. For none other than Herder, whom Said praises for his liberal attitude toward Islam in the *Ideen*, in 1803 published a piece in his collection *Adrastea* with the title "Bekehrung der Juden," in which he also argued for the resettlement of Jews in Palestine. The Jews are, Herder says, "ein unserm Weltteil *fremdes Asiatisches Volk*." He says that the issue of whether Jews belong in European countries is no longer a religious or human rights dispute but a matter of simple policy: too many Jews in one European country can ruin it through their business activities. He then valorizes the arguments of "ein Brittischer Philosoph," who predicts that "die Juden einst in Palästina wieder eingeführt werden," and he ends his piece with the exclamation: "Glück also, wenn ein Messias-Bonaparte sieghaft sie dahin führt, Glück zu nach Palästina!"<sup>32</sup>

Herder, then, finds himself in very uncomfortable company here. Together with Megerlin and Meiners, he inveighs against the Jews as a sort of cancer on European society; like Meiners, he advocates their removal to Palestine, and he has the disadvantage vis-à-vis Meiners of not noticing the Muslim population that lived there. They seem to be invisible to him. Perhaps that is why Herder could have his relatively liberal attitude toward Muslims in the *Ideen*, his work mentioned by Said. For Herder almost certainly had no direct experience of Muslims and thus did not have to entertain the notion of living with them. Jews, by contrast, were a known quantity, the most significant minority in eighteenth-century Germany, and Herder describes this *known* Other negatively and urges its removal. Something similar could be said of Goethe, whose attitude toward Jews was at most ambivalent, and with respect to their human rights entirely negative;<sup>33</sup> as Said suggested in the original edition of *Orientalism*, Goethe's knowledge of Islam was abstract and, I might add, essentially literary. One might press this line of argument even further and ask whether the idolizers of Goethe in, for example, the Goethe-Gesellschaft—generally a very conservative crowd—do not simply deploy the Goethe of the *West-östlicher Divan* as a kind of political alibi, lauding his tolerant attitude toward Islam as long as it was mainly concerned with the Persian poet Hafis, while themselves generally revealing a quite different attitude toward Turkish Muslims in contemporary Germany. I think it justifiable to ask, therefore, how liberal Goethe and Herder would have been toward Muslims if they had known them, given that they were hostile to Jews in many respects. On the other hand, it would be unfair to end by faulting Goethe and Herder for attitudes toward Islam that they did not express, or faulting them for the attitudes of their admirers. It is

important to point out, however, that theirs is not the only tradition in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century discourse on Islam in Germany, and that Said's 2003 correction to his earlier implication of Germany in Orientalist discourses was one-sided. It would also seem that the Jews are in a certain sense the secret Other in these German discussions of Islam, just as Muslims are the unseen Other in the project of "resettling" Jews in Palestine; in tandem with the notion of colonizing the Muslim world went a desire to expel Jews from German society.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), 3. Subsequent citations will be given in the text in parentheses. For a summary of some of the more important critiques, see Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2001); some of them are included in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. Alexander Lyon Macfie (New York: New York UP, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Other scholars have criticized this shortcoming. From the vantage of Africanist Islamic studies beginning in the late nineteenth century, see Roman Loimeier, "Edward Said und der deutschsprachige Orientalismus: Eine kritische Würdigung," *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 1. 2 (2001): 63–85. For the late eighteenth century, see Jan Loop, "Timelessness: Early German Orientalism and Its Concept of an Un-historical 'Orient,'" in *Wenn die Rosenhimmel tanzen: Orientalische Motive in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rüdiger Görner and Nima Mina (Munich: Iudicium, 2006), 11–25.

<sup>3</sup> Edward W. Said, "A Window on the World," *Guardian* (and other newspapers), 2 Aug. 2003, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1010417,00.html> (all Web sites cited in this chapter were accessed 15 Mar. 2009). David Bell evidently did not have knowledge of Said's revision of his views on Goethe when writing his paper delivered in 2004, "'Orientalizing the Orient' or 'Orientalizing Ourselves'? The Meeting of West and East in Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*," in *Wenn die Rosenhimmel tanzen*, 52–66.

<sup>4</sup> *Time*, 25 Aug. 2002, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901020902-340702,00.html>. See also Barenboim's obituary for Said in *Time*, 29 Sept. 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901031006-490772,00.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Barenboim, "Equal before Beethoven," *Guardian*, 13 Dec. 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/dec/13/middle-east-classical-music> (accessed 15 Mar. 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> For the following, see W. Daniel Wilson, "Turks on the Eighteenth-Century Operatic Stage and European Political, Military, and Cultural History," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9 (1985): 79–92.

<sup>8</sup> See W. Daniel Wilson, *Humanität und Kreuzzugsideologie um 1780: Die Türkenoper im 18. Jahrhundert und das Rettungsmotiv in Wielands "Oberon," Lessings "Nathan" und Goethes "Iphigenie"* (Bern: Lang, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> G. F. W. Großmann, *Adelheit von Veltheim*, ed. Otto Pniower (Postdam: Müller, 1920), 182.

<sup>10</sup> Lines 1936–39; cf. the prose version: “Du weißt, daß du mit einem Barbaren sprichst und traust ihm zu, daß er der Wahrheit Stimme vernimmt.” Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, 40 vols. (“Frankfurter Ausgabe”), vol. I,5, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer and Peter Huber (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988), 612 and 192.

<sup>11</sup> *Die türkische Bibel, oder des Korans allererste teutsche Uebersetzung aus der Arabischen Urschrift selbst verfertigt: welcher Nothwendigkeit und Nutzbarkeit in einer besondern Ankündigung hier erwiesen von M. David Friederich Megerlin, Professor* (Frankfurt am Main: Garbe, 1772), preface, 24, 25, 29, and 30. Megerlin’s reactionary viewpoint is evident in the fact that he prides himself on writing a defense of Johann Andreas Eisenmenger’s infamous *Das neu entdeckte Judenthum* (*Die türkische Bibel*, 20; cf. *Entdecktes Judenthum, oder: Grundllicher und wahrhafter Bericht, welchergestalt die verstockte Juden die hochheilige Dreyeinigkeit, Gott Vater, Sohn und Heiligen Geist, erschrecklicher Weise lästern und verunehren, die Heil. Mutter Christi verschmähen, das Neue Testament, die Evangelisten und Aposteln, die christliche Religion spottlich durchziehen, und die gantze Christenheit auf das äusserste verachten und verfluchen*, Königsberg [i.e. Berlin]: Haude, 1700–1711). In fact, Megerlin lists some benefits of reading the Koran, especially the principle of submission to God, and says: “Die *Juden* insonderheit könnten manches daraus lernen, und ihren Undank gegen Gottes Wohlthaten, und Halbstarrigkeit, und *Unglauben* gegen das Evangelium *bestrafet* sehen. Ich habe deswegen auch eine besondere Schrift entworfen, gegen die *Juden*, mit dem Titel: *Mahomed* ein ernstlicher *Zeug*, wider die *Juden* und ihren Unglauben etc” (33). This book was apparently never published.

<sup>12</sup> On Meiners, see [Carl von] Prantl in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Historische Commission bei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 56 vols. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875–1912), 21:224–26.

<sup>13</sup> In the periodical’s programme, Meiners says its purpose is partly “zur wahren Aufklärung . . . das Unsrige beyzutragen” (M[einers], “Vorerinnerung,” *Göttin-gisches Historisches Magazin von C[hristoph] Meiners und L[sudwig] T[imotheus] Spittler* [hereafter abbreviated as *GHM*] 1 (1787): 1–4; here 4); cf. “Ueber die Gelindigkeit, und Schärfe der Strafen unter verschiedenen Völkern,” *GHM* 2 (1788): 126–42; here 128 and 129.

<sup>14</sup> See Wilson, *Geheimräte gegen Geheimbünde: Ein unbekanntes Kapitel der klassisch-romantischen Geschichte Weimars* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), 387, and the references there.

<sup>15</sup> Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 82.

<sup>16</sup> Sara Eigen Figal, *Heredity, Race, and the Birth of the Modern* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 81.

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Meiners, *Beschreibung einer Reise nach Stuttgart und Hebst 1801, nebst einer kurzen Geschichte der Stadt Strasburg während der Schreckenszeit* (Göttingen, Germany: Röwer, 1803).

<sup>18</sup> Todd Kontje, Susanne Zantop, Sara Eigen Figal, and John H. Zammito (“Policing Polygeneticism in Germany, 1775 (Kames,) Kant, and Blumenbach,” in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (Albany: State U of New York P, 2006), 35–54) have discussed Meiners’s racist views, but not the relevant articles that I will be discussing.

<sup>19</sup> *GHM* 7 (1790): 385–455. The scanned original of the entire *GHM* is available at <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/diglib/aufkl/goettihistorimaga/index.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Meiners later counters a similar argument (of the famous travel writer Volney) that the nature of Oriental peoples could be explained from the despotism under which they suffer (416 n.).

<sup>21</sup> M[einers,] “Ueber die Gelindigkeit,” 126–42.

<sup>22</sup> Meiners, “Über die Natur der morgenländischen Völker,” 442–43. The reference is to Jean Marie Louis Poiret, *Voyage en Barbarie; ou lettres écrites de l’ancienne Numidie pendant les années 1785 et 1786, sur la Religion, les Coutumes & les Mœurs des Maures & des Arabes-Bédouins; avec un Essai sur l’Histoire Naturelle de ce pays*, 2 vols. (Paris: LaRochelle, 1789), 1:158–59; the book was immediately translated into German as *Reise in die Barbarey oder Briefe aus Alt-Numidien geschrieben in den Jahren 1785 und 1786 über die Religion, Sitten und Gebräuche der Mauren und Bedouin-Araber. Nebst einem Versuche über die Naturgeschichte dieses Landes. Mit Kupfern. Aus dem Französischen übersetzt, und mit Anmerkungen begleitet*. 2 vols. (Strasburg: Akademische Buchhandlung, 1789). A check reveals that Meiners was using not this translation but the French original. In 1791 an English translation was published in London.

<sup>23</sup> He cites Georg Høst, *Nachrichten von Marókos und Fes, im Lande selbst gesammelt, in den Jahren 1760 bis 1768: Aus dem Dänischen übersezt* (Copenhagen: Proft, 1781; the Danish original appeared in 1779).

<sup>24</sup> “Ueber die Gelindigkeit,” 130–31; cf. M[einers,] “Ueber die Ursachen des Despotismus,” *GHM* 2 (1788): 193–229; here 211.

<sup>25</sup> “Ueber die Ursachen des Despotismus,” 211.

<sup>26</sup> Meiners claims that one can infer the “abnehmende Menschlichkeit” of a people from the increasing harshness of their punishments (*Über die Gelindigkeit*, 128). He repeats here what we saw in his essay on Oriental peoples, that the Orientals have the harshest punishments. He notes “. . . daß nirgends mildere Gesetze herrschten, und gelindere Strafen vollzogen wurden, als unter den freyen und unverdorbenen Germaniern, die Tacitus und Cäsar beschreiben” (*Über die Gelindigkeit*, 129).

<sup>27</sup> Meiners, “Ueber die Ursachen des Despotismus,” 198.

<sup>28</sup> Meiners, “Ueber die Ursachen des Despotismus,” 199.

<sup>29</sup> Especially relevant are *Grundriß der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Lemgo: Mayer, 1785), and *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der Religionen*, 2 vols. (Hanover: Helwing, 1806–7). Meiners summarizes some of the main arguments of his article on Oriental peoples in his posthumously published *Untersuchungen über die Verschiedenheiten der Menschennaturen (die verschiedenen Menschenarten) in Asien und den Südländern, in den Ostindischen und Südseeinseln, nebst einer historischen Vergleichung der vormahligen und gegenwärtigen Bewohner dieser Continente und*

*Eylande*, 3 vols. (Tübingen, Germany: Cotta, 1811–15), vol. 2 (1813), 564–92. He updates his arguments with “evidence” from more recent travel writers.

<sup>30</sup> Meiners, *Untersuchungen über die Verschiedenheiten der Menschennaturen* 1 (1811), xviii–xix (Meiners’s preface, quoted by the editor, his Göttingen colleague Johann Georg Heinrich Feder). On the background of the Meiners-Forster dispute, see Alexander Ihle, *Christoph Meiners und die Völkerkunde* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931), 144–45. Though Ihle’s intent is to give Meiners the recognition he deserves, his conclusion is largely negative: “Viel Widersinnigem, Oberflächlichem, gewaltsam Ausgedeutetem und Wertlosem ist man begegnet” (144).

<sup>31</sup> Jena, *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 1789, vol. 2, no. 136–38 (4–6 May) and 160 (28 May), cols. 273–93, 465–72. The reviewer cites numerous examples to argue that Meiners uses unreliable sources, uses them inaccurately (often in the opposite sense from the intended one), uses them uncritically, contradicts himself, piles up facts from which he draws no conclusions, makes apodictic claims without evidence, and does not order his material well or provide a synthetic view, except for his unsupportable theory of two main races of mankind (Caucasian and Mongolian).

<sup>32</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, “Bekehrung der Juden,” first printed in *Adrastea*, vol. 4, pt. 7 (1803); repr. in *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 10, ed. Günter Arnold (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2000), 630–33.

<sup>33</sup> See W. Daniel Wilson, “‘Humanitätssalbader’: Goethe’s Distaste for Jewish Emancipation, and Jewish Responses,” in *Goethe in German-Jewish Culture*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn and Jost Hermand (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), 146–64.