



FORUM: Postkoloniale Arbeiten / Postcolonial Studies

**Orientalisms and Cosmopolitanisms:
Perspectives on the Islamic World in German-Language Travel Writing
by Women in the Long Nineteenth Century**

James Hodkinson

Abstract

This essay examines the differing contexts and modes of encounter with Islamic culture in the travel writing of two contrasting women, the Prussian Countess Ida Hahn-Hahn and the Austrian Maria Schuber: both travelled to and wrote from the Middle East in the 1830s and 1840s and published their letters as collections. The encounters both women had with Islam were conditioned, at least in part, by their respective stance on religion, issues of gender and social class, and by the obligations of patronage and the expectations of distinct readerships.

Whilst both women can be seen to write about Islam as a religion and culture defined by its difference to Christianity, both can also be seen in differing ways and to differing extents to represent Islam and Muslims as simultaneously belonging to a universal and inclusive notion of humanity and human religion. Thus, without embracing high philosophical discourse of Kant or Hegel, both women can be seen to demonstrate cosmopolitan impulses towards Islam, although these jostle for ascendancy with a more Eurocentric, Christian and indeed *völkisch* vision of the relationship between cultures.

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Meine geliebte Emy! So stehe ich hier denn wirklich an der Pforte des Orients, des Landes vom Anfang, von dem wir so viel zusammen gesprochen, nach dem wir oft uns geträumt haben. Noch nicht bin ich darin! [...] aber die Pforten des Occidents sind hinter mir zugethan, denn das was Grundstein und Kern des Lebens der Völker bildet und der Masse die Seele einhaucht: die Religion – ist hier eine andre. Ich bin im Gebiet und unter dem Gebot des Islam (Hahn-Hahn, I: 190)¹.

Thus wrote Ida Hahn-Hahn, daughter of a noble if impoverished Mecklenburg family, in a letter to a friend in September 1843, one of her *Orientalische Briefe*, after arriving in Constantinople. Historically, that city has been thought of both as a ‘transitional space’ between the two perceived cultural blocks of ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’, or as a more pluralist site in which the ‘intermingling’ or ‘entangled’ nature of cultures becomes visible. Of these, Hahn-Hahn in many ways aligns herself with the former paradigm by using a telling metaphor of the city as ‘Pforte’, a ‘gateway’ or ‘portal’. Her use of this metaphor allows her to conceive of herself as a traveller, to move and enter into a new space. That new space, represented by the city, is however placed just inside a separate cultural zone, which she feels differs in essence from her own occidental Christian origins. Hahn-Hahn is also entering different religious space – one that is presided over, indeed determined by Islam. She is to be ‘unter dem Gebot’, under the laws of that faith and the authority enacting them. Waiting in some kind of metaphorical ‘vestibule’ between East and West, she appears to harbour many of the fears, ideals and associations a nineteenth-century European travel-writer might supply to such a situation. In this sense, then, Hahn-Hahn is very much of her times: her views appear to be firmly rooted in the essentialist thinking about cultural difference that had been an explicit part of Germanophone culture since the late eighteenth century.² In some ways, though, Hahn-Hahn is an untypical (if not unprecedented) figure of her times, for she is a self-determining, independent female travel writer writing about (and ultimately publishing) her experiences as she travels through the Middle East and beyond.³ In this she is breaking away from certain social, professional and even moral norms expected of nineteenth century European women. This essay seeks to explore further instances of this particular form of encounter, one occurring between German-speaking, women travel writers and the Islamic world. In a first section, the study will engage with theoretical frames that have been used by scholars to comment upon encounters of this sort. Central to this discussion will be an examination of how factors such as gender, social class, religion and racial ideology may have conditioned or indeed limited the way in which women viewed the Islamic faith, producing precisely the kind of essentialist writing in evidence in the excerpt above. In a second section, however, the

essay will ask how, in what ways and to what extent two differing women travel writers, the German Countess Ida Hahn-Hahn, (1805 – 1880), and a less socially elevated and less well-known native of Graz in Austria, Maria Schuber, were able to free themselves from such determinants and develop new ways of conceiving and representing Islam. In both cases a mode of writing is being sought, which acknowledged the ‘difference’ of Islam from a Christian viewpoint, but viewed it simultaneously an expression of a religiosity common to all humanity.

I.

Nineteenth-century Germanophone engagements with Islam and Islamic culture have traditionally been seen as part of the Orientalist tendency in European cultures. Said saw Islam as one of the most potent manifestations of his model of Orientalism, whereby the Muslim embodied the reductive ideals and fears of the European cultural imagination, being ‘the very epitome of an outsider against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages on was founded’ (Said, 70).⁴ Attempting to make right the fact that Said explicitly omitted much German culture from his study (Said, 17-19), Andrea Polaschegg’s now standard work,⁵ sought to show how, in its literary forms, German Orientalism embraced a much wider range of cultures than had previously been stated, which included those of Sino-Asia and particularly the Indian subcontinent (Polaschegg, 82-83). With this welcome widening of the focus, however, Polaschegg argues against seeing an emphasis on Islamic territories and cultures in German Orientalism: such emphasis would only replicate Said’s narrower focus in a manner inappropriate for the Germanophone context and would express scholarly obsessions with examining the history roots of contemporary cultural conflicts (*ibid.* 96-97). Susan Marchand’s recent magisterial study shifts the focus to offer a detailed account of the genesis and development of academic scholarship on the Orient in nineteenth-century Germany.⁶ Marchand deals with the well-known interest in Islam in Enlightenment Germany, noting its cyclical return throughout the nineteenth century in the form of the burgeoning academic discipline of Islamic studies (Marchand, 356-67). Admittedly, amongst the ‘Lonely Orientalists’ in the first half of the nineteenth century, those specialising in Arabic and Islamic studies were, for Marchand, most isolated: Islam ‘did not inspire nearly as many romantic panegyrics as did India’ (*ibid.* 118). Todd Kontje’s study was less interested in the geo-cultural scope of Germanic Orientalism, and more concerned to show how key literary texts in German reflected shifting attitudes and differing uses of the Orient from the Middle Ages to the present.⁷ Whilst constructions of the Orient in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are shown often to fill the vacuum created by the absence of German Nation and Empire, those constructions are not necessarily seen as fantasies of dominating and shaping the Orient. Certain key literary representations of Occidental-Oriental interaction are shown

as attempts by writers to rethink the one-sided power relationship at the heart of traditional Orientalism: Kontje is able to show how this ‘remodelling’ also applies, in certain texts, to specifically Germanic-Islamic relationships.⁸

Whilst Islam may not have been the primary focus for German speakers writing on ‘other’ cultures in literary, theological, historical, anthropological and travel writing, it was nevertheless a theme to which German-speaking writers across all these discourses returned from the Enlightenment and throughout the long nineteenth century.⁹ Indeed, a comprehensive and analytical narrative of how Islam fared within in German cultural discourses of the nineteenth century is a story as yet untold by scholarship. Furthermore, it seems we can read German writing about Islam not merely as an expression of European ‘power’ over some remote other religion, but also as an attempt to imagine new relationships between Christian Europe and the Islamic world, which are based on ‘connections’, ‘overlaps’, or on commonality in various forms. The full range of modes and dynamics within German-Islamic encounters perhaps becomes more apparent if we consider briefly the diverging paradigms on cultural difference in German thought and culture from 1770’s onwards, and consider how these might have shaped how women travellers saw and wrote about Islam.

Initially, there is much to lead one to expect that German or Austrian travellers in the first half of the nineteenth century might harbour and even maintain essentialist and prejudicial views on Islam – even those involved in travel to Islamic territories. Essentialized visions of cultural and religious difference abounded throughout the German speaking world during the outgoing eighteenth- and incoming nineteenth centuries, in both popular and scholarly discourses. In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91), for instance, Johann Gottfried Herder had mapped out an ethnocentric or ‘völkisch’ understanding of culture; cultures were organic extensions of the essence of peoples, this essence being determined by their differing mental and physical ‘organisation’, which was in turn determined by topography and climate of their origins. The histories and achievements of differing Nations and Empires were expressions of those essential character traits. In his writing on Islam, Herder is complimentary about the moral steadfastness of Islam, though he decries it elsewhere as a false religion and exposes his crassly ideological use of the faith.¹⁰ Similar views were adopted by later nineteenth-century intellectuals: having turned his back on his once-cherished ideals of political and religious freedom, and become an ideologue in the service of the Austrian Government and a champion of reactionary Roman Catholicism, the older Friedrich Schlegel propounded similar thinking to that of Herder in his lectures of the late 1820-s. The twelfth lecture in the 1829 series *Philosophie der Geschichte*, on the

“Charakterschilderung des Mahomet und seiner Religion, so wie der arabischen Weltherrschaft. Neue Gestaltung des europäischen Abendlandes und Wiederherstellung des christlichen Kaisertums,”¹¹ achieves what the lengthy title promises, presenting Mohammed as the greatest embodiment of the ‘strongly willed’ ethnic character of the Arab peoples; a character, which, in turn, lends Islam its aggressive, expansionist traits. Any sneaking admiration for the so-called ‘Mohammedans’ and their empire building gives way to scathing criticism within pages, when Schlegel contrasts the theologies of Islam and Christianity: changing tack, Schlegel twists the Islamic prohibition of alcohol, presenting it as an attack on Christian drinking of wine at Mass.¹²

Whilst the ubiquitous presence and far-reaching influence of such paradigms of cultural difference are well documented, feminist and gender-orientated scholarship has exposed other factors impacting specifically on how women wrote about such matters. Subhangi Dabak, amongst others, attacks the tendency of certain scholars who, in their enthusiasm for discovering and promoting women’s writing of the period, overlook the overt racism of writers such as Ida Pfeiffer and Ida Hahn-Hahn.¹³ Gabriele Habinger’s pioneering work¹⁴ is informed by an understanding of travel writing that draws on ethnological theory and practice of such figures as James Clifford and Clifford Geertz. Both Clifford and Geertz dismiss the idea that ‘traveller’ or ‘host’, the ‘observer’ or the ‘observed’ (the so-called ‘informants’) exist as fixed, discrete categories that encounter each other in a single sociological context: not only are both parties are in a state of flux, but such encounters occur simultaneously in social, gendered and ethnic terms.¹⁵ Habinger applies these insights to investigate how a range of determinants impact upon women’s writing about cultures other than their own, including their femininity, in relation to prevailing ideologies of gender, social class, and religious affiliation. For Habinger, however, these determinants both limited women, though, in certain cases, also offered them strategies to exploit in writing. Ultimately, Habinger is able to maintain a balance between showing the more progressive tendencies in women’s travel writing and the reactionary “Schattenseiten” der weiblichen Mobilität’ (Habinger, 9).

However sophisticated a reader of travel-writing seeks to be, however many differing thematic frameworks one brings to bear upon the travelogues one reads, commentaries on this form of literature can still often veer towards reductive reading. By approaching an intercultural encounter in terms of a sociological category, scholars can tend to reduce travellers and their experiences to exemplars of particular ideologies or phenomena.¹⁶ This essay, however, will ask if our travellers wrote in a way that we might not expect from nineteenth-century Christian European women of a particular class; it will ask, that is, if both managed to look beyond essentialist paradigms of cultural difference. It might be possible to show how our women travellers conceive of

and write about other religions a manner that might be deemed ‘cosmopolitan.’ The tradition of cosmopolitan thought stretches from the philosophy of antiquity to contemporary thinkers such as Ulrich Beck and Kwame Anthony Appiah.¹⁷ The idea was re-awoken with particular efficacy in modern German thought from the later Enlightenment onwards, particularly in the writings of Kant and Hegel.¹⁸ In his study of cosmopolitanism, Robert Fine works closely with texts by these thinkers in his re-articulation of the tradition. Fine is keen to move beyond forms of sociological thought, which contend that it is the values and concepts of localities or nation states alone, which define how groups and individuals of differing cultures encounter each other.¹⁹ Cosmopolitanism is an alternative way of modelling cross-cultural encounters, which can be made useful to cultural studies as well as to the social sciences (Fine, 6). At the heart of the tradition Fine sees the core idea that “the human species can be understood only if it is treated as a single subject, within which all forms of difference are recognized and respected but conceptualized as internal to the substantive unity of all human beings” (Fine, ix-x).

Aspects of this idea can be found, with different twists and emphases, in a range of well-known Germanophone cultural works of the period. In his *West-Östlicher Divan* Goethe imagines a relationship with Persian culture as embodied by the poet Hafiz, and in doing so both respects the historical and cultural specificity of that other poet, but also, in an imagined space that crosses historical and cultural divides, connects with him as a fellow practitioner of *Weltliteratur*, as a poet of all humanity.²⁰ By revealing hidden familial relations between characters apparently divided by culture, religion and ethnicity, Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise* (1779) radiates cosmopolitan idealism.²¹ And Johann Georg Jacobi’s lesser-known tale of a Zoroastrian father and daughter, journeying between oases of harmonious, interreligious coexistence in a world otherwise marked by division and intolerance, *Nessim und Zulima. Eine Erzählung nach Raphael* (1782), is an example of similar ideals in prose narrative.²² This work was a source of inspiration for Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), who constructed an encounter between a Muslim slave girl and the German protagonist in his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.²³ Rejecting the company of drunken crusading knights, Heinrich converses with Zulima and the pair discover common values and beliefs that transcend boundaries of East and West, Islam and Christianity, through the utopia of Romantic poetry: Kontje describes this encounter as indicative of a ‘gentler German cosmopolitanism’ which was to reawaken “the pre-national spirit of European unity and reconnect Europe to the East” (Kontje, 99).

Might our two women travellers have exhibited cosmopolitan attitudes and have viewed Islamic culture through that particular lens? It is possible to conceive of cosmopolitanism not only as an ideology informed by the reading of elevated theoretical-philosophical texts, but as a set of

attitudes, values and behaviours derived from and expressed, implicitly or explicitly, through an individual's ongoing interaction with different cultures. These values may not be upheld consistently by our writers, indeed they may emerge only briefly. In this discussion, we will be asking how and to what extent tendencies emerge in the writings of Hahn-Hahn and Schuber, which one might term 'cosmopolitan' in our sense. Of course, the travelogues produced by these two women can still be seen as conditioned substantially by such issues as gender, class, religion, ideology, and the possible affiliation of the traveller to a particular patron, who may have funded both journey and publication. The discussion will seek to remain sensitive to both cosmopolitan and more Eurocentric, Orientalist tendencies in texts by the two travellers, and also to the possible reasons for these fluctuations.

II.

Ida Hahn-Hahn was already a published and widely read author by the 1840-s: and this was testament to her talents, rather than her schooling. She had been privately tutored and excelled in her studies, though the scope of that education is believed by most to have been limited.²⁴ Her double-barrelled surname came from the fact that she married her cousin – largely for reasons of familial succession and finance, as her father had ruined the family with disastrous forays into the theatre. The marriage was unhappy and divorce followed. In a period of self-discovery and personal development in the 1840-s, Hahn-Hahn embarked upon a series of intercontinental journeys, upon which Adolf Baron Bystram (1798-1848) became her companion – though she also travelled alone, as a woman of some means and, consequently, independence. Of greatest interest for this discussion are the letters she wrote in the aforementioned *Orientalische Briefe*, in which she recorded first hand experiences of her travels in Islamic territories.

In what forms would this traveller encounter Islam - as religious practise and ritual, as doctrine, text, or indeed as architecture, dress, food and custom? How was this traveller to react to her new context? What view of herself within an Islamic culture does she present? The first significant encounter with an Islamic culture occurs in Constantinople. Hahn-Hahn describes the city in which she finds herself, effectively reading it as an unfolding text and deriving many observations on matters of culture and faith from these readings. In the first letters of September 1843 she writes to her mother, waxing lyrical about the Oriental paradise she finds:

Jetzt in den stillen Mondabend hinaus zu schauen, das ist wie ein Traum, den eine freundliche Fee mir geschenkt haben könnte. Im bläulichen Duft schwimmen die weichen Kuppeln der Moscheen, die zarten Minare's, die stillen Cipressenhaine (I, 116).

The city is described as a supernatural gift, and a dream. This is a dream that is soon to be broken quite explicitly, however. Hahn-Hahn finds she can admire the vista of an Islamic city from afar – such

a distanced vision does not disrupt her pre-conceived ideal. Written records of her walks through the city on the very next day, however, produce a different narrative. The traveller deliberately deconstructs her ideal, through an analogy of a theatre-goer stepping behind the scenes of a stage, only to witness something far less beautiful: "Du bist entzückt, hingerissen [...] und jetzt führt man Dich hinter die Szene. Hilf Himmel! Latten, Sparrwerk, schmutziges Papier [...] grobe Leinwand; - so, aber ganz gänzlich ist Constantinopel" (I, 130-31). Hahn-Hahn replaces the Oriental idyll with an inverse, negative image of Oriental squalor - one which will prevail as it is presented as the 'true' or 'more precise' vision of the city.

Is Hahn-Hahn merely adjusting to the reality of cultural difference and how it impacts upon her preconceived ideals? Or is she to repeat this pattern of oscillation between negatively and positively charged constructions of Islam? Still in early September 1843, she writes in more detail of her trip on a (typically dilapidated) Turkish steamboat, where she witnesses an act of Islamic prayer on deck, and far more besides:

Das Gebet habe ich nur von einem Türkenvorrichten sehen, von dem Kaffeewirth. Er überschritt plötzlich die Schranken zum ersten Platz, weil da etwas freier Raum war, lies die Pantoffeln stehen, stellte sich mit dem Gesicht nach Südost, Mecca zugewendet, und vollzog sein Gebet, bei dem ich die unglaubliche Geschmeidigkeit seiner Glieder bewunderte. [...] Am Schluss des Gebets muß der Mohomedaner mit der Hand über das Antlitz fahren, damit aus demselben jeder Zug von Scheinheiligkeit verbannt werde; ist das nicht hübsch? [...]

Auch das Morgengebet der Hebräer beobachtete ich, hauptsächlich bei einem Alten [...] Eine schwarze Kapsel, die zehn Gebote enthaltend, befestigte er mit einem ledernen Riemen um sein greises Haupt, schlängelte das Ende desselben um die Finger der linken Hand, warf eine schwarz und weiß gestreifte Wollnecke über den Kopf, setzte eine Brille auf, und begann zu lesen, wobei er die Lippen schweigend aber heftig bewegte. Nach dem vollendeten Gebet, verwahrte er diese Dinge sorgfältig, nachdem er jedes andächtig geküßt.

Wenn man das so in der Nähe sieht, fragt man sich wie es möglich ist, sich um dieser Formen willen zu hassen oder zu verachten, da ja alle dem Grundgedanken entsprungen sind die Seele reiner und höher zu stimmen? (I, 119-121)

Of course, the letter is littered with many of the value judgements and generalizations of her age: she refers to 'Mahomedaner', a common misnomer in pre-twentieth century European discourses, which exposes the Christian misapprehension that Islam deifies the Prophet Mohammed in the way that Christians do Jesus Christ, although she later alternates this with the more informed term 'Muslime'.²⁵ In the same letter, she moves from writing about Turkish customs to focus on the ethnic character of Turks, though her vision narrows and she makes an unreflecting, negative snap-judgement once again, saying of the Turkish custom of smoking pipes in coffee houses: 'Ich bin überzeugt, daß das ewige Qualmen den türkischen Character deteriorirt hat' (I, 119). Even when talking about the act of prayer itself, there is a note of condescension: the observance of one Muslim custom, whereby the hand is passed over the face to expunge any hypocrisy or false piety after

prayer, is referred to as ‘hübsch’. Whilst she might be free of bourgeois Christian moralizing, the countess passes her experiences through other Eurocentric filters: the tone might be thought to echo that of a well-to-do lady tourist, observing Muslim life as if in a museum.

Yet there is far more in this passage. Hahn-Hahn is, as she writes elsewhere in the same letter, interested in new ideas and she detests the stupidity of those people ‘denen die Welt der Ideen hermeitsch verschlossen ist’ (I, 118). In the passage cited she encounters new customs and new ideas and witnesses the prayer not only of a Muslim, but also of a Jewish man. She describes these in largely non-ideological terms, proving herself even by contemporary standards quite a competent ethnographer. Mentioned in careful detail are the rituals, the clothing and trappings involved in acts of devotion. There is a marked absence of European prejudicial characteristics associated with Islam by many nineteenth-century European commentators on religion – namely, fanaticism, irrational and blind devotion and comments on the misguided and ultimately ‘heathen’ nature of the other faith. Not only does she open herself to ideas, learn and record without heavy-handed Eurocentric prejudice and posit an enlightened message of mutual respect between Christians, Muslims and Jews, but she stresses a commonality of religious experience, which transcends dogma and ritual – members of all faiths seeking a common refinement of the soul through prayer and devotion. Similarities of ritual do occur to her: she asks rhetorically ‘Kniest nicht der Katholik wie der Mohammedaner? (I, 121), seeing this common act not merely as coincidence but as a physical expression of universal human deference to the divine. Continuing her reflections, she writes on religion more generally:

Wir können wol finden, daß eine Form mehr als die andre grade unsrer eignethümlichen Innerlichkeit entspricht, und daher für uns das Wahre ist; allein, ob sie vor Gott die einzigwahre, ist doch wol mehr zweifelhaft (ibid).

Here, Hahn-Hahn seems to be contrasting critically a number of paradigms of religion, or religiosity in the wider sense. She discusses religion as a ‘form’, which may be suitable or unsuitable to an individual’s ‘inner’, spiritual needs. In a way, she also echoes the *Ringparabel* of Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*, in that she exposes the notion of the one true religion as a limiting cultural construction – one that she feels God might well not share. Lines later, and continuing in a similar vein, she writes:

Ich glaube, das Reisen und Aufenthalt zwischen fremden Völkern der Orthodoxie nicht sehr förderlich sein mögen, und es ist dabei nur das unendlich traurig, daß immerfort die Orthodoxie, die Rechtgläubigkeit nach menschlichen Gesetzen, mit dem Glauben verwechselt wird [...] (ibid)

Hahn-Hahn distinguishes here between religious orthodoxy, on the one hand, which is the strict observance of the rules governing organized belief, and genuine faith, ‘Glauben’, on the other, which is the subject’s inner capacity for faith. Travel amongst alien peoples, it seems, does little to support

an individual's observance of orthodoxy – a state of affairs not undesirable, it seems, for this traveller.

If this constitutes a cosmopolitan perspective on religion, one which acknowledges and respects religious difference, whilst seeing organized religions as formal expressions of a spiritual faculty common to all humanity, then it is not a constant in Hahn-Hahn's writing. Indeed, Hahn-Hahn's written representations of her fellow women following her visit to the harems of noble Islamic households are overtly racist: having physically and metaphorically glimpsed behind the veil of the harem, she and her fellow visitors find 'nicht eine Spur von Schönheit gefunden haben' (I, 264), for the Muslim women she encounters are described as ugly. Having swept away one European stereotype of Muslim women as the exotic and erotic creatures of the Harem, Hahn-Hahn fills that space with another more negative image. A particular norm of European feminine 'beauty' seems to be conditioning how she sees these other women – one which supplants any cosmopolitan impulse to see Muslim women in some sense as 'sisters' and not wholly as 'others'. It seems unfortunate that, at a point where her femininity grants her access to experiences denied men, this traveller reverts to Orientalist type.

Let us, though, seek a balanced judgement. In Hahn-Hahn, we find a traveller, who, after initial trepidations, appears at ease in other cultures. When writing explicitly on matters of faith she appears to hold dear cosmopolitan ideals. Elsewhere, though, in other, less consciously reflective writing about religion and culture, that ideal falters. Perhaps remarkably, the most 'cosmopolitan' comments of the *Orientalische Briefe* are to be found in the opening letters home from Constantinople. The question of whether we find a cosmopolitanism which blossoms during her travels, possibly as a result of the reflective opportunities offered by the *ongoing* travel and writing, cannot be simply answered in the positive. The letters convey no such unbroken development, no sense of someone who sees herself ever more integrated into an ideal of universal humanity. There is also something of a restless traveller about Hahn-Hahn, who, at points in her letters, grows bored with, is distracted from or even contradicts ideas and ideals espoused elsewhere her writing. In the third volume of her letters, writing towards the end of her Oriental travels, she is thrilled to see the sun rise over the Nile: the bustling activity and diverse cultures meeting at this vital river she describes as a 'Bild des Lebens' (236-37), one so varied that 'die Erwartung [...] lässt keine Langeweile aufkommen' (237). Three days later, though, she is glad to find relief from the 'unglaublichen Monotonie der Ufer'. The contradiction is perhaps born of changing experiences and circumstances, and may well be the instinctual remarks of a weary traveller experiencing relief. In fact, Hahn-Hahn's relief is derived more from the fact that she writes from the luxury of the appropriately named *Hôtel d'Orient* in Cairo, a Europhile environment which comforts her not only

with newspapers, a soft bed and good food and coffee, but with the sense of being reconnected to her own culture in the form of European travellers, and thus, allowing her an escape from an alien environment. These comments do not seem to speak of a woman for whom the ongoing encounter with cultural difference continued to shape and enhance ideals that also looked beyond cultural difference. Naturally, these might simply be offhand remarks made by a weary traveller overwhelmed by the constant change and rigours of travel.

We can perhaps view such anecdotal evidence in a different light, if we consider Hahn-Hahn's later life and writings: her 'journeys' would continue long after the literal travels ceased. In 1849, following Bystram's death, she converted to Roman Catholicism, recounting her epiphany as a metaphorical journey in a protracted text entitled *Von Babylon nach Jerusalem*. In 1854 she founded a convent for unmarried mothers near Mainz, where she lived until her death in 1880. Later she would refer to her earlier period of travel, creativity and unorthodoxy as her personal 'Babylon' – her state, if we are to think of that Babylon in terms of its Old Testament associations, of 'confusion'. Not only did Hahn-Hahn (quite understandably) cease the physical act of travel in later life, but she seemed happy to use the motif of the journey not as an opportunity to rethink her relationships with other cultures, but as a means to banish such 'confusion' and consolidate her own sense of self as a virtuous and Christian European woman.

In 1850, another volume of travel letters was published in Austria entitled *Meine Pilgerreise über Rom, Griechenland, und Egypten durch die Wüste nach Jerusalem und zurück vom 4. October 1847 bis 25. September 1848* (Graz, 1850). The author was Maria Schuber of Graz. Hailing from this time and place, Schuber was very much a child of conservative Austria at the end of the Metternich regime.²⁶ To an extent she fell victim to the strictures of a certain bourgeois model of femininity, one which saw woman as less educated and less in need of education, as domesticated, devoutly religious and in little need of movement beyond the physical and cultural sphere of the home, let alone beyond the geo-cultural borders of the (in this case Austrian) nation state. Women seeking to travel in the context of such gender-politics needed to 'legitimize' their journeys in socially acceptable terms, and travel for purposes of education and self-cultivation was not seen as befitting.²⁷ For Schuber, as with others like her, religious piety, particularly Christianity in the Roman Catholic tradition, served both the reason for her journey, and the guarantor of her propriety as a good daughter of the Austrian heartlands whilst abroad. Given this stance, one might expect a much more skewed picture and set of attitudes towards Islam in these travel writings.

The title of Schuber's travelogue might in itself be seen to present the journey as an innocuous pathway through southern European, the Mediterranean and the Holy Land, to Jerusalem, the city at the centre of the three Abrahamic faiths, and then back – most travellers return home at some time. However, Schuber's journey might be seen in a slightly different light, when one considers that she dubbed it her 'Kreuzzug' (291). Whilst she was no conventional missionary on a proselytizing venture, and certainly no crusading knight in any literal sense, she was to make her journey as a metaphorical crusade, often walking on foot, partly for reasons of financial necessity, though partly, too, for reasons of piety. She stayed in convents, church-owned dwellings and in Christian enclaves en route, often seeking out the company of fellow Christians as she travelled. This decision was born out of the need to appear frugal with money, and to underline her virtue and piety in the eyes of the patron of her travel, to whom the volume as a whole is dedicated: the second title page of the 1850 Graz edition bears the inscription: 'dem hochgeehrten Herrn, Herrn Johann Nepomuk Krauss [...] ihrem Gönner, aus Dankbarkeit und Achtung gewidmet', and Krauss is the 'Herr Subernalrath K.' to whom many of the individual letters are also written. With such a sponsor and indeed a host of upstanding citizens of Graz making up her correspondents and reading public, it seemed unlikely that Schuber would display attitudes that questioned the absolute validity of Roman Catholicism, or that sought to establish any form of connection between it and other faiths. If she is not quite a 'tourist' in the sense that Hannerz relates, one who remains culturally entirely 'at home' whilst travelling 'abroad',²⁸ then at first glance Schuber might appear as a writer whose religious coordinates had, at least in writing, remained decidedly fixed.

Schuber finally reached Jerusalem in spring 1848 and wrote a flurry of letters to various persons within the week she stayed there. Jerusalem had been largely under the control of Ottoman Turkey since 1517 – and this was still the case on Schuber's arrival. A single Austrian, of course, had no actual colonial aspirations in Ottoman Jerusalem. Yet there was a fraught history to Austro-Turkish relations: Hapsburg Austria and Ottoman Turkey had been great rivals for several centuries. Would Schuber access a collective cultural memory of an older tradition of conflict, displaying antagonistic attitudes towards the Turkish forces of occupation? Perhaps this would manifest in overtly nationalistic terms, or be subsumed into a wider religious discourse on the wrongfulness of the Muslim occupation of Christ's final resting place.

On 5th March she wrote to a certain 'Herrn Medizin Dr.K'. Her letter describes the city in relatively positive terms, admiring its high, handsome walls, calling it 'eherwürdig' and 'schön' (283). Even when confronted with the city at close quarters she remains up-beat: the streets are not reduced to the stinking Oriental maze of other narratives:

Die Straßen sind nicht breit, doch auch nicht zu enge, häufig mit Schwibbögen versehen, oder ganz gedeckt nach orientalischer Sitte, um von der Sonne geschützt zu sein. Auch sind die Straßen rein und nett gelehrt, was den Werth einer Stadt gewiß erhöht. (282)

Schuber of course uses European standards of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘filth’ to measure the city, though she locates Jerusalem quite positively within this spectrum. Might it be that such a pious pilgrim could not bear to think of the city at the heart of her religion, the resting place of Jesus Christ, as being anything other than clean, beautiful and noble, and that this colours her vision? When she calls Jerusalem ‘diese grosse berühmte Weltstadt’ (*ibid*), is she alluding to the city’s capacity to function as the cosmopolitan centre of many faiths, or is it solely Jerusalem’s Christian heritage that thus elevates it? Schuber also reads the city’s buildings as an historical text, one which in some way reflects cosmopolitan attitudes to cultural and religious difference. A specific instance is her description of the Mosque of Omar, which Schuber notes, ‘den einst so großen Tempel Salomans erfeßt’ (*ibid*). However, it is not the architectural ‘overwriting’ of one religion’s holy sites by another, that impresses Schuber, but rather that the mosque was built to adjoin the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre, at the point where Caliph Omar prayed after conquering the city. Upon entering the city he had conquered, Omar had famously declined the Patriarch’s offer to pray in the church, as he reputedly did not wish to endanger the status of the building as a Christian centre of worship. Schuber praises what she sees as the ideal of a (Muslim) ruler, who recognises the pivotal role played by his city in a range of faiths, and insists that the allocation of space, and location and construction of religious buildings not privilege any one faith over another. The Muslim Turks guarding the church are also praised for their respect, even affection towards Christianity:

Die türkische Bewachung der Soldaten an den Stadthoren und in der Grabeskirche ist sehr gut, genau und gelassen. Ueberhaupt scheinen die Mahomedaner heutigen Tages in ihrer geheimen Liebe und Achtung für das Christenthum zuzunehmen, worüber ich noch mehrere Angelegenheiten finden werde, Ihnen einige Mittheilungen zu machen (282)

Or could such extracts, again, be read differently? Is it possible, that the Muslims referred to in this letter, both past and present, are shown to be coexisting peacefully with another faith that is nevertheless alien to them. And, conversely, is it more the case that Schuber’s Muslims are equally alien to her, and only earn her respect if they display positive attitudes towards Christianity? Is this at best the mutual tolerance of essential difference, rather than a cosmopolitanism that does not predicate human relationships on such divisions? Schuber ends this passage, by saying that she will reflect and write more on the subject – and this she does.

Schuber’s journey took her through various other Islamic territories. Whilst in Egypt other trends emerge in her writing on religion, which might appear cosmopolitan in our sense. She is highly complementary about the Islamic model of education as practised in Egypt, particularly its

enlightened gift of free education to many of its children. She decides this to be a good model for a practice lacking in Europe, expressing her views in a letter to Krauss from Cairo on 20 January 1848, following a visit to an academy where three-hundred children were receiving a good standard of academic education in a state-funded institution. In the same letter, she describes a guided tour around Cairo, having made contact with Christians there. She learns that an Egyptian nobleman had ordered the translation German-language works of theological interest into Arabic for laudable purposes:

Mehmed Ali gab den Auftrag, alle religiösen Schriften zu durchforschen, um auf Einheit zu gelangen! Welch' herrliche, großdenkende Idee eines Fürsten würdig. Uebrigens ist der Muslimanismus eben so zerfallen in seinen theilweisen Meinungen und Ausübungen wie der Christianismus. Vielleicht meint er nur die Lehre seines Propheten in Einklang zu bringen. Immerhin der beste Vorschlag eines Regenten. Während unserer treuherzigen Gespräche machte ich denen Herren auch einen Vorschlag, den sie mit vieler Theilnahme annahmen und mich versicherten, daß sie und die anderen Herren, mit denen ich heute im Ministerium sprach, beistimmen; nämlich die Lehre Jesu Christi als die allein wahre und seligmachende anzuerkennen. (215-16)

She praises the princely, noble idea of translating religious works of differing faiths into a common tongue, in order to seek 'unity' of belief amongst them. Schuber pulls apart her own hitherto homogeneous image of Islam and also sensitizes her readers to differences of opinion within differing forms of Islam. She considers briefly, that Ali's project might simply be aiming towards the reunification of these divisions within Islam and seems disappointed that the work might not be extended to include other faiths, though remains full of praise for his intentions. However, the pendulum swings the other way later in the passage, and Schuber is once again concerned to spread the word of Christianity as the one true faith via Christians in Egypt to the rest of Egyptian society. She goes on to cite from an (unnamed) French essay she had recently read, which she presents as her own view, or the above mentioned 'suggestion'. This essay sees the unification of religions as the way to further the progress of civilization, to create political world unity and peace. The traveller cites some two translated pages from the essay. The text criticizes peoples who 'sich in ihrem Glauben besser halten als die Andern, die sie kaum als Mitmenschen und Kinderdasselben Gottes beachten' (215-216), and sings the praise of 'Die kluge und lobenswerte Toleranz weiser Monarchen.' However, the essay also describes how such a potentially cosmopolitan vision of religion 'führt [...] in einen anderen Abgrund, und der heißt: Indifferentismus, das heist: Gleichgültigkeit, die mit der Zeit jeden Glauben zerstört' (216). Again, the cosmopolitan reader is frustrated as the ideal of commonality between religions collapses into Christian-centred uniformity. The collapse continues as the passage attempts to find equivalence between the prophet/messiah figures of the two faiths: 'So wie der Christ glaubt, daß Jesus Christus [...] der Sohn Gottes ist, so glaubt der Muselmann, daß Mahomed sein Prophet sei' (216), although, once more, this attitude

lapses. There follows a kind of self-critique of the history of Catholic Church, particularly of periods such as the dark ages and the Spanish Inquisition. The essay asserts, however, that Roman Catholic Christianity will emerge as the true faith to which all will convert, albeit ‘ohne Fanatismus, ohne Hochmuth’, without fanaticism or aggressive proselytising (216): but Christian, nevertheless.

A number of readings can be generated by the above letters to these two men. It appears that Schuber’s contact with Mehmed Ali exposed her to the enlightened (and cosmopolitan) ideals held by educated Muslims, which she greatly lauds, even if she then later supplants these with Christian ideology. Writing for her intended audience, both her sponsor specifically and Catholic Graz generally, one might contend that she was compelled in some way to write as if she were a proselytising missionary, especially when confronted by a benevolent universalism that threatened the theological sovereignty of Christianity. Ought we to see her as a woman caught between two patriarchal paradigms of religion represented by two influential and socially elevated men: one idealistically universalizing, the other partisan and, for her, dominant? Might she, a woman of her era, be forced to vacillate between two differing ideologies and bound to perform such ambivalence in her letters. Schuber, might however, simply be a Christian traveller of great religious conviction, who encounters an initially appealing cosmopolitan ideal of religion, if only to imply her own faith’s ascendancy by re-embracing the missionary spirit.

How are we to reconcile the cosmopolitan and Orientalist modes of thinking and writing in Schuber’s work? Can we speak of a woman who, in the course of her journey, leaves Orientalist thinking behind? There is no evidence from the letters to presume that there is any teleological development, no shift in attitudes from provincial Austrian Orientalist conceptions of Islam to a worldly cosmopolitanism. In a dual sense, Schuber returns both geographically and ideologically to her home, as the title of her volume implies. She continues to write from a position of Christian piety and conviction, whether it is to her sponsors, to other women or to her own brother Benno, until the end of her journey.²⁹ One cannot, though, overlook how she explored the possibility of a ‘new relationship’ with Islam. Perhaps one more anecdote will help illustrate Schuber’s ambivalence on this matter. Whilst in Ottoman Turkey, (301-302) she writes of a building which was once a Christian convent, but had become a disused Turkish mosque. Schuber wants the building to be a convent once again – this would provide the opportunity for Turkish women to instruct themselves in Christian virtue. This she writes in a letter to the aforementioned Priest in Graz. Moving on to visit a local school, though, she describes how Arabic women teach their under the authority of Franciscans. It occurs, ‘wie es in ganz Orient [...] der Gebrauch ist’: a Christian education is offered, but this is administered sitting on the straw mats. Participating in the lessons, she delights in

learning something of their spoken language, and learns what little of the written Arabic characters the pupils know and something of their country's other faith - Islam. Here Schuber lets slip a certain fascination with Islam, mischievously allowing herself to learn these lessons on school time, and in a Christian school. The reader is left in no doubt as to Schuber's ultimately Christian standpoint and motivations, but also notes her openness to learning about and connecting with aspects of Islam, albeit in a quiet and coy manner.

During their travels both women have traversed a wide range of possibilities in their written representations of Islam. Neither, it should be emphasised, rethought her relationship with Islam and Islamic culture to the extent that she could be thought to be wholeheartedly or consistently 'cosmopolitan' as we have understood the term. Yet both travellers approached and engaged with that ideal in a way that opened up, however briefly, the possibility of a new relationship with the Muslim world. Neither traveller, it seems, can be thought simply to reproduce the more crassly reductive Orientalist writing typical of many of their contemporaries. Of the two travellers, perhaps Ida Hahn-Hahn might appear to show more obviously cosmopolitan inclinations: as an increasingly confident woman of means in the 1840s, explicitly open to new ideas, she was free to peruse and engage with Islamic culture (and other faiths), free to establish a kind of kinship with the other faith derived from an ideal of universal human religiosity and free, also, to disseminate her opinions on Islam. And as an established fictional author and poet in her own right she wrote for a public which was both socially and ideologically diverse, and upon which she was not wholly reliant for subsistence. For all Hahn-Hahn's free trans-confessionalism, however, Schuber perhaps tests tougher boundaries. She writes and ultimately publishes letters that evince a steadfastly Christian mode of writing, be it derived from her dependence on Christian, patriarchal patronage or her own belief systems. Yet these texts continue to betray, perhaps unwittingly, what we have called her 'cosmopolitan' impulses. Ultimately, then, whilst Maria Schuber makes only the most slender of progress into cosmopolitanism territory, hers is perhaps the more significant journey, as she writes under very different and in some ways more difficult pressures.

Notes

¹ HAHN-HAHN, IDA, Orientalische Briefe, 3 vols. Berlin 1844

² This mode of thought it perhaps best exemplified by the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-180) Herder's seminal works will be alluded to later in this essay.

³ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) is often considered the real trailblazer in terms of women who travelled to and wrote back from the Orient. See her 'Turkish Embassy Letters' (1716-18) in: MONTAGU, LADY MARY WORTLEY, Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, in 3 vols. Ed. by her grandson Lord Wharncliffe, London 1837, volume 1.

⁴ SAID, EDWARD, Orientalism, 3rd edt, London 2003. The importance of Said's study should not be overlooked – his polemic approach gathers together a wealth of material in what has become definitive new context and offered us the key insight that one culture's vision of another is never entirely innocent.

⁵ POLASCHEGG, ANDREA, Der andere Orientalismus. Regeln deutsch-Morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert, Berlin/New York 2005.

⁶ MARCHAND, SUSAN L, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship, Cambridge/New York 2009

⁷ KONTJE, TODD, German Orientalisms, Ann Arbor 2004.

⁸ See Kontje, p.83.

⁹ HODKINSON, JAMES, MORRISON, JEFFREY, (Hg), Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture, Rochester /NY 2009

¹⁰ See ALMOND, IAN, Terrible Turks, Bedouin Poets, and Prussian Prophets: The Shifting Place of Islam in Herder's Thought in PMLA, 2008, (123: 1), 57-75.

¹¹ SCHLEGEL, FRIEDRICH, Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, ed. by Jean-Jacques Anstett, Ernst Behler and Hans Eichner, 35 vols, Paderborn, Vienna, Zurich: Schöningh, 1958ff. Quoted as: (Schlegel, section, volume, page: fragment/entry number). Here: 'ZWÖLFTE VORLESUNG: Charakterschilderung des Mahomet und seiner Religion, so wie der arabischen Weltherrschaft. Neue Gestaltung des europäischen Abendlandes und Wiederherstellung des christlichen Kaisertums' (Schlegel ,I,9.,269-290).

¹² See: Schlegel, I,10:276.

¹³ DABAK, SUBHANGI, Images of the Orient in the Travel Writings of Ida Pfeiffer and Ida Hahn-Hahn (Univ. Diss, Michigan State University, 1999). See also O'BRIEN, TRACI S. ' "A Daughter of the Occident" Travels to the "Orient": Ida von Hahn-Hahn's *The Countess Faustina* and *Letters From the Orient*' in: Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture, Volume 24, 2008, pp. 26-48.

¹⁴ HABINGER, GABRIELE, Frauen reisen in die Fremde. Diskurse und Repäsentationen von reisenden Europäerinnen im 19 und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert (Vienna: Promedia, 2006). Habinger reconstructs a discourse of 'strategic modesty' in Pfeiffer's writing, whereby the traveller denies all claims to being an imaginative or highly descriptive writer, and offers instead merely 'sober observations', although this sobriety itself becomes a method for validating the observations she makes as true and realistic (pp.162-68).

¹⁵ Geertz is credited with, amongst other things, instigating the 'linguistic turn' in ethnology. Dismissing the notion that travelling to the 'source' of a culture granted the travel writer authentic access to its 'essence', Geertz viewed written encounters between subjects of differing cultures (critically) as limited constructs in

language – so historians and literary scholars can look at historical encounters as narrative constructions, in a sense, as fictions rather than immediate truths. See: GEERTZ, CLIFFORD, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, 2005. James Clifford has pointed to the multiple spheres of identity within which both the observer and the observed function in such an encounter: both are simultaneously social, gendered, religious and ethnic beings: ostensibly simple encounters have to be looked at on multiple thematic plains, and is subject to constant flux. James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, HUP, 1997).

¹⁶ For all of its strengths, Dabak's study is in danger of becoming reductive: her reading finds in Hahn-Hahn and Pfeiffer only the racism and ethnocentricity that her ideological starting point presumes and sees few other modes of thought and writing in the letters she considers.

¹⁷ See BECK, ULRICH, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, Cambridge 2008. Beck has been a major voice in shaping conceptions of contemporary cosmopolitanism social-scientific and political debate. See also APPIAH, KWAME ANTHONY, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York 2006, a controversial work which places certain limits on the role of national citizens in acting as citizens of the world and reasserts the role and function of nation state.

¹⁸ Kants Essay 'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht' (1784) and Hegels 'Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts' (1820) feature strongly in Fine (2007) and Beck (2008) and the contemporary discussions surrounding the relevance of cosmopolitan thinking for the nation state and international law.

¹⁹ Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007)

²⁰ This reading of Goethe and his Divan is perhaps best represented in: BHATTI, ANIL, ' "...zwischen zwei Welten schwebend". Zu Goethes Fremdheitsexperiment im „West-östlichen Divan“', in: KNOBLOCH, HANS-JÖRG and KOOPMANN, HELMUT (eds) *Goethe. Neue Ansichten*, ed. by, Würzburg 2007, pp. 103-121

²¹ On the problematic relationship between the concept of 'tolerance' and Lessing's play, see ROBERTSON, RITCHIE, 'Dies hohe Lied der Dichtung'? The Ambiguities of Toleration in Lessing's *Die Juden* and *Nathan der Weise*' in: *Modern Language Review* 1998, (1), 105-120.

²² In JACOBI, JHOANN GEORG, *Dichtungen*, 1820 Ronneberg. My thanks to the staff of the Taylorian Library of Oxford University for allowing me to access their fine engraved and illustrated miniature of this text.

²³ For an earlier reading of *Ofterdingen* as a continuation of Enlightenment ideals, see MAHONEY, DENNIS, 'Stages of Enlightenment: Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* and Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*', in: Seminar, 23 (1987), 200-215.

²⁴ See MÖHRMANN, RENATE, *Frauenemanzipation im Deutschen Vormärz: Texte und Dokumente*, Stuttgart 1980, 231, and also: KRAFT, HELGA W, 'Ida Hahn-Hahn (1805–1880) Germany,' in FREDERIKSEN, E and AMETSBICHLER. E (eds) *Women Writers in German-Speaking Countries: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998), 189.

²⁵ ELGER, RALF, and STOLLEIS, FRIEDERIKE, (eds), *Kleines Islam-Lexikon. Geschichte – Alltag – Kultur*, Munich 2001, 228.

²⁶ The nationalist uprisings of 1848 throughout Habsburg territories set in motion the difficult transition towards the great 'Compromise' of 1868 and the creation of the polylingual and pluricultural realm of Austria-Hungary: travelling 1847-48, well before such changes, Schuber was not by origin a cultural pluralist. On the comparative uses of the Austro-Hungarian pluricultural experiment in contemporary debates on pluriculturalism see: BHATTI, ANIL, *Aspekte gesellschaftlicher Diversität und Homogenisierung im postkolonialen Kontext*, in: MÜLLER-FUNK, WOLFGANG/ WAGNER, BIRGIT, *Eigene und andere Fremde. "Postkoloniale" Konflikte im europäischen Kontext*, Vienna 2005, pp.31-47.

²⁷ See Habinger, 159-163.

²⁸ HANNERZ, ULF, ‘Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture’ in: Mike Featherstone (ed), *Global Culture. Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, London and New Delhi 1990, (pp. 237-252).

²⁹ On 25 March 1848 Schuber wrote to ‘Frau Baronin B.’ “Da ich weiss, Frau Baronin! Daß nur die heil. Geschichte Ihr Interesse in Anspruch nimmt, so ist es genung, Sie von Bethlehem aus zu grüssen, um Ihnen Jesus, Maria und Josef vor Augen zu stellen.” (327). Whilst Schuber appears to be tailoring her material explicitly to the religious interests of her readers, similar thoughts, alongside professions of intense piety, are in her letters to her brother Benno from Bethlehem in the same month. Religious conviction, it seems, is not a performance determined by the expectations of her correspondents.