



Tuwaiq Escarpment in the Nejd, Saudi Arabia – Author, Marcel Baptiste, Wikimedia

***You are descended from levels of reality other
than the one you normally take for granted.***

— Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan

Let the one among you who is without sin

be the first to cast a stone.

— Jesus Christ

After my last class, I hurried down to the lake where Tomás was waiting under the willow tree. For a time we walked in silence. I felt as if I were with a friend I'd known for years. Like Gio, Tomás had a deeply expressed gallantry that made you feel you were the most important person in the world. I didn't want the afternoon to end. I wanted to know more about Tomás.

Finally, I summoned my courage and said, "The first night, I came to see you dance, I realized you had the same passion as Jean Babilée. I went home that night burning to study flamenco. Not to be a flamenco dancer, but to help me create my choreography. You've made me a better dancer."

Tomás' eyes never left me . . . his melancholy eyes. I was thinking of the way he danced the *siguiriya*. He had the ability to fuse completely with the brooding currents of that song. Had dancing the *siguiriya* made him melancholic? Or was he attracted to the *siguiriya* because of the melancholy in his soul?

I looked across the gleaming water at the bluish shadow of the mountain beyond and a flock of sailboats borne swiftly by the wind. In silence, we watched a hawk high above the shore gliding and gliding on air.

"Do you like to sail?"

"I've only been once with Emile and Yvonne."

"I have a friend who has a cat boat. Would you like to go sailing?"

"Oh, yes."

"It's a little boat, just for two."

"How lovely."

We walked awhile in silence, walking slowly like I once did with Gio. From time to time, he looked at me and I looked at him.

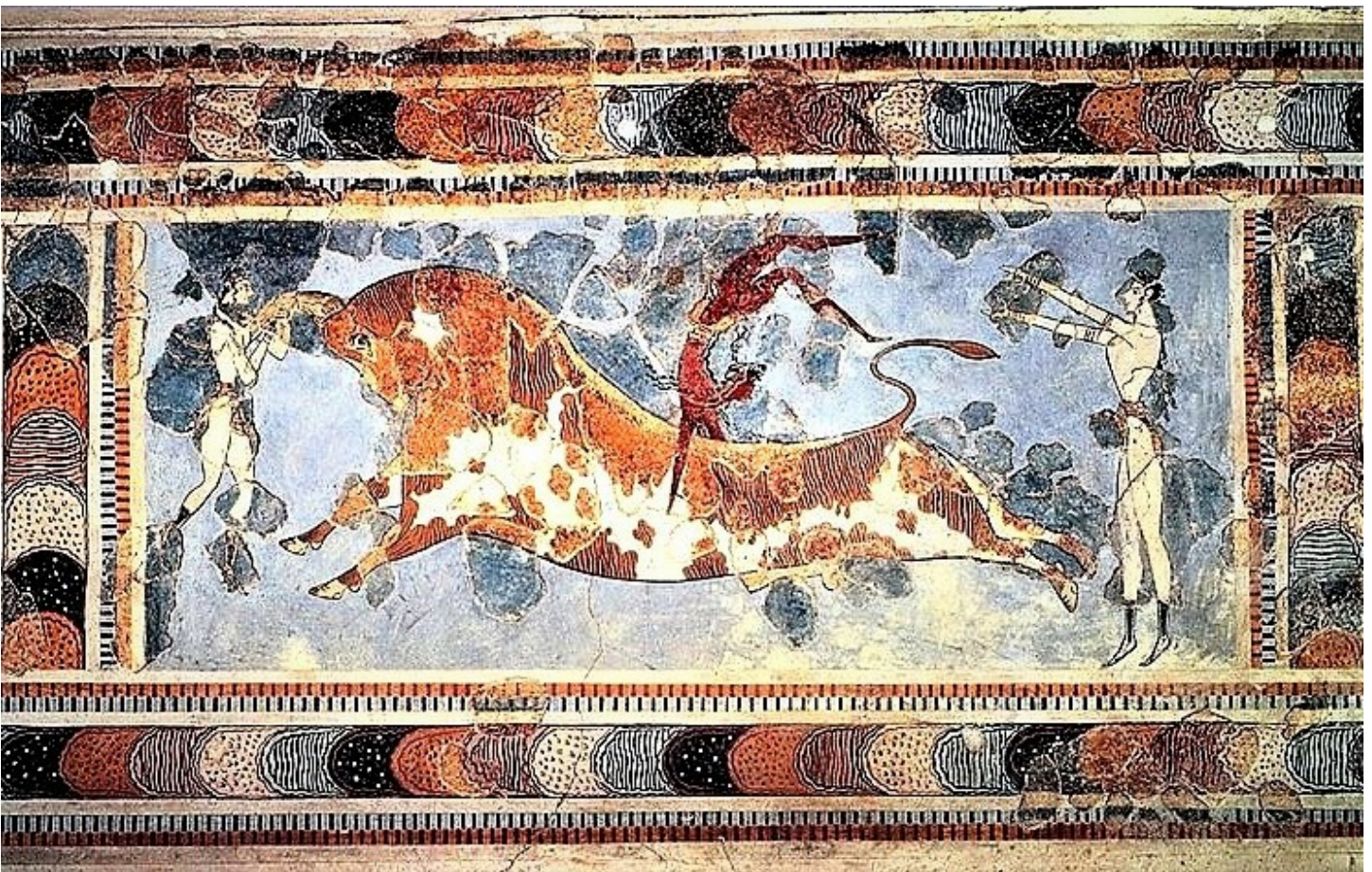
“One day when you have the time, I’d like to learn more about Gitano culture.”

“*Bien*, if you wish, I have the time right now.”

I told him to begin at the beginning, and he did, in the time of the Greeks and Romans.

“Frederico García Lorca believed that flamenco has the same roots as Greek tragedy. Unpredictable forces rule our lives. Flamenco and bullfighting dramatize these tragic forces. In Spain, bullfighting is called *la corrida de toros* or *tauromaquia* which is derived from the Greek language. Bulls were sacred animals during the Bronze Age in Crete, two thousand years before Christ. Minoan culture had a ritual in which a woman or a man leaped over the bull by grasping its horns and when the bull violently jerks his neck back, it propels them over the bull.”

“That sounds even more dangerous than the *corrida* today.”



Women leaping bulls, Fresco from Knossos, Crete – Unknown ancient artist, public domain, Wikimedia



Corrida de torros, Barcelona, Spain, 1890-1900 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“During the time,” Tomás said, “that Francisco Goya was creating his series *Desastres de la Guerra*, he did a series, *La Tauromaquia*, depicting matadors confronting the bulls. The *corrida* symbolizes the peril of man’s fate. Before the Romans came to Andalucía, the people worshiped the earth mother. Her son took the form of a bull. Each year a bull was slaughtered by the priests. The sacrifice was to assure the cycle of the seasons. Lorca thinks that the modern bullfight originated with the ancient ritual killing of the bull. In the *corrida*, the *torero* performs the same role as the priest. The ritual killing of the bull is a religious mystery. In the pagan world, the bull was sacrificed to preserve the fertility of the earth. In the Christian faith, Christ was sacrificed to save mankind.

“I grew up in the Gitano quarter of Santiago in Jerez de la Frontera, the town where El Estampio was born. Before he began to dance flamenco, El Estampio was a bullfighter, a *torero*. One of the great *bailaores* of this century, his movements were influenced by postures from *la corrida*.



José Gómez Ortega – *Joselito, El Gallo*, 1920 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Temeridad de martincho en la plaza de Zaragoza, *The Daring of Martincho in the Ring at Saragossa*, 1816 – Author, Francisco Goya, public domain, Wikimedia



La desgraciada muerte de Pepe Illo en la plaza de Madrid, "The disgraceful death of Pepe Illo in Madrid's plaza," 1816 – Author, Francisco Goya, public domain, National Gallery of Art, Wikimedia



Los moros establecidos en España, prescindiendo de las supersticiones de su Alcorán, adoptaron esta caza y arte, y lancean un toro en el campo. "The Moors established in Spain, disregarding the superstitions of their Quran, adopted this hunt and art, and they spear a bull on the field," 1816 – Author, Francisco Goya, public domain, National Gallery of Art, Wikimedia



Galli-Marié as Carmen in the Opera by Georges Bizet – Author Henri-Lucien Doucet, 1886, public domain, Wikimedia

“There is a deep connection between flamenco and the bullfight. In Bizet’s opera, the Gitano dancer, Carmen, falls in love with the *torero*, Escamillo. There’s been a lot of intermarriage between flamenco and *torero* families.”

“I have Jerez de la Frontera in my blood. As a kid, I loved to go into the salt marshes of Las Marismas with Papa where I could see stags with magnificent horns and millions of birds spending the winter.”

“Where is Las Marismas?”

“It’s on the coast just north of Jerez de la Frontera, where the Guadalquivir River flows into the Atlantic, a wilderness of marshes, streams, and sand dunes. You can sail up the river from the Gulf of Cádiz to Seville. In the days of the Romans, the Guadalquivir was navigable all the way to Córdoba where the massive Roman Bridge is still standing. In Las Marismas, the constantly shifting sand dunes bury the pine trees. But there’s an amazing plant that has acquired the survival trait of shifting its roots as the sand shifts so that it always remains on the crest of the dune. It goes to show that the gods of nature can create.”

“What kind of wildlife did you see?”



Guadalquivir River, Roman bridge, Córdoba – Author, Berthold Werner, Wikimedia



Iberian lynx – Author, Programa de Conservación Ex-Situ del Lince Ibérico, Wikimedia

“Everything from flamingos and Imperial eagles to wild boar and Iberian lynxes. There are even some wild dromedaries roaming around, survivors of the Moorish Conquest. The Spanish government had planned to drain the marshes for farming but the Marquis of Bonanza who owned an estate in Doñana became interested in its ecosystems and along with renowned ornithologists, petitioned Franco’s government to turn Las Marismas into a preserve. It was a courageous thing to challenge Franco’s policy and they’ve succeeded in stopping the government’s plans.

“What are the lynxes like?”

“Their fur is the color of caramel with black spots like a leopard, a ruff of silver hair at their throat and on the tips of their ears, black tufts of hair standing straight up. Now and then I’d catch sight of a lynx with her tiny just born cubs. But then I saw fewer and fewer lynx until I never saw one again. The commercial hunters have slaughtered them for their fur.”

“You mean none survived?”

“It’s believed they’re extinct. The beautiful Iberian lynx is gone.”



Iberian Lynx – Author, Programa de Conservación Ex-situ del Lince Ibérico, Wikimedia



Pinar de la Algaida en Sanlúcar de Barameda, Doñana National Park – Author, Antonio M. Romero Dorado, Wikimedia



Marshes, Doñana National Park – Author, Fred Technische, Wikimedia



Dunes, Doñana National Park – Author Joergsam, Wikimedia



Parque Nacional Doñana, a UNESCO World Heritage Natural Site – Author, Angel M. Felcísimo, Wikimedia



Rhonda, Malaga, Spain – Author, Manfred Werner, Wikimedia

“What a tragedy. Cats are sacred beings. You must have had a magical childhood in Andalucía.”

“It was magical because I began dancing when I was very young. When I was seven, I began studying with Cristina López. I discovered I was born to dance. They called me the child *fenómeno*. The fact that I learned dance from a woman, allowed me to acquire knowledge of arm and hand movements that I otherwise would not have known. I went to Madrid to study at El Estampio’s academy. The young dancers adored him. He was our inspiration. When he died a few years ago, I mourned him not only for his work as a dancer, but for his greatness as a human being. At the time, the classic style of dance was in danger of dying out. El Estampio resurrected it by his extraordinary style. But while he conserved the classic form of flamenco, he was also a great innovator. I have inherited his love for purity in the dance. My mother was a Gypsy, or as we say in Spanish, a Gitano. My father was of Andalucían heritage. So I have the blood of both strains of flamenco.”

“Both?”

“Originally, there were two distinct sources of flamenco — the Gitano and the Andalucían. The Gitanos originally came from the Indres River valley in India. Their language *romani*, is derived from Sanskrit. Persecuted by the Aryan race, they began to migrate, wandering through Asia, Africa, and Europe for years before they came to Spain in the 15th century. Scholars have suggested that the Spanish word Gitano is derived from *egipto*.”

As he talked, I marveled at the change in him. The restrained Tomás had disappeared, his hands moving with flourishes as he spoke, his eyes flashing as if something had ruptured inside and he was pouring out.

“Before the Gitanos arrived, there was a mixture of many cultures in Spain — the blond Visigoths, Jews, Berbers, and Islamic Moors from North Africa. The musical influences were diverse — Mozarab dirges, Greek psalms, Persian melodies, Gregorian chants, Castilian ballads, Jewish laments, and African rhythms.

“In the medieval era, Andalucía was more sophisticated than Christian Europe. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in harmony under the Moorish kings. The Jewish Sephardim were the most sophisticated of all. Many of the literary, philosophical, and religious works of Jews in Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East were written in Arabic with an alphabet derived from Hebrew. A million people lived in Córdoba. It was a golden age. The Arab philosopher Averroës and the Jewish philosopher Maimonides, resurrected the philosophy of Aristotle which had been preserved in Alexandria, Egypt. In *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*,

Averroës attacked Islamic theologian, al-Ghazali who said that the Greek philosophers were pagans whose ideas were antithetical to the Islamic faith. Averroës disagreed. If the ancient philosophers proved that something was true, Muslims should accept it whether they were pagan or not. Ultimately, Averroës influenced Christian Europe more than Islamic thought. Far ahead of his time, Averroës said that when philosophy and religion disagree, then religious scripture should not be understood literally, but allegorically.



Averroës, detail from *Triunfo de Santo Tomás*, 14th century – Author, Andrea Bonaiuto, public domain, Wikimedia

“Averroës writings on Aristotle,” Tomás said, “influenced the thinking of the French philosopher Abelard who opposed St. Bernard, the Cistercian monk who preached the crusades. St. Bernard also condemned Abelard for putting reason above faith. St. Bernard ruled that reason had no right to contradict the doctrines of the Church.



Illustration from Peter Abelard's works, the brightest thinker of the 12th century – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Saint Bernard afflicted eye is healed by the Virgin Mary's milk, 1480–1485 Author, I.A.M. of Zwolle, public domain, Wikimedia



Accused of heresy, philosopher Averroës was banished from the court of Caliph Abu Yusuf Yaquib al-Mansur in 1195 – Author, Louis Figuier, *Vies Des Savants Illustrés Du Moyen Âge*, public domain, Wikimedia



Statue of Ibn Rushd, known as Averroës, in Córdoba, Spain – Author, Saleemzohaib, Wikimedia. During the 12th century, Averroës, an Islamic theologian, mathematician, physician, physicist, astronomer, and philosopher, introduced the work of Aristotle into European thought.

“For the same reason that St. Bernard condemned Abelard of raising reason over faith, conservative Muslims condemned Averroës for heresy. The orthodox clerics could not allow the rationalism of Averroës. The liberal Islamic philosopher was attacked and his books burned. Averroës, the most brilliant mind of the 12th century, was banished from Spain. Much later, under the reign of the Catholic Queen Isabella, the schism between reason and faith fanned the flames of zealotry, which duplicated the schism between faith and reason in the Islamic world. After the expulsion of Averroës and the conservatives’ rejection of the 12th century Islamic and Jewish enlightenment, the Islamic world became as theologically xenophobic as the Christian world.”

Colliget Auer.



Habes in hoc Volumine / studiose lector / gloriosi il-
lius senis Abhomeron Abinzoar Libruꝝ theysir / quo nihil for-
sitã exactius in medicina reperies ellaboratũ. Habes ⁊ Auerrois
librum Colliget quem satis laudasse puto cuz Auerrois esse pre-
dixerim. etiã quibusdã nouis ⁊ perellegantibus marginalibus
additionibus exornatũ. Superqꝫ ea cura emendatũ ⁊ impres-
sum vt nihil preterea supersit quod vel eius integritati vel orna-
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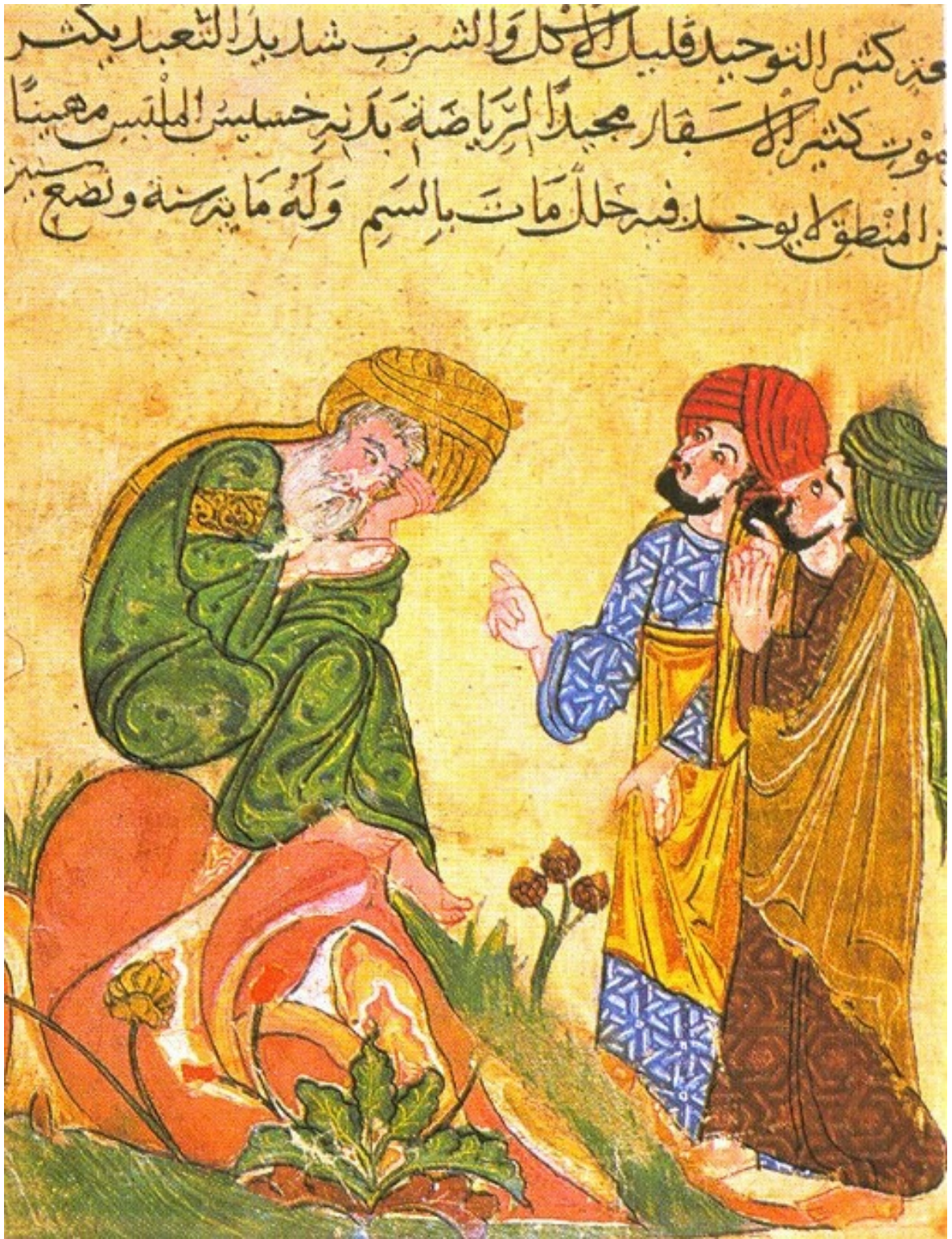
Manuscript page by Maimonides, Jewish scholar of Cordoba, Andalucia, written in the Judeo-Arabic language using Hebrew letters – Author, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1901-1906, Public domain, Wikimedia



Illuminated manuscript of Jewish philosopher Maimonides teaching about the measure of men, 1347 – Unknown author, *Harpers Magazine*, public domain, Wikimedia. A Sephardic Jewish philosopher, astronomer, and physician from Córdoba, Andalucía during the Islamic Almoravid Berber Empire of the 12th century, Maimonides was a contemporary of the Islamic philosopher Averroës. Recognized as the preminent Jewish scholar and philosopher of his time, Maimonides influenced scholars in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic worlds during The Golden Age of Córdoba



Islamic philosopher Avicenna's *Canon* from a 16th century manuscript – Source, Yale University, Medical Historical Library, public domain, Wikimedia. A Persian sage of the 11th century, Ibn Sina, known as Avicenna in the West, author of *The Book of Healing* and *The Canon of Medicine*, a medical encyclopedia, is considered one of the fathers of modern medicine. Influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle, Avicenna was a preeminent philosopher of The Islamic Golden Age. In a time when the body of human knowledge was much smaller than today, making it possible for thinkers to apply their intellect to all disciplines, Avicenna wrote on psychology, astronomy, geography, theology, logic, mathematics, physics, and poetry.



Arabic manuscript, Socrates addressing his pupils – Author, 13th century Seljuk illustrator, public domain, Topkapi Palace Library, Istanbul Turkey, Wikimedia. The Islamic Golden Age, in which culture, economic expansion, and science flourished between the 8th to the 13th century, collapsed during the Mongol invasion, the 1258 destruction of Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate. During the Islamic Golden Age, scholars and intellectuals met at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad to study and discuss available world knowledge, including Plato and Aristotle, translating the knowledge of Greek, Persian, Indian, Chinese, Egyptian, and Phoenician civilizations into Arabic and Persian. During the 10th to the 12th centuries, Islamic scholars, Ibn Sina, Avicenna, and Ibn Rushd, Averroes, explored the works of Aristotle that had largely been lost after the fall of the Roman Empire and the Early Middle Ages, and through their writings, were introduced to the philosophers of Western Europe, including Saint Thomas Aquinas and 13th century philosophers of the Roman Catholic Church.

“You’re the first dancer I’d ever met, who’s taken the study of philosophy seriously.”

“It’s because of my *abuelita* on my mother’s side from Morocco who was self-educated. In her time, that was the only way for a North African woman to become educated.”

“You’ll recall,” I said, “Socrates, Aristotle, and Herodotus weren’t educated at Oxford or Cambridge.”

Tomás smiled a rare smile and said, “When I was fourteen, my *abuelita* gave to me Herodotus’ *History of the Greco-Persian Wars*. It took me nearly a year to get through it, but I was glued to Herodotus’ narration of history. The Greek wove into his narrative in the Ionian story-telling tradition, collecting oral histories, odd stories, and folk tales he’d collected during many years of traveling through Egypt, Libya, Syria, Babylonia, Phrygia, Thrace, Macedonia, north to the Danube and Scythia, across the northern edge of the Black Sea all the way east to the Don River in Russia.”



Battle of Thermopylae and advance to the Battle of Salamis between the Persians and the Greeks, 480 BC – Author, Department of History, U.S. Military Academy, public domain, Wikimedia

“It’s hard to image that centuries before Christ, a historian had traveled that far.

“I was fascinated,” Tomás said, “by Herodotus’ storytelling. The Greco-Persian War was my first taste of military history, Herodotus constructing his story like a novelist with descriptions, dialogue, and speeches inspired by the stories he heard during his travels or which he embellished or perhaps invented. During the first stage of the Persian invasions under Darius, the Greek infantry, the hoplites, with their heavier armor and long spears and phalanx attack, overwhelmed the Persian infantry in the Battle of Marathon, proving to the Greeks that the Persians could be beaten. After Darius died, his son Xerxes assembled one of the largest armies of the ancient world and built a vast fleet to conquer Greece. To cross from Asia over to Europe, Xerxes ordered two pontoon bridges built to carry his troops across the Dardanelles strait, a feat that many historians consider technologically impossible in that time.



Greek triremes at the Battle of Salamis, Greece – Author, Edmund Ollier, 1882, public domain, Wikimedia



Mt. Athos peninsula where Darius the Great's Persian fleet was destroyed by a storm, 492 B.C. – Author, Dave Proffer, Wikimedia

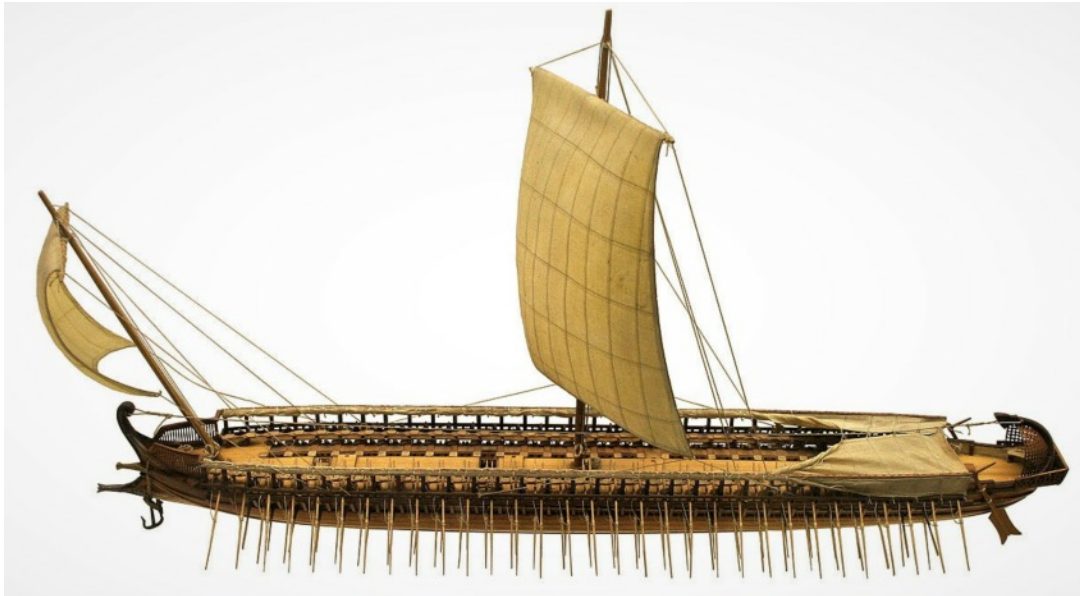
“Herodotus tells us that in the previous invasion of Greece, the Persians lost a great fleet and thousands of men in a storm at the cliffs of Mount Athos peninsula, a treacherous passage through uncharted rocks and currents. To avoid another disaster, Xerxes ordered a channel built with slave labor through the isthmus, a Herculean project which took three years and which historians thought at one point was a legend rather than fact. Herodotus suggested that it was Xerxes’ ego trip to prove he could accomplish the impossible. It’s as if the French had built the Suez Canal solely to conquer Madagascar. A much smaller allied Greek army held off Xerxes massive army at the pass of Thermopylae for several days before the remaining few hundred were slaughtered by the Persians. At Thermopylae, the Spartan, Theban, and Thespian heroes didn’t die in vain for it gave the Greeks the time to evacuate the women and children from Athens, then fall back to defend the Isthmus of Corinth against a Persian fleet of a thousand ships. With a huge army marching down the peninsula and a flotilla of Persian ships off the coast, a sight which must have looked much like D-Day, a terrifying sight for the outnumbered Greeks. Aware that the army of Xerxes depended upon the Persian fleet to keep them supplied and mobile, the Athenian general, Themistocles argued against the Greeks commanders who wanted to escape. He offered a better strategy — entice the Persians into the narrow strait of Salamis where the restricted room for maneuver would neutralize the advantage of the immense Persian flotilla of triremes.”



Greek fleet of triremes reconstructed from sources of The Perseus Project – Author, EDSITEment, public domain, Wikimedia

“What are triremes?”

“Warships,” Tomás said. “It’s Latin for three banks of oars. The trireme manner of attack was to ram the enemy’s ships with the cast-bronze ram at the bows. In the case of the democratic city states of Greece, triremes were powered not by galley slaves but by free men. Greek triremes were constructed of a combination of woods, a compromise between durability and weight, the frame and structure made of pine or oak which is strong and resistant to decay. But because the ships had to be transported frequently out of the water to prevent rot, fir was used in places because it was lighter than pine. The hulls were constructed with an ingenious mortise and tendon naval construction which existed five hundred years before Christ, its design and scores of oarsmen allowing a trireme the ability to travel more than 100 kilometers in a day.



Model of a Greek trireme – Author, Deutsches Museum, Munich, Germany, Wikimedia

“In order to entice the Persians into the straits, Themistocles sent a messenger to Xerxes, telling him that the Allied Greek command had split and he was defecting to Xerxes. The Persians would gain a certain victory if they sailed into the strait to block the Greek escape. Knowing that if he could destroy the Greek navy, Athen’s only choice would be to surrender, the Persian admiral made the decision to deploy his fleet to destroy the escaping Greeks. While the fleet spent the entire night searching in vain for the supposedly escaping fleet, the Greeks were preparing for battle. When morning came and no Greek ships had sailed out to sea, the Persians fell into the trap and sailed their enormous fleet into the Strait of Salamis to attack the Greeks. Themistocles ordered some of his ships to act as if they were fleeing to lure the enemy in, drawing the huge Persian flotilla into the strait where they were struck by a sudden advance, the Greeks ramming their bronze rams into the Persian triremes, pushing the first line of ships back until they collided with the second and third lines, creating a jumble of ships, allowing the Greeks to ram and grapple onto the Persian triremes while hundreds of hoplite warriors leaped aboard slaying the Persians and killing the brother of Xerxes, Admiral Ariabignes, leaving the demoralized Persians without a chief.

“The destruction of the Persian navy at Salamis allowed the Greek army to destroy the Persian army and ended the invasion of Greece. By resisting the advice of the other Greek commanders, Themistocles strategy of luring the massive Persian fleet into the restrictive confines of the Salamis strait, reminds me of T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, ‘Nine-tenths of tactics were certain enough to be teachable in schools, but the irrational tenth was like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and that is the test of generals.’

“The Greek victory over Persia in the Battle of Salamis,” Tomás added, “was one of the most important battles in history for it was after the victory at Salamis that Greece reached its apogee in philosophy and science. If Xerxes had won, Athens might not have made the advances in knowledge that it did.”

“Or perhaps,” I said, “the Athenian surge of creation in philosophy, science, and knowledge would have happened even if the Persians had won. Or perhaps another civilization would eventually have made the same discoveries. Look at what other ancient civilizations have produced. The advance of man’s knowledge would have continued to advance. Yvonne said that a historian cannot speak intelligently about what might have been. As Thucydides said, ‘freaks of chance are not determinable by calculation.’ By giving you Herodotus’ *History of the Greco-Persian War*, your grandmother did for you what Yvonne did for me — inspired your love of history.”



The Babylonian Marriage Market. Herodotus' History of the Greco-Persian War – Author, Edwin Long, 1875, public domain, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Wikimedia

“*Mi abuelita*,” Tomás said, “taught me the stories of old Spain. Because I love Andalucía, I desired to learn all that I could about it. I’m passing that on to Alicia.”

“Is Alicia going to dance professionally?”

“I don’t insist that she be a *bailaora*. It’s good for her soul. But I want her to follow whatever star she wishes. She’s interested in the universe, planets, stars, and distant galaxies. She wants to go to the university. *Y por Dios*, she’s going to do it. She’s as smart as my *abuelita*. When I mentioned Averroës and Maimonides, your eyes lit up. Have you read them?”

“No, but I read Emile’s book on Andalucía and the Islamic and Jewish philosophers who introduced Aristotelian logic into Europe. Have you studied Islam too?”

“My family has roots in Morocco. One of the branches of our family converted to Islam. When I was young, my grandmother encouraged me to read the Bible and the Quran. When I was twenty, the poet Rumi inspired me to study Sufi philosophy. The simplicity with which I live my life, has been influenced by the Sufi mystics.

When it’s cold and raining,

You are more beautiful

And the snow brings me

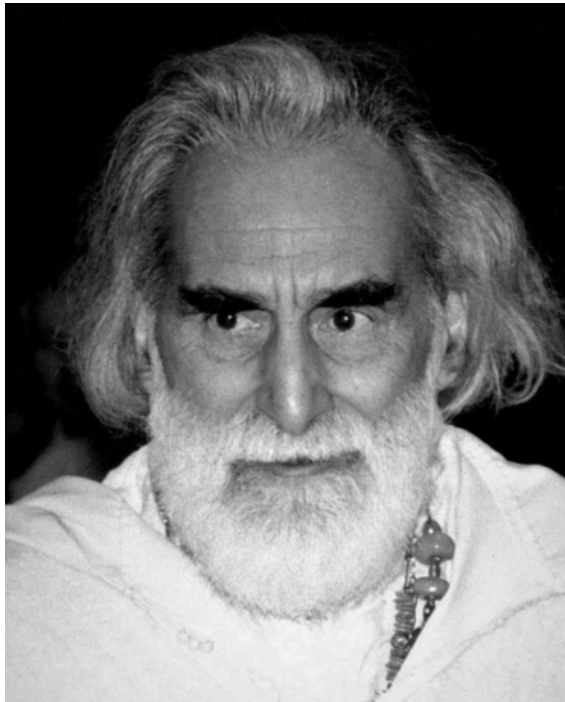
Even closer to your lips.

As Tomás spoke the poet’s words, his dark eyes fixed on mine, a sudden frisson made me tremble as he said ‘even closer to your lips.’

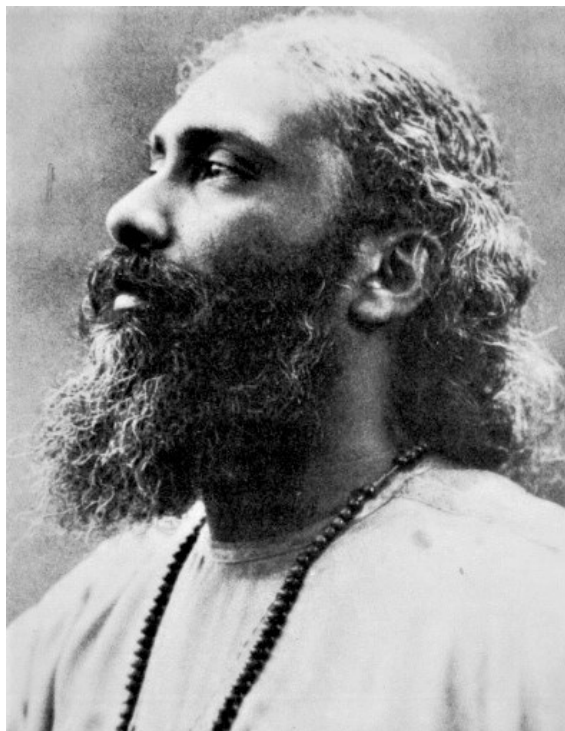
“I’d like to know more,” I said with a sigh, “about the Sufis. Who is Rumi?”

“Rumi was a 13th century Sufi poet and mystic born in Persia. Sufism is the mystical side of Islam. When I was living in Paris, I went to talks at La Sorbonne with Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan. I was fascinated with his ease at being in the world, his humanity, his desire to teach. Pir Vilayat had spent a number of years studying with masters of the religions of the Orient including Hinduism and Buddhism. Vilayat was a religious innovator. He said all religions are rays of light from the same sun.

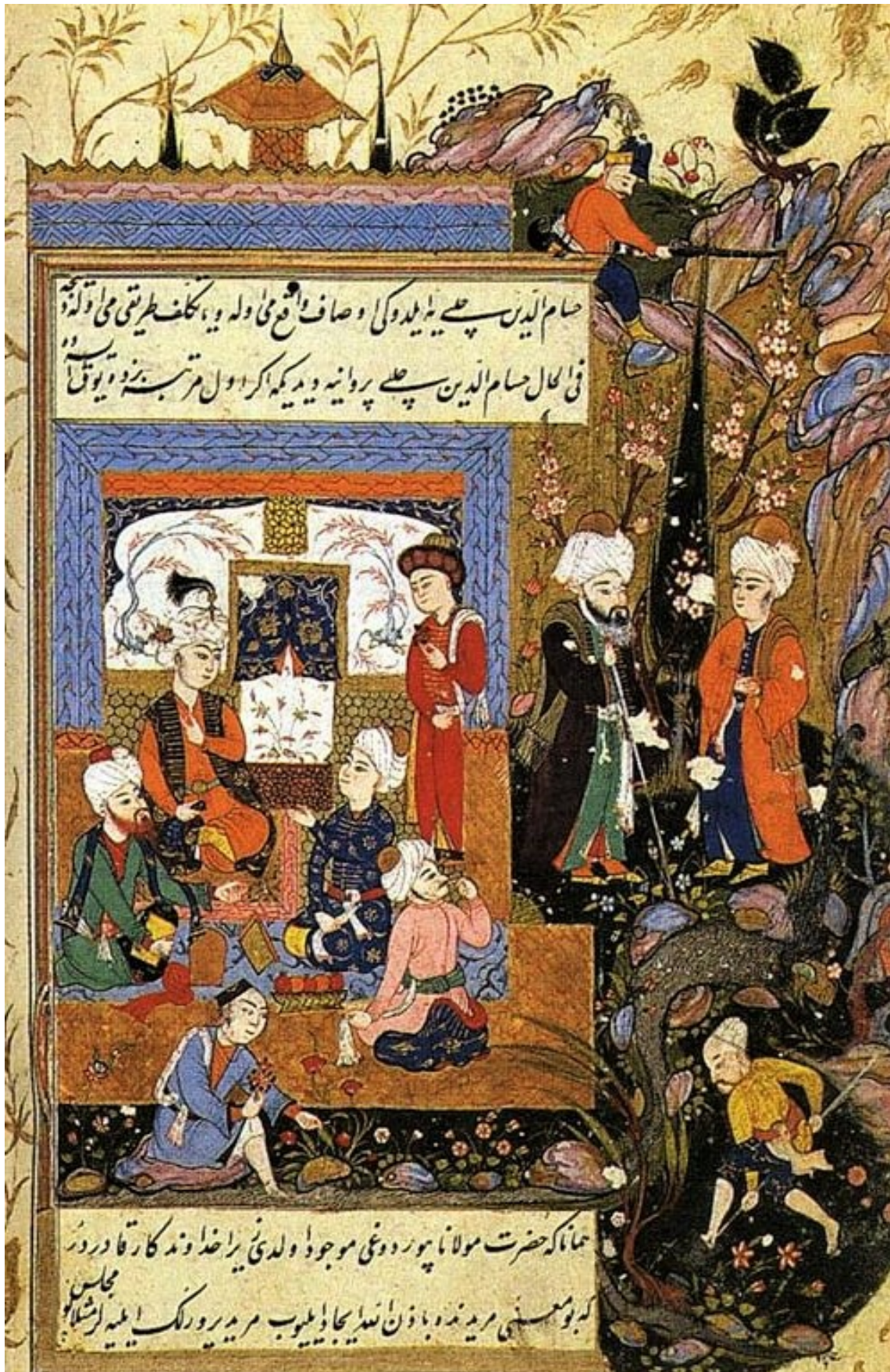
“I find that Sufi thought has many similarities with Christian values. The Sufi seeks to rise above the desires of the lower self — arrogance, greed, pride, and envy. Attar of Nishapur believed that a mystic union with the divine is attainable through inward purification. The Sufi embraces one’s feelings and consciousness of self as manifestations of God. I have an affinity for mysticism in all forms, Meister Eckhart’s Christianity and Islamic mysticism — the soul melting into the oneness of the universe.



Vilayat Inayat Khan [above] leader of Sufi Order International, Bad Überkingen, 1996 – Author, Schorle, Wikimedia. Vilayat Khan is the son of Hazrat Inayat Khan, founder of The Sufi Order in the West.



Hazrat Inayat Khan [below] founder of Sufi Order in the West – Author, Archive of Sufi Movement, Moscow, Russia, public domain, Wikimedia. Hazrat Khan, a Northern Indian classical musician and Sufi mystic, believed music to be the harmonious thread of the universe. Hazrat's message of divine unity focused on love, harmony, and beauty. To preach blind obedience to a sacred book, made religion devoid of spirit.



Jalal al-Din Rumi, founder of the Sufi Whirling Dervishes, addressing his Sufi disciples – Author, Mawlewiyya Dervich Aflaki Baghdda, Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York, public domain, Wikimedia



Dancing dervishes by Kamal ud-Din Behzād, circa 1480-1490 – The Metropolitan Museum of Arts, public domain, Wikimedia



Shams of Tabriz as portrayed in a painting in a page of a copy of Rumi's poem dedicated to Shams, 1500 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedi.



Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes – Author of painting, Jean-Baptiste van Mour, public domain, Rijksmuseum, Wikimedia



Sufi whirling dervishes, Istanbul. Shutterstock 662769613

“In the middle ages, Sufi texts had an influence on the ethical thought of Jewish philosophers. The son of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides believed that the Sufi faith carried on the tradition of the Biblical prophets. The culture of Cordova in the 12th century was a fascinating achievement. But when the Moors were cast out of Spain, repression set in and freedom of thought was terminated. An era of enlightenment was lost.

“While the Sufis have been persecuted by the Christians, they have also been persecuted by Muslims, especially whenever there has been a revival of Islamic fundamentalism. In the 18th century, the theologian Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached a moral revival of Islam. Wahhab was influenced by the teachings of 13th century theologian ibn Taymiyyah who believed all speculative philosophy in theology was heretical. Taymiyyah issued a fatwa declaring jihad against the Mongol invaders even though they had converted to Islam, for the Mongols didn’t follow true Sharia. Like Taymiyyah before him, Wahhab condemned the cult of saints. The Shias and Sunnis had corrupted monotheism, Wahhab advocated a return to the pure ‘oneness with God’ of the Quran and hadith by destroying the impurities which had crept into Islam over the centuries.”

“The hadith?”

“The hadith, means ‘narrative’ in Arabic, the collected words of the prophet Muhammad on righteous behavior. For example, the stoning of adulteress and the prohibition of images of living things in paintings and sculpture, are spoken of in the hadith, but not the Quran. Wahhab intended to return Islam to its austere origins. For Allah’s sake in the name of purity, infidels should be killed. When the religious reactionary was persecuted, he fled from Medina to the inland area of the Nejd where Muhammad ibn Saud formed an alliance with Wahhab to give religious legitimacy to his rule. With the force of the Bedouin Wahhabi religious warriors, the regime of Saud spread across Arabia. When they conquered the holy cities of Shia Islam, Najaf and Karbala in Iraq where Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad is buried, the Saudi soldiers massacred over 1,000 men, women, and children, looted the city, and destroyed the golden dome over Hussein’s tomb. After Karbala, Saud conquered Mecca where the Ikhwan warriors smashed ancient graves and banned smoking. The religious revival based on al-Wahhab’s strict teachings preached the extermination of idolatry.

“The alliance,” Tomás continued, “between the first King of Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi clerics, is similar to Isabella of Spain’s relationship with the clergy during the inquisition. After taking power in Medina in the mid 1920’s, the House of Saud destroyed the tombs of the Jannat Al Baqi cemetery. The Garden of Baqi

had existed for fourteen centuries before being destroyed. It's believed that the Prophet Mohammed is buried there. Now only a desolate space remains."

"But how could they justify the destruction of sacred sites that have been part of Islam for centuries?"

"The Wahhabis believe that only the earliest beliefs of Islam are pure. The original beliefs are the ultimate authority. They cannot be altered. Nothing that came later can be allowed. The Wahhabis said the cult of saints and tomb visitations which were common among Muslims was idolatrous worship. All shrines must be destroyed. Only God should be worshipped. That's why the Saudis destroyed the shrine over the tomb of Fatimah the daughter of Mohammed despite protests from other Muslims. The destruction of Fatimah's tomb shocked other sects. It's as if the Protestants demolished the Cathedral of Chartres. Revered for her moral purity, Fatimah is held in the same esteem as the Virgin Mary is held in Christianity."

"It's interesting how patriarchal religions have a need for a morally pure female deity."

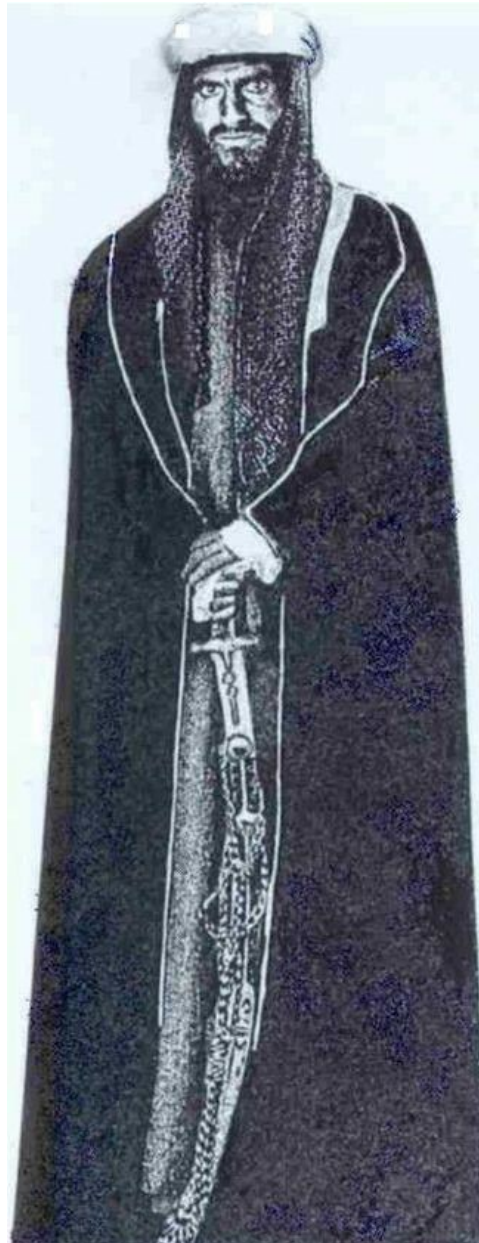
"It has to do with women's place in society. Dominant men demand pure women. That's why in patriarchal religions, adulteresses were stoned to death.

After the Ottomans conquered Arabia in 1813, the House of Saud fled to Kuwait. For the next century, the Ottoman Empire ruled over the Arabs until defeated in World War One. During the political vacuum after the Ottoman Empire lost their colonies, Abdulaziz ibn Saud, organized Bedouin raiding parties to defeat the rival Rashid family, a dynasty centered in northern Nejd. With the fierce Wahhabi Ikhwan warriors, ibn Saud drove the Hashemite King of Hejaz, Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and founded the nation state of Saudi Arabia based upon the tenets of Islam as preached by ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

"I've not heard of the Ikhwan warriors."

"Around 1913, the ulama created the Ikhwan warriors to force the Bedouin tribes to give up their nomadic ways and settle around oases. Believing that nomadic life wasn't in concordance with Islam, the ulama began a puritanical religious rival to purify Islam of corrupt practices."

"Who were the ulama?"



Ikhwan leader Sheikh Sultan bin Najd Al-Otaibi – Public domain, Wikimedia



Flag of Ikhwan warriors, founded by Abdulaziz ibn Saud in 1912 – Public domain, Wikimedia

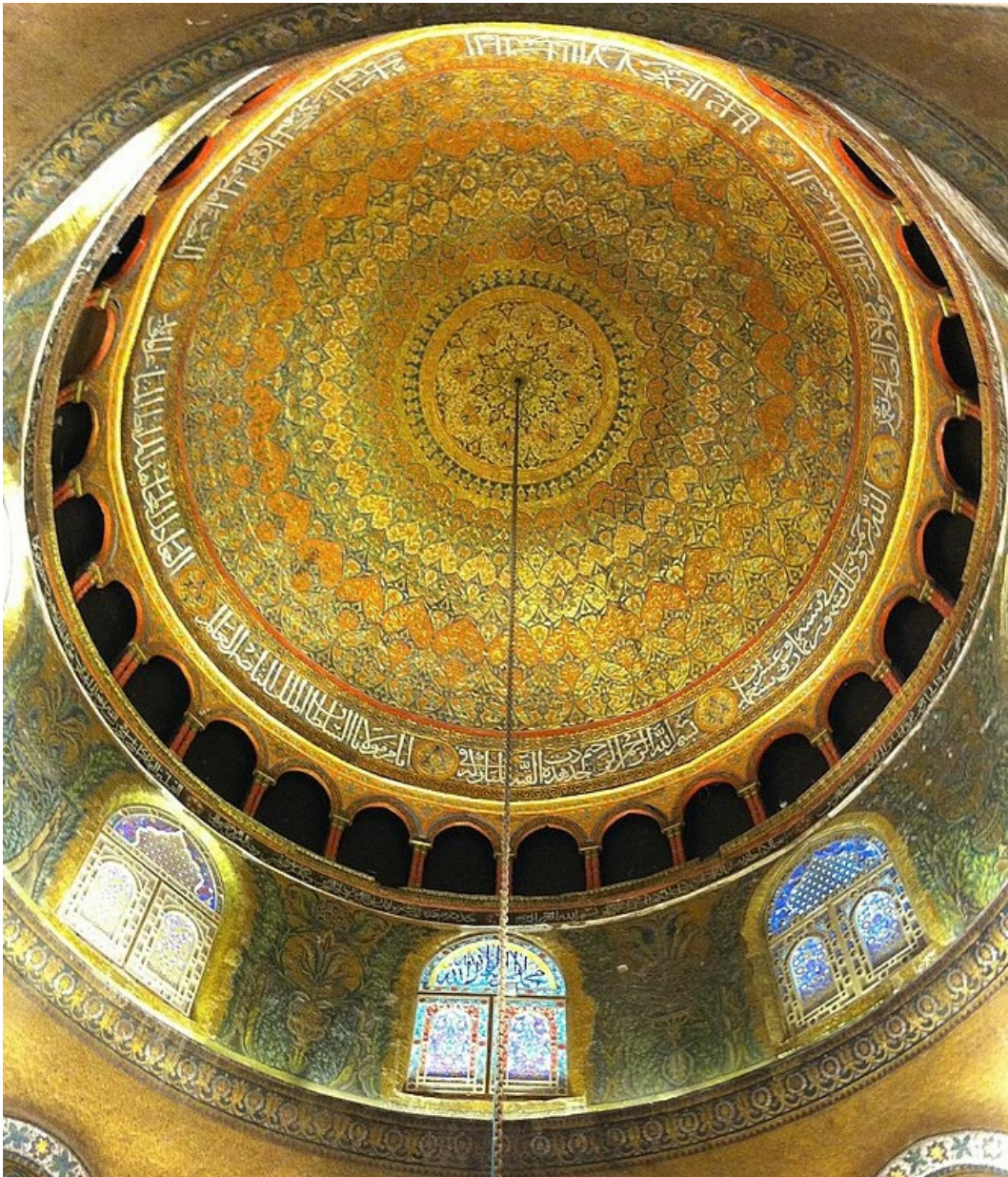
“Ulama means ‘scholars’ in Arabic — scholars of the Quran and the hadith, intellectuals of the Islamic hierarchy, comparable to rabbis in Judaism. Trained in Islamic jurisprudence, ulama were the arbiters of sharia law — imams of mosques, village mullahs, the guardians of the religious traditions of Islam. The ulama began converting the nomad raiders into zealous religious warriors, the Ikhwan, ‘the brethren,’ soldiers for Islam.”

“Ikhwan,” I said, “seems similar to the religious military order of the Knights Templar formed by the Patriarch of Jerusalem to protect Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land. The most formidable warriors of the Crusades, a few hundred Templar knights and several thousand infantry led by the 16-year old King of Jerusalem, Baldwin IV, afflicted by leprosy, defeated Saladin’s much larger army of 26,000 in the Battle of Montgisard.



Bataille d'Ascalon, Battle of Montgisard, between King of Jerusalem Baldwin IV and Saladin's Egyptians, 18 November 1177 – Author, Charles Philippe Lariviere, Château de Versailles, public domain, Wikimedia

“The King of Jerusalem granted the Templars a command post on Temple Mount — Al-Aqsa Mosque which had been built on the foundations of Solomon’s Temple in the Old City of Jerusalem. Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third-holiest site in Sunni Islam — revered and contested by Jew, Palestinian, and Christian. The Knights Templar built a new apse, cloister, and church, naming it, ‘Solomon’s Temple,’ and Dome of the Rock, *Templum Domini* — Temple of God.

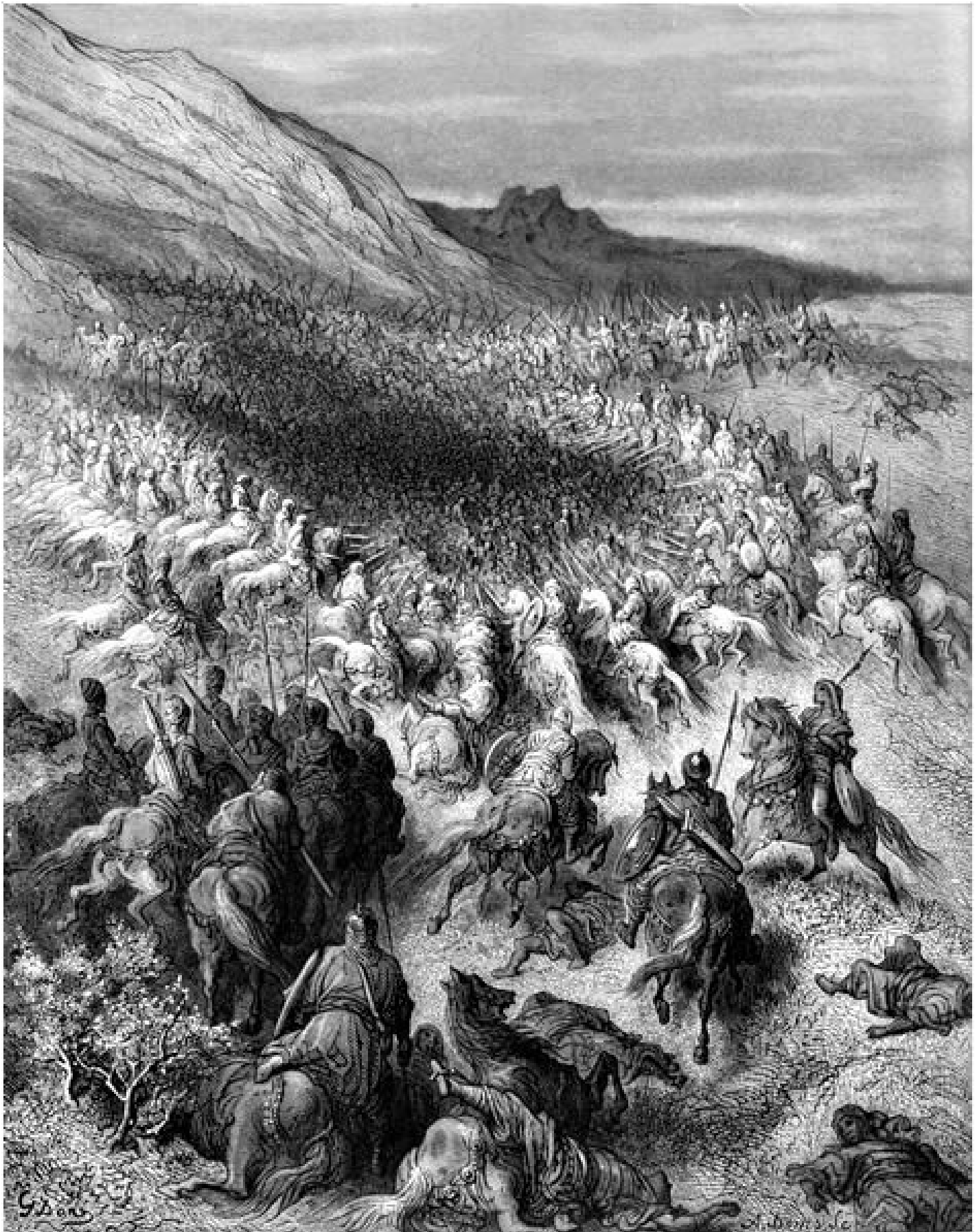


Dome of Al Aqsa Mosque, third holiest site in Islam, Jerusalem – Author, Meedanphotos, Wikimedia

“But the Knights Templars,” I added, “lost their Temple Mount at the Battle of Hattin on the Fourth of July 1187 when the great Muslim warrior Saladin defeated the Christians to reclaim Al-Aqsa Mosque — ending the Kingdom of Jerusalem.”

“Christians,” Tomás said, “refused to accept the loss of Jerusalem.”

“Jerusalem,” I said, “a small piece of land, has been fought over by more civilizations than any other city. After St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Cistercian Order and preacher of the Crusades, lauded the Templars at the Council of Troyes in the 12th century, Pope Innocent II issued a papal bull exempting the Knights Templars from all authority except the pope.”



Battle of Hattin – Author, Gustave Doré, public domain, Wikimedia



Battle of Cresson prior to the Battle of Hattin, defeat of the Crusaders by Saladin – Author, Jean Colombe, 1474, Bibliothèque nationale de France, public domain, Wikimedia



Guy de Lusignan surrendering to Saladin after the Battle of Hattin – 1187 – Painting by Said Tahsine, public domain, Wikipedia



Abdulaziz ibn Saud's Ikhwan warriors – public Domain, Wikimedia

“Ibn Saud’s Ikhwan warriors,” Tomás said, “forced Shias to convert to Sunni Wahhabism. The Ikhwan conducted raids on camels over great distances carrying giant black flags emblazoned with white Arabic script flowing in the wind — slaying women and children of apostates, cutting the throats of the males with a knife.”

“The Ikhwan were terrorists.”

“War invariably conjures up terror,” Tomás said softly. “The bombing of Guernica and Dresden, the Prussian *Kriegsbrauch* terror, the Japanese rape of Nanking, the firebombing of Tokyo were all acts of terror.

“Terror is a powerful weapon,” I said. “If a people are desperate enough, righteous enough and angry enough, terror will be used,”

“For centuries,” Tomás said, “the Hejaz had been part of the cosmopolitan empire of the Umayyads. The people of Yanbo and Jeddah, Mecca and Medina, are separated from the Nejd of Eastern Arabia by the high mountains of Sarawat, giving them a separate ethnic identity than the Wahhabis of Nejd. To take religious control of all of Arabia, the Wahhabi Imans cut a deal with King Saud — the imams would rule over spiritual institutions and Saud would rule over the government. Their agreement became a power-sharing arrangement between the ibn Saud family and the followers of the religious revolutionary ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a pact that has remained in place for over 100 years.

“Like the Muslim Brotherhood, Wahhabis believe that the Quran and moral laws of the Sunnah were to be the sole doctrines governing the Muslim family and community.”

“The Muslim Brotherhood?”

“The Muslim Brotherhood is a Pan-Islamic religious movement founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna in the city of Ismailia on the West Bank of the Suez Canal. During the resistance to the British occupation of Egypt, the Brotherhood created a paramilitary force to eliminate British colonialism and bring about the rebirth of an Islamic destiny, the creation of an Islamic Caliphate, an empire sweeping from Indonesia to Syria to Morocco.”

“I see,” I said, “Al-Banna dreamed of an empire like the 7th century Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus which stretched from Persia and Mesopotamia across North Africa to the Pyrénées in Spain.”

“That was the original dream. *Khalifah* signifies ‘successor to the Prophet Mohammed.’ Al-Banna believed in a theocracy based on the Quran that reveals to mankind the perfect way of life as ordained by Allah. Today, the Muslim Brotherhood doesn’t stress the idea of a Caliphate, but teaches that living under Islamic Sharia will liberate Muslims from foreign imperialism, assure social justice, and banish corruption, sinful behavior, and poverty.”

“As I understand it,” I said, “the British supported King Saud’s conquest of Arabia. If that is true then how did the Americans end up winning the concessions to drill for oil in Arabia instead of the British?”

“That’s a complex question. After the war, in the San Remo Conference, Great Britain and France agreed to divide up the petroleum concessions of the Kurdish area of Mosul in Mesopotamia. Who nailed down the rights to drill for oil in Arabia was in part due to the machinations of a British Arabist, St. John Philby — in many ways a counterpoint to Lawrence of Arabia. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge in oriental languages. Philby was recruited by Sir Percy Cox to work as an intelligence officer in the colonial office with Gertrude Bell and T. E. Lawrence during the Arab Revolt. Renowned for being the first European to cross the desolate southern Arabian Desert, Philby possessed similar qualities to Lawrence. A first-rate explorer and map maker, fluent in Arabic, Philby was a great admirer of Arab culture and was comfortable wearing Arab dress. I might add,” Tomás chuckled, “judging from the old photos, Lawrence had a finer sense of Bedouin splendor than Philby. The striking difference between the two adventurers was that they backed different Arab kings.

Lawrence championed the Emirs Feisal and Abdullah, sons of the Sherif of Mecca Hussein bin Ali, descendant of Mohammed and leader of the Hashemites, whereas Philby supported the Hashemites' bitter enemy, ibn Abdulaziz Saud."

"Was St. John Philby," I asked, "the father of Kim Philby, the M16 British intelligence officer who spied for the Soviet NKVD?"

"The same."

"There's an interesting story," I said. "You recall Alan Turing's Ultra?"

"Sure, the breaking of the code of the Nazi's Enigma Machine."

"The Soviet mole, Kim Philby," I said, "had access to decoded messages from Turing's section at Bletchley Park. When Philby learned that the Japanese were going to strike Singapore instead of Russia as Hitler had hoped, he passed the news on to his Soviet controller. That bit of information proved to be one of reasons Hitler didn't take Moscow."

"How's that?"

"Although Moscow was close to being encircled, the Wehrmacht was reeling from extended supply lines and combat fatigue. The first snow had melted and heavy rains were churning the roads into *rasputitsa*."

"*Rasputitsa*?"



Rasputitsa - Wehrmacht horse sunk in mud, Kursk Oblast, Russia, March – April 1942 – Author, Dinstühler, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Rasputitsa - Wehrmacht soldiers pulling a truck from the mud, Russia, November 1941 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“*Rasputitsa* — quagmires of mud,” I said. “Severe weather from the Arctic swept across Russia and heavy rains mired the Panzer tanks and trucks deep in the *rasputitsa*. No longer fearing a Japanese invasion, Stalin moved 20 divisions and 2,000 tanks across the continent and stalled the Wehrmacht blitzkrieg at Moscow’s gates. Hitler’s plan for a quick victory over the Soviet Union was stopped cold by a ferocious Russian defense, - 40 C weather, and Kim Philby’s intelligence report.”

“To go back a bit,” Tomás said, “you were asking how the Americans got the concession to drill for oil in Saudi Arabia rather than the British. It’s a complex story in which St John Philby, the father of the Soviet spy Kim Philby, casts a long shadow. Although Britain was favoring the Sherif of Mecca at the time, Philby conspired with Saud to overthrow the Hashemite ‘Keepers of the Holy Places.’ With the help of British World War One surplus munitions, the forces of Saud took the holy city of Mecca in 1924, and Medina and Jeddah in 1925 from Sherif Hussein, ending 700 years of Hashemite reign. Britain signed the Treaty of Jeddah recognizing the rule of Abdulaziz ibn Saud over the Hejaz and the Nejd from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. At that time, a significant source of income was from the taxes on the pilgrimage to the holy cities, but during the depression in the early 1930’s, the resulting drop in number of pilgrims and resulting loss of income made ibn Saud search for new sources of income.”

“And that led to the search for petroleum?”

“Right. The Bahrain Petroleum Company, a subsidiary of Standard Oil Company of California, struck oil in Bahrain in 1932 and the following year, the subsidiary of SOCAL set up the California Arabian Standard Oil Company which was granted by ibn Saud, an oil concession of one million square kilometers. Drilling near the village of Dammam, they were unsuccessful for several years due to many technical problems, but continued drilling deeper and deeper until they finally struck oil in 1938, eventually discovering the greatest source of crude oil in the world.”

“From that point on,” I said, “petroleum became the *raison d’être* of Saudi Arabia.”

“By gaining the confidence of ibn Saud,” Tomás said, “St. John Philby became the king’s advisor for the Western Powers. He converted to Islam, married an Arab and began getting rival bids from the British and American companies to drill for oil in Arabia. Philby wielded a lot of power in the Saudi kingdom. It is said at the age of sixty, he took a second wife, a sixteen-year-old girl he purchased at the slave market in Taif, south of Mecca.



Harry St. John Philby – Photo from *The Heart of Arabia, a Record of Travel and Exploration*, London, Constable and Company, 1922, Wikimedia



Damman No. 7, the first successful oil well in Saudi Arabia struck oil, on 3 march, 1938 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

“Philby induced an American millionaire Charles Crane to invest in the oil exploration in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. A supporter of independence for the Arab states, Crane was an anti-Semite who opposed the creation of a Jewish state which pleased King Saud and strengthened the American position over Britain, the country which had issued the Balfour Declaration. After Standard Oil of California struck oil in Bahrain, the company put King Saud’s advisor Philby on payroll which resulted in Saudi Arabia granting an exclusive concession to the American company over rival bids from the British controlled Anglo-Persian and Iraq Petroleum Companies. The California-Arabian Standard Oil later merged assets with Texaco to form ARAMCO, the Arabian-American Oil Company that discovered in 1951, the Sanfaniya Oil Field and a few years later, the Ghawar Field, the world’s largest onshore field. It wasn’t long before ARAMCO became the world’s wealthiest company, establishing a political alliance between the Saud dynasty and the United States which has lasted unto today.”

“And Wahhabism flourished in Saud’s kingdom.”



Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia – public domain, Wikimedia

“Today, the teaching of Wahhab remains the doctrine sanctioned by the government of Saudi Arabia. After the Saudis began pumping vast amounts of oil during World War Two, great sums were spent to spread Wahhabism around the world, building Islamic centers, universities, and mosques, and funding scholarships for students, journalists, and Islamic scholars. The stability of Saudi Arabia is built upon the political alliance between the Saud dynasty and the Wahhabi clerics.”

“The United States,” I said, “is allied with a country whose other main export is Islamic fundamentalism.”

“Through the centuries,” Tomás said, “the struggle between a tolerant faith and a puritanical faith has plagued the Muslim world just as it has afflicted the Christian world. Like the revolutionary Martin Luther, ibn Abd al-Wahhab wanted to return to the earliest and purist teaching of the faith — to reject the theological accumulations of the *ulama*. He opposed the Shias and Sufis as heretical. However, a conflict arose between the spiritual leader and the warlord. Wahhab refused to approve ibn Saud’s campaigns for territory and riches. Jihad must not be waged for personal profit, but rather for the spreading of the true faith. Self-enrichment was incompatible with jihad. Wahhab condemned the slaughter of civilians, the killing of women and children. He did not propose that those who fell in battle were martyrs to be rewarded with a high place in heaven. Jihad must not be accomplished through the sword, but through education, scholarship, and discernment.

“Today, the followers of Abd al-Wahhab prefer the term, ‘Islam’ rather than ‘Wahhabi,’ a term used by Shias and Sunnis who oppose the movement. The Salafiyya movement is another strict, puritanical form of Islam which rejects the foreign influences that have corrupted Islam. The Nejd area of central Arabia where Salaf and Wahhabi Islam originated is remote. It remained for centuries outside of the Islamic empires of the Umayyads and the Ottomans of Turkey. Although similar in its beliefs to Wahhabi Islam, the Salafs reject the title Wahhabi, as being a derogatory name used in the West.

“My Moroccan grandmother,” Tomás continued, “was moderate in her beliefs. She said Salafism refers to the first three generations of Islam which are the eternal models for Islamic morality and behavior. Salafism is derived from, *al salaf al salih*, which in Arabic means our devout forefathers the Prophet and original believers whose codes of behavior must be emulated in family life and warfare. The Salafs reject the speculations of Islamic philosophers and theologians who’ve corrupted true Islamic beliefs. My grandmother said that by Salaf standards, she would be considered an apostate, *takfir*. Islamic fundamentalism is why the

Islamic philosopher Averroës was accused of heresy in the 12th century and banished from Spain. The fanatical side of Islam didn't begin with the Wahhabi theology, it's been there since the fatwas of the 13th century theologian ibn Taymiyyah.

“Many Sunni rulers,” Tomás continued, “have committed genocide against the Shia which they believe is a threat to true Islamic beliefs. In terms of doctrinal belief, Islam has a similar history as Christianity. Just as Catholics have killed Protestants and Protestants have killed Catholics, Muslims have killed more Muslims than Christians. Internecine war is always the most vicious. Their most dangerous enemies are themselves.”

“Christians,” I said, “inherited the idea of violent retribution to punish apostasy from the Judaic tradition.”

“True,” Tomás agreed. “In Deuteronomy, you'll find the scripture telling you what to do if someone tempts you to serve other gods. ‘But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he dies.’”

“In the book of first Samuel,” I said, “God tells the people of Israel, ‘Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel, and ass.’”

“And in Deuteronomy,” Tomás added, “God says, ‘Thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies which the Lord thy God hath given thee. . . thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them.’”

“In prehistoric times, all religions were bent on killing and stoning those who refused to believe.” Tomás smiled, his dark eyes reflecting the falling light, “Not too many religious pacifists in those days. During the Christian Crusades, the command to slaughter your enemies hadn't changed — ‘kill the unbeliever!’ After Jerusalem fell to the Muslims, the English King Richard the Lion Heart led the Third Crusade to reconquer the Holy City.”

“And failed to take Jerusalem,” I interrupted. “Saladin defeated the European Crusaders and Islam retained Jerusalem.”

“Saladin, Tomás said, “is revered in Islam for vanquishing the Crusaders. Born in Tikrit, Iraq of Kurdish descent, Saladin founded the Ayyubid Caliphate uniting Egypt and Syria, a kingdom which stretched from Libya to Yemen to Baghdad.



Saladin – Author, Gustave Doré, public domain, Wikimedia. A Sunni Muslim Kurd, Saladin founded the Ayyubid Dynasty centered in Egypt, which conquered Egypt, Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, the Hejaz of Arabia, Yemen, and the North African coast to Tunisia. Under Saladin’s command in 1187, the Ayyubid army overwhelmed the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin, retaking power from the Christians who had conquered Jerusalem and Palestine 88 years before. During the Third Crusade, Saladin held on to Jerusalem by means of his military skill and political negotiation, gaining a reputation for generosity and chivalry that made him one of the most respected figures of the Middle Ages in Christendom and Islam.

“Despite Richard the Lion Heart’s reputation in the story of Robin Hood, not only did he fail to win Jerusalem for Christendom, the Crusader King is remembered in Palestine until this day for the beheading of 3,000 Muslims including women and children in the conquest of Acre. I’ve seen a painting illustrating the execution ceremony — there were hundreds of decapitated heads neatly stacked beneath the scaffold. The establishment of Frankish colonies in the Holy Land and the Crusaders’ mass execution of Muslims hovers over the Middle East one thousand years later like a poisonous cloud.”



The Siege of Acre. The Hospitaller Master Mathieu de Clermont defending the walls of Acre, Palestine, 1291- Author, Dominique Papety, 1840, public domain, Wikimedia

“You’ve just told the same story about Richard the Lionheart that Emile did when I was a kid. He said mass public executions were a common rite of religious terrorism.”

“The Sufis have suffered,” Tomás said, “from the narrow mentality of the Middle Ages. Just as Protestants once criminalized the celebrations of carnival, Wahhabis have suppressed the holy sites and ecstatic dancing of Sufism. The persecution of liberal Islamic thinkers by conservative Islamic theologians continues today. Whenever strict Islamists rise to power, Sufis are persecuted.”

“When did the Sufis come on the scene?”

“In the 8th century. Sufism began as reaction against the materialism of the Umayyad Caliphate. As an expression of their humility, the early Sufis wore plain woolen garments. The Arabic word for wool is ‘Sufi.’ In their search for the divine truth behind the illusion of the material world, the Sufis chanted with music and dance as a way of experiencing an ecstatic union with God. Sufism has taken hold in North Africa and Asia in part because it accommodates local spiritual beliefs which the people find compatible with the mysticism of Sufism. In North Africa, the Sufis have opposed colonialism.

“The Shias and Sunnis, and certainly the Wahhabis and Salafs believe Sufism is a sacrilege and have suppressed it over the centuries. Before the 8th century, there was a tolerant atmosphere in Islam which allowed diverse viewpoints. But during the late Umayyad Caliphate, reaction set in. The regime began imposing its doctrinal views on Muslims, seeking out and persecuting dissenters as heretics. One of the primary dissenters to the Umayyad doctrinal authority was Ghaylan al-Dimashqi, a theologian of the Qadariyyahs who taught that man is free to act as he decides. Ghaylan said that man is the author of all his actions, good or bad. On the Day of Judgment, Allah will judge man and reward him for his good deeds and punish him for his evil deeds. The authoritarian Umayyad Caliphs of the 8th century didn’t believe in free will. Rather, they used the concept of determinism to justify their own tyrannical rule. As you’ve pointed out, the Umayyad Caliphate was as vast as the Roman Empire once was. At its height in the 8th century, the Caliphate centered in Damascus stretched from Samarkand, Tashkent, Persia, Syria, and Arabia, across all of North Africa, from Egypt to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Cordoba Spain, a total of six million square miles. Ghaylan accused the Umayyad Caliphs of being unjust rulers. He said that the election of the Caliph must be made according to the consensus of the entire community. Ghaylan believed that despite one’s tribal ancestry, anyone might be qualified to be caliph. Rulers did not have the right to view their power as a gift from God.”

“So Islam,” I said, “had the same concept as the Europeans — the Divine Right of Kings.”

“Ghaylan opposed the concept of Divine Right and advocated rebellion against the tyrannical rule of Caliph Yazid II ibn Abd al-Malik. Fearing the theologian to be a threat to the stability of the Umayyad regime, Yazid had Ghaylan, the theologian who preached free will, executed. During the violent struggles over the centuries of Muslim against Muslim, theology has been used as a weapon for political domination.”

“So the internecine warfare within Islam,” I said, “has been driven essentially not by theological beliefs but rather by the struggle for political power.”

“Precisely. Just as the struggle between Protestants and Catholics during the French Religious Wars was primarily about political hegemony. The Sufis who I admire have always been hated by the Islamic fundamentalists. During the Mughal Empire in India, the Emperor brutally suppressed the Sufis for being heretical and prohibited their music and dance. In Iraq, a Sufi, Mansur al-Hallaj who refused to renounce his beliefs, was imprisoned for 10 years in a Baghdad prison, tortured, and dismembered before the people in the 10th century. When the revolutionary Atatürk came to power in Turkey after the war, he banned all of the Sufi orders, expropriated their funds, outlawed dervish clothes, and passed a law banning their traditional music including the *ney*, the Sufis’ reed flute.

“A Sufi would say that al-Wahhab and many Muslims have misunderstood the Quran. It is a distortion to say that one person’s version of Islam alone is true. The Quran says, ‘There must be no coercion in matters of faith.’ My understanding of the Quran is that all revelations of the prophets must be respected. It is not God’s will to declare fellow Muslims to be unbelievers. One must respect the traditions of other faiths. The Sufi mystic ibn al-Arabi said, ‘Do not praise your own faith so exclusively that you disbelieve all others.’ Sufis believe that the omniscient and omnipresent God does not belong to any one religion, either Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. To glimpse the divine is to leave all other arguments behind.”

“Heresy,” I said, “has been suppressed in Islam as fanatically as it has in Christianity.”

“Throughout the history of Christianity,” Tomás said, “there’s been a suppression of heretical beliefs. The Christian philosopher and mystic Meister Eckhart, a leader of the Dominican order, was accused of heresy by the archbishop of Cologne in a Franciscan led inquisition. He was tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII. Every religion that has been persecuted has not only been guilty of persecuting other religions, but has persecuted dissenters within its own faith.

“Spiritual ideas have a strong hold on us,” Tomás went on. “Religious beliefs have given people strength to survive hard times. While Christianity has given us faith in ourselves, it has failed to understand that man is a member of the animal kingdom. We have a kinship with the animals. We must honor that. We are the atavistic inheritors of our animal origins — and from that springs all things wonderful and all things malevolent.”

“Your views of primitive man,” I said, “are very much like Yvonne’s. Once humans developed agriculturally dependent economies, they began to lose respect for the spirits of wild animals. Primitive people saw themselves as a part of the natural world, while modern man sees himself as the ruler of nature.”

“I agree. Native Americans were like the early Greeks in the sense that they viewed nature as the source of all existence. The mysterious forces of nature were not something to be captured and made to serve man. The soul of man was a manifestation of the world soul. In reading about American Indians, I discovered that the Muscogee Creek Indians had over twenty clans associated with a bird, animal, or element of nature. *Koakotsalgi* was the lynx clan or bobcat as they say in America. A clan had an affinity with its iconic animals. There were taboos against killing clan animals for they were kin to the clan.

“Our long ago ancestors were deeply religious because life was difficult. Fate was unpredictable, crops could fail — enemies, illness, drought, famine, and disease could wipe out your tribe at any moment. Mysterious powers were at work. Only divine intervention could rescue them from a cruel fate. To converse with the divine was paramount in their lives. But absolute belief in the divine has a dark side.”

“You’re talking about the true believers?”

“When by conquest, a religion forces another religion to convert to the conquering religion, then fanatical devotion smites the non-believer. What is the difference between someone with deep religious beliefs and a zealot? Is it only a question of degree? Although religion has been a necessity for mankind, religious zealots have caused grave harm.”

“Ideologues” I said, “favor the Procrustean solution.”

“The Procrustean solution?”

“You’ll remember Procrustes, the bandit in Greek mythology. He invited unsuspecting travelers to stay overnight in his magical bed which perfectly fit whoever slept there. Procrustes actually kept two beds, to

ensure that no one would fit one or the other. The victims who were too short for his longer bed, he stretched on a rack, the ones who were too long to fit the shorter bed, he chopped off their limbs. The Procrustean solution is the practice of processing data to fit a preconceived structure. It's a rhetorical deception that discards any data that refutes one's preconceived idea. One only believes the information that supports one's ideological position. It's an epistemological distortion, our personal rearrangement of reality. We are the creators of what we believe is the truth. That truth can be justified by the axiom that the end justifies the means. In warfare, we believe that it's just fine to distort information because it supports a good cause.

“However, those who distort reality to create their vision of the world are eventually destroyed by their own methodology. In the myth, the hero Theseus captures Procrustes, makes him lie in his own bed and chops him down to size to fit the very bed Procrustes had created for others. In Franz Kafka's *Penal Colony*, the man operating his torture machine dies by means of his own device.



Franz Kafka, 1906 – Author, Atelier Jacobi, Sigismund Jacobi, public domain, Wikimedia

”While it may take a long time, I believe that sooner or later, justice arrives to those who rely on the Procrustean solution. The worse thing about religious and political zealotry,” I added, “is that it precludes doubt. By suppressing doubt, religions suppress the pursuit of knowledge. Communism and fascism are more than ideologies, for they have a world view and cosmology that is essentially religious. Instead of worshipping God, one worships the state and the supreme leader. Religious beliefs can lead ordinary people to do the bidding of extremely cruel people. The Nazi philosophy relied on religious fervor to empower the nation. Goebbels said, ‘The Nazi Party is my church. I believe I serve the Lord best if I do his will and liberate my oppressed people from the fetters of slavery.’ Like communism and fascism, authoritarian religions use fear and the threat of punishment to oppose the exchange of knowledge. Yvonne gave me a book of propaganda art in Germany’s Third Reich. Josef Goebbels was the Reich’s maestro fanning the flames of hatred against the Jews, a controller of all German media playing upon the will of the masses like a diabolical puppeteer. By exploiting the basest instincts of the German people, he moved his listeners to ecstasy.”



Joseph Goebbels awards 16-year-old Hitler Youth Willi Hübner the Iron Cross for the defense of Lauban, 9 March 1945 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Ecstasy and politics are a lethal combination,” Tomás said, “Joseph Conrad said, ‘Words are the great foes of reality.’”

“After his family had been deported to Poland,” I said, “a Jewish kid shot a Nazi diplomat in Paris. Goebbels seized upon the murder to promote hatred of the Jews. After the diplomat’s assassination, Goebbels told Hitler that the German people were crying for revenge. With the Fuehrer’s approval, he set in motion *Kristallnacht*, ‘Night of Broken Glass.’ The Nazis destroyed a thousand synagogues, killed Jews in the streets, and deported 30,000 to concentration camps. Goebbels said, ‘It is the absolute right of the State to supervise the formation of public opinion.’ By prohibiting all other sources of information and disseminating the same lie over and over, creating fear of the enemies within and appealing to the German’s love for their nation, Goebbels’ was able to turn truth upside down.



Ohel Yaskov synagogue destroyed in Munich during Kristallnacht, November Pogrom, 1938 – Unknown author, יטרפ ףסוא, private collection, Wikimedia



Fasanenstrasse synagogue, Berlin, destroyed during Kristallnacht, November Pogrom, 1938 – Author, Center for Jewish History, NYC, public domain, Wikimedia

“For a long time,” I said, “German and Prussian culture has contained an authoritarian streak that demands obedience. Yvonne said that Hitler banned the film *Mädchen in Uniform* for being decadent. A same-sex love story between a girl and her teacher, *Mädchen in Uniform* was a powerful critique of the Prussian style of educating girls. The German girls were hammered on the anvil of discipline, tempered in the forge of obedience. Thomas Mann had gone to school in northern Germany and learned to hate the rigidity of a Prussian education. The Prussian system turned out outstanding Nazi citizens.”

“I would’ve liked to have met your sister. I’ve lost a brother and you’ve lost a sister.”

“It has been terribly hard for me to live without Yvonne. She was all to me. But my memories of her give me the strength to excel in my studies.”

“I feel the same for my brother. He’s the source of my inspiration.”

“The book Yvonne gave to me of Goebbels propaganda opened my ideas about how people’s opinion can be constructed. Goebbels was successful in creating an astounding phenomenon — the willingness of

Germans to inform on each other to the Gestapo. It was the best possible tool to stamp out resistance to the Reich. Despite the fact that good citizens love their children, worship each Sunday in church, are kind to animals, and have a baked goose for Christmas, the continuous broadcasting of lies compels good people to commit atrocities. Just before my sister died, she published an essay in *Le Temps Modernes*, ‘How Evil masquerades as the Good.’

“I like that phrase,” Tomás said. “Evil masquerades as the good. Evil becomes good, and good becomes evil. Without Goebbels drilling into the German mind the superiority of an Aryan master race and the citizen’s obligation of absolute obedience to the state, Hitler wouldn’t not have been able to impose his philosophy of death. The Holocaust was not only a result of a conspiracy of extremely cruel people, but was made possible by the *willingness of ordinary people to do the bidding* of extremely cruel people. The Nazis made killing a virtue.”

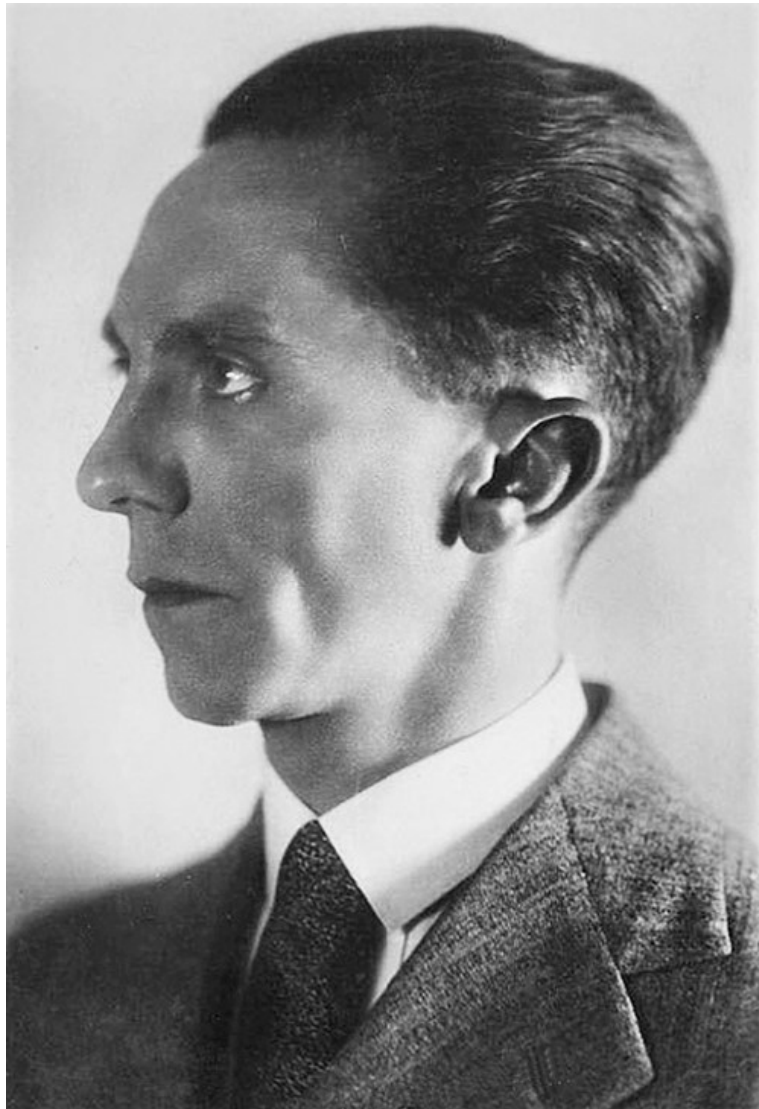
“I’ve thought a lot,” I said, “about why ordinary people are willing to commit evil. One of the reasons is that the minds of humans are so created that they can compartmentalize different parts of their lives. People can hold opposing positions on things and yet remain oblivious of any contradiction. They believe in the scriptures that honor human life, while at the same time allowing themselves to become the instruments of those who are destroying human life. A man who has been unfaithful many times persecutes his wife for being unfaithful. While giving sermons on fidelity, a religious leader seduces the wives of his congregation. A father who loves his own child, without any pangs of conscience abuses his stepchild. The ability to compartmentalize our ethical values in one area enables us to isolate our values in another area. One’s behavior can be driven by opposing moral codes. Humans possess an unconscious psychological defense mechanism which allows them to escape the anxiety caused by maintaining beliefs and values that are diametrically opposed to one another. The mind is a maze of walls — a kind of philosophical and moral schizophrenia, allowing people to commit reprehensible acts while feeling morally pure.

“Goebbels’ insecurities fed his inexhaustible compulsions and his pursuit of women. As head of German film production, he became obsessed with Ludmilla, a stunning Czech actress. While Hitler had no qualms about exterminating millions of Jews, Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Ukrainians, and Gypsies, on marriage, he was a staunch supporter of the vows of fidelity. A sexual conservative, Hitler threw Ludmilla out of the country and Goebbels was left to console himself with an endless series of sexual conquests, not a difficult task when one controls the film industry. Goebbels constant need for beautiful young women was fulfilled by the leader of the Hitler Youth movement who procured young girls for the minister. Power is the greatest aphrodisiac of all.

Yvonne was horrified by how this man could impose his twisted views on the average German. Have you seen a photo of Goebbels?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“I saw one taken by Eisenstaedt in the thirties at the League of Nations. Goebbels gaze is cold and distrustful, as if he’d love to send you to the executioner — chilling to the bone. Once, you’ve seen that look you’ll never forget it. Short, weak chinned with a pinched face, Goebbels would be perfect casting for the vampire Nosferatu. Goebbels didn’t fit the image of the Aryan master race. He was keenly aware of it. Yvonne believed that because of his club foot, a deformity like that of Stalin, he was tormented by self-hate and transmogrified that hatred into a hatred of the Jews.”



Joseph Goebbels, Reichsminister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda – Unknown author, German Federal Archives



Poster for Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 propaganda film *Triumph des Willens*. Authorized by Adolf Hitler, the film proclaimed Germany's return as a global power. Led by Hitler, Germany would achieve greatness again – Wikimedia

“Yvonne had told me about Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, but I still was overwhelmed when they screened it in my history of film class. Hundreds of thousands of people cheering Hitler and marching men became tedious quickly. It had a simple message — the glorification of the State, the glorification of Hitler’s Third Reich. I asked myself, how could so many people in a democracy go wrong? Of course, I’m not a German living in a depression after losing a World War. When Riefenstahl read Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in 1932, she said she’d become a National Socialist after reading the first page. She was convinced that someone who could write such a book like *Mein Kampf* would be victorious in leading Germany.”

TIME

The Weekly Newsmagazine



Martin Munkacsy



Volume XXVII

HITLER'S LENI RIEFENSTAHL
A Historical Perspective on the Life of a Woman
(See Page 11)

Number 7

Leni Riefenstahl on the cover of *TIME*, February 17, 1936 – Author, Martin Munkacsy, *TIME* Magazine, public domain, Wikimedia



Dust jacket of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* – New York Public Library Digital Library, Wikimedia

“Riefenstahl was not alone in embracing *Mein Kampf*,” Tomás said, “millions of Germans felt that the anointed leader had come. Religion had been co-opted by National Socialism. There is a certain mindlessness that puts people at the mercy of politically driven charlatans. Gifted with persuasive oratory, the charlatan takes responsibility for the people’s moral decisions. The charlatan becomes a god.”

“Sartre said the same thing,” I said, “about people giving up their moral decisions to the deceiver. Riefenstahl was part of the process of anointing Hitler. She was a gifted artist and ambitious. Enthralled by Hitler’s vision for Germany, she chose him as her god. When she first listened to the charismatic Nazi leader speak, she had an apocalyptic vision that she’d never forget. She said that she saw the earth break open, a geyser spewing out reaching the sky and shaking the earth. Riefenstahl’s goal in *Triumph of the Will* was to convince the nation that Hitler was the leader who would bring glory once again to Germany as a great world power.



Riefenstahl with Heinrich Himmler, SS Reichsführer while instructing her camera crew at Nuremberg Rally, 9 September, 1934- Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



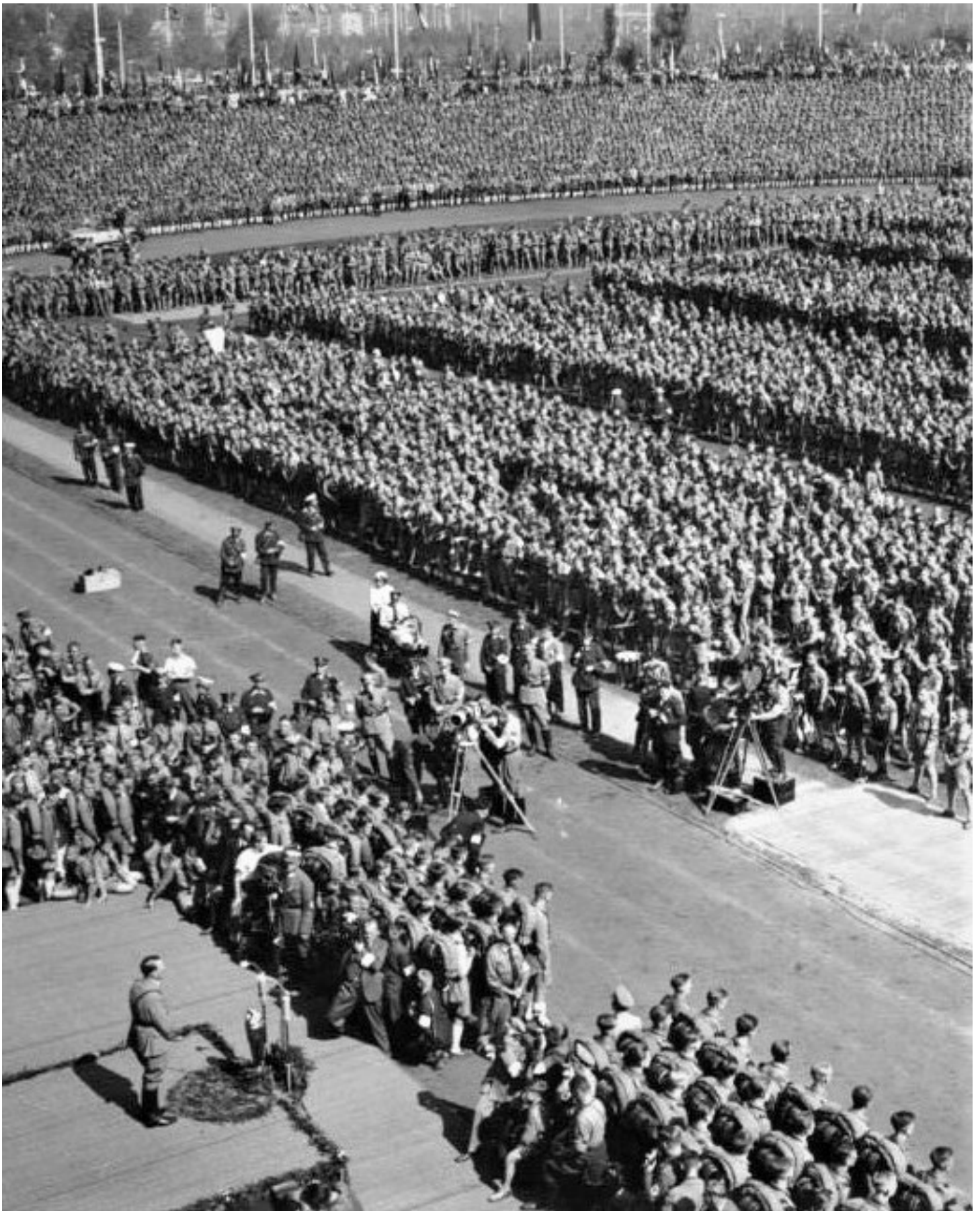
Leni Riefenstahl and her camera crew by Adolf Hitler's car while filming the Nuremberg Rally, September 1934 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Hitler reviewing SA troops, Nuremberg, 1935 – Charles Russell Collection, NARA, Wikimedia



Saluting the arrival of Hitler at the 1936 Summer Olympic Games – Everett Historical, Shutterstock



Leni Riefenstahl and camera crew filming Hitler at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



Nuremberg Rally, 1936 – Everett Historical, Shutterstock

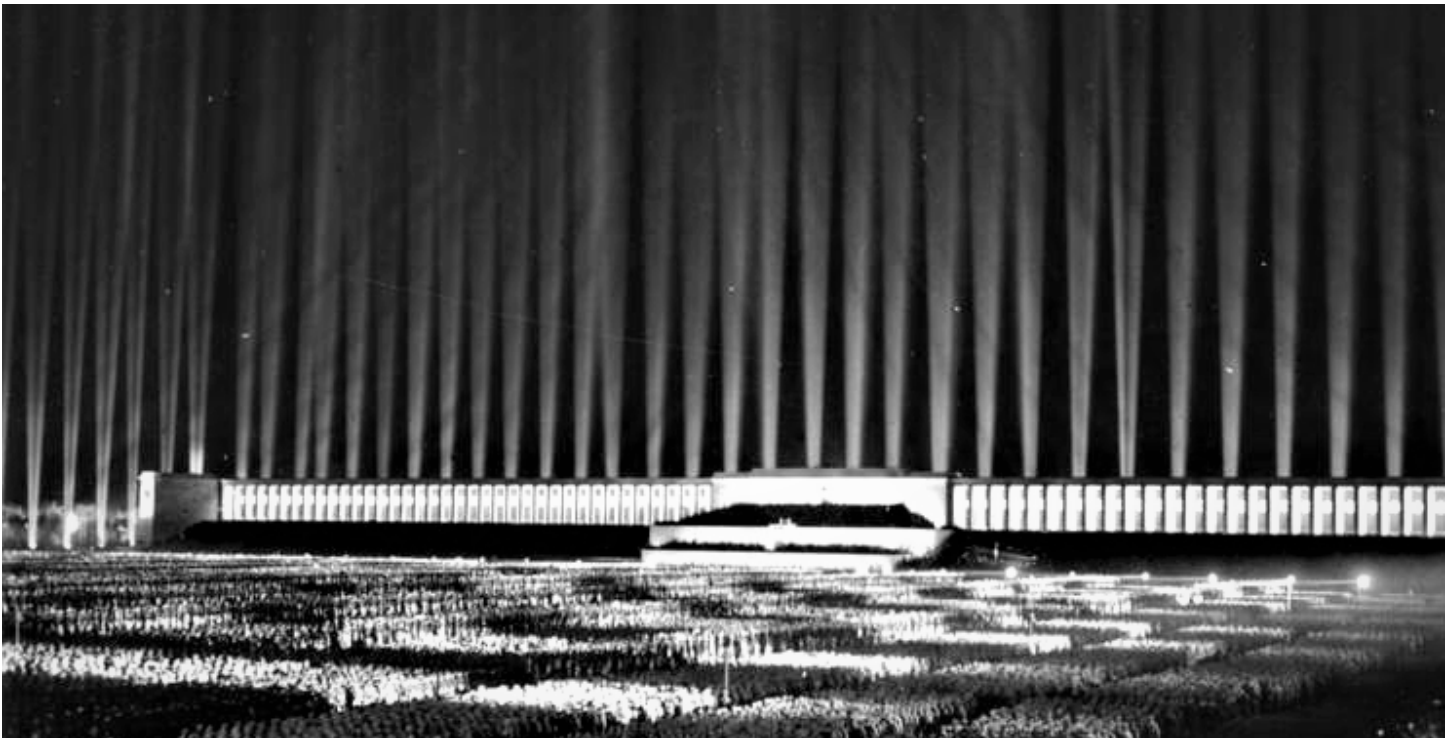


Flag bearers at the Nazi Party Nuremberg Rally – Everett Historical, Shutterstock 237230146



German 150cm anti-aircraft searchlight – Author, Denis Apel, Luftwaffenmuseum Berlin-Gatow, Wikimedia

Designed,” I said, “by Hitler’s architect Albert Speer, the Nuremberg set for *Triumph of the Will* was produced by 152 anti-aircraft searchlights furnished by Hermann Goering, Reichsmarschall of the Luftwaffe. Speer placed the mighty lights at 12 meter intervals with the beams of lights shooting vertically into the sky, creating an enclosed space of 152 beams forming a ‘Cathedral of Light,’ which was aptly named when you consider Nazism was a religion and the Nuremberg Rally was a consecrated rite.”



The **Cathedral of Light** above the **Zeppelintribune**, Albert Speer’s design for the Nazi 8th Party Congress, 1936 Nuremberg Rally – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia



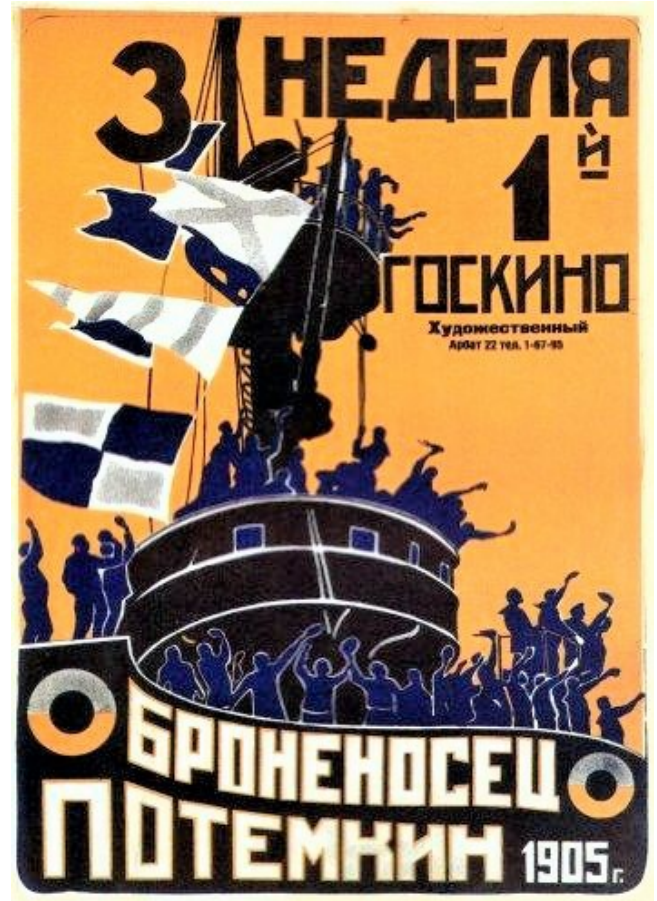
Leni Riefenstahl directing her film crew in Poland, 1939 – Author, Oswald Burmeister, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“I saw a clip,” Tomás said, “of Riefenstahl’s film at the Barcelona Museum. It was chilling at the same time as it was abhorrent. It expressed the same mentality as Francisco Franco’s fascism. *Triumph of the Will* is a religious paean to military power, the will to conquer.”



Leni Riefenstahl and crew filming a mobile dolly shot for the German documentary on the 1936 Summer Olympics, Berlin, released in 1938 – Unknown author, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Riefenstahl,” I said, “became renowned for her innovations as a cinema director, her use of tracking shots on a dolly and on roller skates, radically low and high angle shots, aerial photography, telephoto shots, slow motion, and quick editing. However, I would tell her cinema admirers that kind of experimental photography had been done previously by avant-garde filmmakers. A Brazilian director working in Paris, Alberto Cavalcanti, made an experimental silent film, *Rien que les heures* in 1926, a lyrical montage of one day on the streets of Paris. Working with Cavalcanti, Walter Ruttmann made *Berlin: A Symphony of a Great Metropolis* in 1926, capturing the flow of contemporary life in a poetic way that I find more arresting than Riefenstahl’s work. Walter Ruttmann himself was influenced by the montage film style of the Russians, especially Sergei Eisenstein’s silent film *Battleship Potemkin* made in 1925, nine years before Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. Eisenstein’s montage sequence of the Imperial Cossack soldiers massacring the civilians on the Odessa Steps is one of the most famous scenes in the history of cinema. Around the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, there was a creative burst of innovative filmmaking.



At left - Poster for *Berlin: A Symphony of a Great Metropolis*, 1927 film directed by Walter Ruttmann, written by Carl Mayer and Karl Freund, music composed by Edmund Meisel – Fair use, Wikimedia

At right- Film poster for *Battleship Potemkin* directed by Sergei Eisenstein, 1925 – Author, Goskino Films, public domain, Wikimedia

“Lev Kuleshov’s essay, *Vestnik Kinematografii*, published in 1916, was the first to use the term ‘montage,’ a theory of cinema that influenced filmmakers of the early Soviet era. Dziga Vertov’s 1929 film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, brilliantly used a montage style to express city life in Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and Moscow, the camera relentlessly following the people in daily life interacting with the technology of the machine age, an ode to the beauty of motion. The camera and editing techniques of Sergei Eisenstein and the other early Russian filmmakers influenced Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, the difference being that she had almost unlimited funds, employed sound recording, and was widely distributed, while the brilliant Soviet silent cinema of the 1920’s remains unheralded in the popular mind.”

“It’s ironic,” Tomás said, “that the cinema techniques developed in the USSR, a few years later, would be used by their mortal enemy to make a film idolizing Hitler and the Nazi State.”

“That’s a valuable insight, Tomás. The early Soviet montage style, brilliantly executed by Riefenstahl — the endless flow of images, tens of thousands of men marching in torch light, a river of humanity under the enchantment of the Nazi Party — hypnotized her audience. *Triumph of the Will* instilled in the people a gut level belief in German exceptionalism, inspired hegemonic dreams of grandiosity and cast Hitler as the Messiah who would save the nation.

“Professor Loukas told us that when the Nazis troops marched into Paris, Riefenstahl sent Hitler a telegram saying, ‘With indescribable joy, deeply moved and filled with burning gratitude, we share with you, my Führer, yours and Germany’s greatest victory, the entry of German troops into Paris.’ Riefenstahl believed the Führer was a leader beyond imagination, a leader without parallel in the history of mankind. But after the defeat of Germany, Riefenstahl told a different story. She claimed that she was unaware of Hitler’s vision for Germany, despite her association with Goebbels and Himmler and her reading of *Mein Kampf* 12 years before.”

“Have you seen,” Tomás said, “her film *Olympia*, which Hitler commissioned for the 1936 Olympic Games?”

“I’ve seen it twice,” I said. “She was even more innovative than in *Triumph of the Will*, accomplishing aerial shots with automatic cameras held aloft by balloons and in the diving competition, the camera shooting divers in the air, then after they hit the water, the camera operators following the divers below the surface. It was the first use of underwater cameras. Riefenstahl was enthralled with the human form in motion. That’s why I had to see it twice. As a dancer, I’m fascinated with the body in motion, the reason I am concentrating on

choreography this year. I think that Riefenstahl's training as a dancer influenced her choreography in film. She was talented and intensely motivated, writing poetry at 4, competing in gymnastics at 12, studying ballet at 16, and by the age of 24, touring with the theatre director Max Reinhardt. After an injury ended her dancing career, she performed her first role in Arnold Fanck's *The Holy Mountain* where she picked up the basics of film directing. Her role in *The White Hell of Piz Palü*, a drama set in the Swiss Alps and co-directed by G. W. Pabst, made her famous in Europe and at 30, gave her the prestige to direct her first film *The Blue Light* which won the Silver Medal at the Venice Film Festival, catching Hitler's eye and leading to his offer to film the 1934 Nuremberg Rally."

"For a woman," Tomás said, "to have that kind of success as a director must have been quite rare in 1934."

"Almost unheard of. However, my sister told me about a successful woman director at that time in the U.S. Dorothy Arzner, originally a film editor, directed fourteen talkies during the 'Golden Age' of cinema in the '30s, directing Rosalind Russell and Katherine Hepburn.



American film director Dorothy Arzner, publicity still, 16 October 1934 – Unknown author, Public domain, Wikimedia. The only woman film director in Hollywood, Arzner's career bridged from the silent era of the 1920s to the early 1940s, directing twenty films that launched the careers of many Hollywood actresses, Katharine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, and Lucille Ball, and becoming the first woman to join the Directors Guild of America.

“Yvonne had seen Arzner’s *The Wild Party* starring Clara Bow, in which Arzner was noted for rigging up a microphone on a long fishing rod held overhead Bow’s head giving her freedom of movement — the first boom microphone in the film business. A college girl who falls in love with her professor, Clara Bow’s insouciance and buoyant whimsy made *The Wild Party* a smash success, making her the biggest box office draw of the late ‘20s. Bow became the symbol of the flapper, a modern woman who tooted around town in an automobile, smoked, drank, broke all the sexual norms, setting a new style for independent women in America. Arzner had a gift in directing women, amazing that she directed in a time when no other woman was allowed to direct. We have the same problem today — women don’t get a chance to direct. But Dorothy Arzner did it, the first woman to join the Director’s Guild of America. As for Riefenstahl, despite her ingenuity and grasp of formalism, I have problems with *Olympia*.”

“What didn’t you like about it?”

“Riefenstahl captures the beauty and power of the human body, but her athletes are aesthetic presences rather than human beings. Her abstractions of physical beauty are like the abstraction of the political state — Platonic ideals in a perfect world. But the reality was far less perfect. That’s what Riefenstahl’s hallucinatory images missed in *Triumph of the Will* — the reality of National Socialism. It’s a spectacular fake. It’s morally bankrupt — a case of an artist sacrificing reality to aesthetics. Propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels must have adored her — no one captured the Nazi movement better than Leni Riefenstahl.



Nazi Minister for Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and Leni Riefenstahl, 25 November 1937 – Author, Rolf Lantin, German Federal Archives, Wikimedia

“Hitler adored Leni’s masterpiece. It portrayed him as invincible — the fearless leader of the world. He said, ‘it is a totally unique and incomparable glorification of the power and beauty of our movement.’ Five days after Riefenstahl arrived in New York City to promote *Olympia*, the news broke of *Kristallnacht* — synagogues burned and Jews dragged off to concentration camps. Riefenstahl declared to the media that she couldn’t believe such things could have happened.”

“When people are struggling,” Tomás said, “they’re vulnerable to Messianic leaders. After the despair of losing the war and not having coal to burn to keep warm, struggling to find enough to eat, they were looking for hope. They were looking for salvation.”

“In a state of heightened anxiety,” I said, “the populace responds to propaganda. Passions are in the streets. During the Revolution, the French were whipped by demagogues into actions they could not have imagined a year before. Once the people’s fear is aroused, their anger can be directed at another. One only needs to supply the simple ideology and a scapegoat. Once you convince yourself that your beliefs are an absolute truth, the next step is to eradicate those who question your absolute truth. Denis Diderot said, ‘From fanaticism to barbarism is only one step.’ An American writer pointed out that fascist art glorifies surrender, exalts mindlessness, and glamorizes death. Leni Riefenstahl’s crime was to glorify the ideology of the Nazi Party and reinforce absolute obedience to the state.”

“Even though,” Tomás said, “I was an advocate of the Republican government in Spain, I’ve always distrusted ideological certitudes. My own family’s suffering has led me to doubt all dogmas. While opposing fascism in Spain, I discovered that our ally, the Communist Party, was as authoritarian as the fascists, the extreme left as dictatorial as the extreme right. The extreme positions of revolutionary movements usually fail to produce just governance because of rigidity of thought and the desire for retribution. My mistrust of ideology has drawn me to the Sufi’s mysterious view of the world. I especially love Attar of Nishapur’s *Poem of the Butterflies*.”

We are like the three butterflies in front of a candle’s flame.

The first one went closer and said, “I know about love.”

The second one touched the flame lightly with his wings

And said, “I know how love’s fire can burn.”

The clouds parted for a moment and the late afternoon sunlight struck Tomás' grave face. He was silent for a moment then said, "I'm on a solitary journey. When I perform, I enter a trance and leave all anxieties behind. It is my moment. My prayer. In that moment I am one with the divine."

Overhead, clouds were moving in, dark purple rimmed with silver light, the wind picking up, making me shiver in my thin dress. Tomás took off his wool jacket and put it around my shoulders his hand lingering for a moment on my neck.

"Won't you be cold?"

He laughed, "You haven't noticed how hot blooded I am?"

It was so unusual to see him laugh so freely like that. A few drops of rain fell on my face.

"We'd better go or else we're going to get caught in the rain. I'll walk you to your bus."

"You'll finish telling me about the two strains of flamenco soon?"

"Soon."

"When I got to the stop, I took off his coat.

"Keep it, or you'll get cold. You can bring it next time."

He looked at me for a long moment as if there were something he wanted to say. But he only said ciao and left me at the bus stop. When he reached the corner, he turned and came back.

"We're having a *zambra* tonight on Manolo's houseboat. Everyone is coming, the dancers, musicians, families, and children. We're going to dance until the sun comes up. Would you like to come?"

"Are you sure it will be. . ."

"Why not?"

"Well, I've heard. . ."

"That Gitanos don't welcome strangers?"

"You said that Gitanos are a tightly knit people."

"I've spoken to Manolo. I told him you've been my best dancer all of this year."

Dark hair was blowing across his face damp with sprinkles of rain.

"Yes, I'll come."



Dos Gitanas, 1901 – Author, Francisco Iturrino, public domain, Carmen Thyssen Museum, Wikimedia