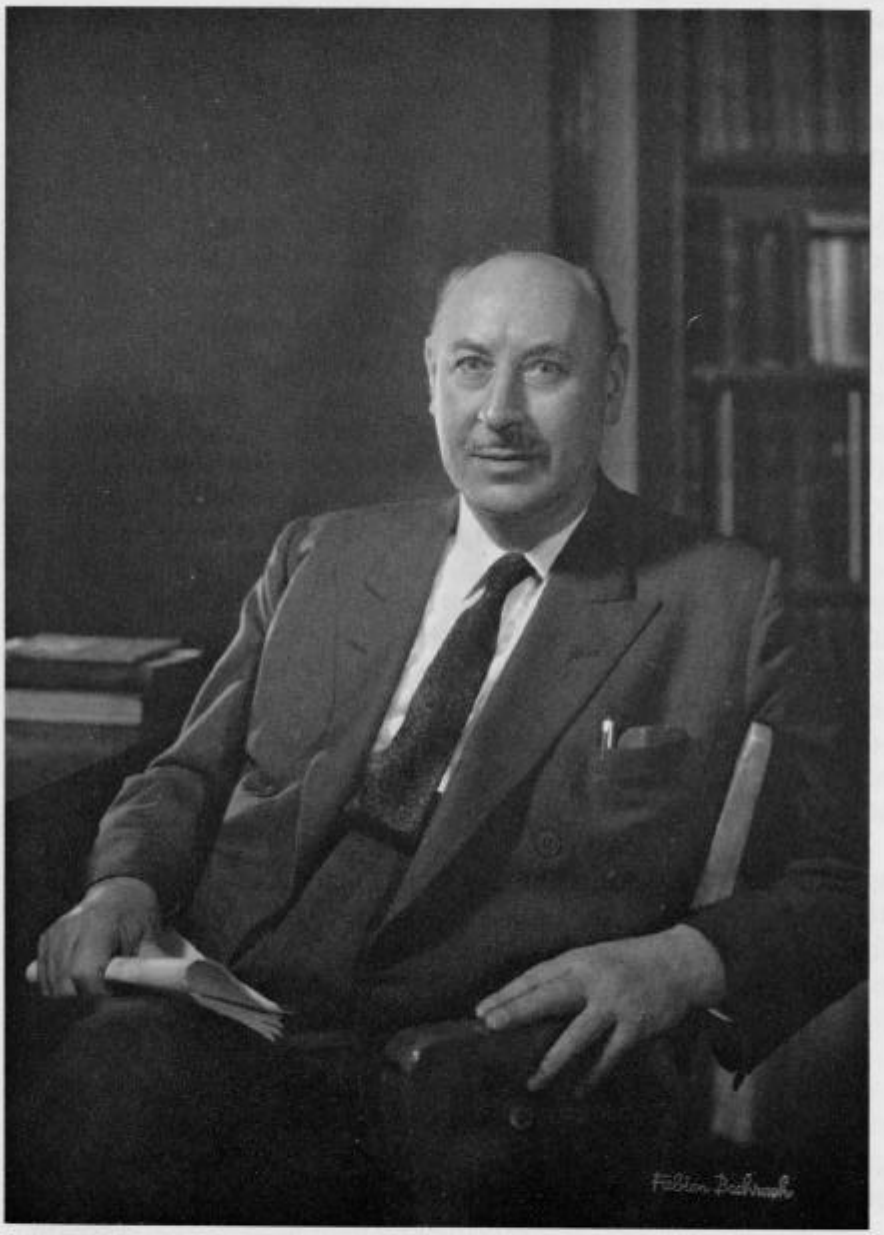
PLATE XXX



Photograph by Fabian Bachrach

SIR HAMILTON GIBB

SIR HAMILTON GIBB

1895–1971

HAMILTON ALEXANDER ROSSKEEN GIBB was born in Alexandria on 2 January 1895, the younger son of Scottish parents, Alexander Crawford Gibb and Jane Ann Gardner. His father, who was in Egypt as manager of a land reclamation company in the Delta, died in 1897, but his mother remained in Alexandria after her husband's death and taught there in the Church of Scotland Girls' School. He was sent back to school in Scotland when he was five years old. From 1904 to 1912 he studied at the Royal High School in Edinburgh, but spent some summer holidays with his mother in Egypt. In 1912 he entered Edinburgh University and worked for an honours degree in Semitic languages, but the First World War broke out before he could finish his studies. He served first as an instructor in a training unit for artillery officers, then in France and Italy with the South Midland Brigade. When the War ended he did not return to Edinburgh, although he was awarded a 'war privilege' Ordinary M.A. He went instead to the School of Oriental Studies newly established in London. He was appointed Lecturer there in 1921, obtained the degree of Master of Arts in 1922, and in the same year married Helen Jessie Stark (known to her friends as Ella), whom he had first met when he had returned to Scotland as a child; they had two children, a son, Ian, and a daughter, Dorothy.

He remained at the School until 1937, first as Lecturer, then as Reader, and finally as Professor of Arabic. In 1937 he was elected to the Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford, and he held it, together with a professorial fellowship at St. John's College, until 1955, when he accepted an invitation to go to Harvard as Jewett Professor of Arabic, University Professor and, shortly afterwards, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies. In 1964 he suffered a severe stroke which impaired his powers of speech and movement, and returned to England soon afterwards, although he remained nominal Director of the Center for a little longer. Until his death on 22 October 1971 he lived in retirement, at Cumnor Hill outside Oxford until after his wife's death in 1969, then for his last few months at Cherington near Stratford-upon-Avon.

He received many honours during his life. His old College, St. John's, made him an honorary Fellow when he left Oxford.

He was a Fellow of the British Academy, the Danish Academy, and the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia; honorary Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Medieval Academy of America; member of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, the Institut d'Égypte, and the Arabic Academies of Damascus and Baghdad. He was one of the editors of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* in its later stages, one of those who initiated the new edition after the Second World War, and a member of its editorial committee until he went to the United States. He was created Knight Bachelor in 1954, and also held French and Dutch honours.

Such are the bare outlines of his life if seen in terms of acts and achievements; it falls into five periods which can be clearly distinguished—the years of formation, of teaching in London, Oxford, and Harvard, and of retirement. But for a man who lived so much within his mind and imagination as Gibb, and for his biographer, the intertwined secret histories of his life may be more important. Of certain strands in his private history he would not have wished me to write even had I been able: his religious faith and his life in a closely knit family. Of two others I can say more: the development of his mind as a scholar and thinker, and his influence on students, colleagues, and friends, on the world of orientalist scholarship and on a wider world of readers of English to whom he showed the way by which, for a whole generation or more, they would understand the religion of Islam and the society and culture of its adherents. These inner processes can be set within the framework of his external life, for in many ways the moves from London to Oxford, and from Oxford to Harvard, were linked with changes in his work as scholar and teacher.

It is difficult to say how it all began. Sights and sounds half remembered from childhood, chance meetings, words spoken by teachers, books read and perhaps forgotten, can give direction to the lonely impulse of delight from which a scholar's vocation springs:

> A door opens, a breath, a noise
> From the ancient room
> Speaks to him now. Be it dark or bright
> He is knit with his doom.

We can only guess at some of the ways in which this particular vocation may have been formed. Alexandria must have given something: the city where he was born, where his father died,

where his mother lived until she too died in 1913, and to which he returned more than once in boyhood, making the long sea journey from one Mediterranean port to another; by imaginative appropriation he belonged to two worlds, that of the eastern Mediterranean as well as Scotland. (His must have been a lonely boyhood: he rarely spoke of it to his own children, but kept one reminder of it until he died—an album of picture postcards, many of them sent him by his mother and with the same sentence repeated on them, 'May you have as happy an Xmas and New Year as the days we spent at Bad Nauheim'—simple words which unlock a world of feeling.) The Royal High School may have been important in other ways. Founded by the Augustinians of Holyrood but taken over by the city magistrates after the Reformation, it remained the main school of Edinburgh until new ones were founded in the earlier nineteenth century. It gave boys from modest homes a solid classical education and sent them out to work in the Empire or the great world of British trade; there must have been an awareness of imperial rule over distant peoples, of long trade routes linking different countries and continents, of varieties of human society, and on this too the imagination could feed. The most famous alumnus of the school was Sir Walter Scott, but even had this not been so any bookish Scottish schoolboy of the time would have read his novels, and one of them may have made a lasting mark on Gibb's mind. It is not fanciful to see in the special interest he always showed in Saladin, and the unexpected warmth and colour which came into his prose when he wrote of him, the influence of *The Talisman*; fifty years later he was still giving it to students as a work of art from which they could learn much about Islamic history.

At the University in Edinburgh he began Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, and was initiated into the discipline of Semitic philology by good teachers. This had been one of the great branches of scholarship in the nineteenth century, rooted as it was in some of the central intellectual concerns of the age: the attempt to construct a genealogy of languages, races, and cultures, and to understand the Bible through a precise understanding of its words and of the beliefs and practices of the peoples of the ancient Near East. But although he respected it and dutifully sent copies of his first book to his teachers in Edinburgh, it was not his chosen discipline, and he may have learnt more from the University in other ways than through his special studies. In the Scottish academic tradition, general

principles should be grasped before details were studied; this was the bent of his own mind, always trying to relate facts to general ideas. The mind should be trained by a balanced study of philosophy, the classics, and natural science: this was to be his ideal, and was one of the things he singled out for praise when he wrote an obituary article on his great contemporary Louis Massignon. Every student had to take at least one course in philosophy. The two brothers who held the chairs of philosophy and provided the teaching available to him, James Seth and A. S. Pringle-Pattison, taught a Scottish variation of the Kantian philosophy and may have played some part (as we shall see) in forming his view of Islam; he is recorded as having taken Seth's course in moral philosophy in his second year.[1]

His studies at Edinburgh were cut short by the coming of war. Had he been in the habit of expressing general moral sentiments, his view of that and other wars would no doubt have been that of any deeply humane and serious person. But he always enjoyed using his mind, and at a certain level his war service interested and satisfied something in him. He never lost his interest in campaigns and battles, and his practical intellect enjoyed learning new techniques and finding new ways of solving problems. (A scholar who went to consult him on a problem in Arabic received a lecture on different ways of growing potatoes, others were instructed in bee-keeping and railway timetables.)

It was in the years immediately after the War that he found his vocation. Started only a few years before, the School of Oriental Studies in London was very small when he went there: in 1920–1 there were only two teachers of Arabic, and only six internal students. Even within London University it was marginal, and this was to be important for him; one of his lasting concerns was to rescue oriental studies from their marginal position in the universities, and insert them into the central stream of intellectual life from which they had first emerged. But at the School he found teachers, and that was what mattered most. In these obscure and complicated subjects not everything which is thought or discovered is published at once, and it is important for a young scholar to insert himself into a living tradition of scholarship, to find teachers who will not only give him the technical secrets of their craft but will lead him to the frontiers of knowledge and direct his mind to urgent problems. Two scholars did this for Gibb in different degrees. One was the Director of the School, Sir E. Denison Ross: a pleasure-loving

man of the world, he would not at first sight have seemed the natural teacher for an austere, unworldly, perhaps over-serious young Scot, but Gibb found in him and respected, as he was to make clear in an obituary article, a total devotion to scholarship, provided only it was living, and inflexible judgement on scholarly matters.[2] Ross gave him at the start of his career kindness and encouragement and a subject for his thesis, the Arab conquest of central Asia, from which he gained a lifelong concern for great historical themes, the conflict and interaction of societies and cultures, and for historical geography.

The other teacher, whose influence went deeper and lasted longer, was Sir Thomas Arnold, whom Gibb was eventually to succeed as Professor of Arabic. Arnold initiated him into a central tradition of European scholarship: he had himself studied at Cambridge with Robertson Smith, who had studied with Wellhausen and others of the great German scholars. But he had added something of his own: a specifically historical concern with the way in which Islam had spread and its institutions been formed, and a moral concern for its present welfare. He had taught for a time at the Anglo-Muhammedan College at Aligarh, and while there is said to have shown his sympathy for his Muslim colleagues and students by appearing in oriental dress; nobody who knew him could have imagined Gibb showing his sympathy in the same way, but the concern was there. Of Arnold's famous books, *The Preaching of Islam* dealt with the continuous, almost invisible expansion of the Muslim community over the world, and *The Caliphate* with the problem of authority in Islam; both were subjects to which his pupil would return.

In those years there was a third person whom Gibb thought of as a teacher and from whom he learnt much: an Egyptian, Muhammad Hasanain 'Abd al-Raziq, who taught at the School for a time between 1920 and 1923. Gibb was later to call him 'my honoured teacher' and dedicate a book to him.[3] When in later years he went to Cairo he would stay with him, not in one of the quarters frequented by foreigners but in the unfashionable bourgeois suburb of Zahir. It was perhaps through this relationship, which seems to have been personal as well as academic, that he acquired his feeling for the values of the traditional Egyptian Muslim urban life: not the Franco-Ottoman life of the aristocracy or the Levantine and European communities, but something simpler, more firmly rooted in the past, and in his eyes more authentic.

During Gibb's fifteen years as a teacher in London he published his first important writings: his M.A. thesis, *The Arab Conquests in Central Asia* (1923); a translation of selected passages from the traveller Ibn Battuta (1929); *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades* (1932), another translation, from a work by Ibn al-Qalanisi, with a perceptive historical introduction; a general survey of *Arabic Literature* (1926); 'Studies in contemporary Arabic literature' (published in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* between 1928 and 1933);[4] an essay on the influence of Arabic upon European literature in *The Legacy of Islam* (1931); and *Whither Islam?* (1932), a collection of essays by different hands on the present state and prospects of the Muslim world, edited and provided with a long introduction by him.

A reader who looks through these works with a knowledge of what was to come later will be struck at once by their wide range. They cover almost (but not quite) the whole span of the interests he was to show throughout his life; it was as if he were making a preliminary survey of his whole field of study before taking up each subject in a systematic way. The reader will be struck also by the maturity of thought, taste, and scholarship which these works show—not yet perhaps the writings on Islam, but certainly the historical and even more the literary works. One at least of them sounded a new note in Islamic scholarship: his studies of contemporary Arabic literature were the first attempt by a scholar trained in the European tradition of literary study to apply critical standards to the new writing in Arabic. There were already present that balance and measure which his older contemporary Levi Della Vida singled out as the distinctive mark of his mind, in the *Festschrift* which his colleagues and students gave him on his seventieth birthday.[5]

How should we define the scholarly personality now revealing itself in the 'young Professor Gibb' who so astonished Levi Della Vida and others when they met him at congresses or elsewhere in his twenties and thirties? At the heart of it lay an abiding concern with the Arabic language. He had a complete knowledge of it in its classical and modern forms, and a sense of its fundamental unity throughout history. (He spoke it with some hesitation, perhaps because he valued it so highly, but given time could say what he wanted in it.) He liked teaching Arabic, and told me towards the end of his life that he had taught elementary Arabic to someone or other every year of his teaching career, and every time had learnt something new.

(Here too perhaps was a legacy of the Scottish academic tradition, in which the professor gave elementary as well as advanced instruction.) But Arabic was important for him not so much for its own sake as because of the literature written in it, and because it had meant so much to Arabs and Muslims. The imagination of the Arabs had expressed itself above all through language, 'the most seductive, it may be, and certainly the most unstable and even dangerous of all the arts'. With that love of general ideas, that desire to link the particular with the general which marked his mind, and which also was not without its dangers, he went on to suggest that the Arabs had a special attitude towards their language:

> upon the Arab mind the impact of artistic speech is immediate; the words passing through no filter of logic or reflection which might weaken or deaden their effect, go straight to the head . . . the Arab artistic creation is a series of separate moments, each complete in itself and independent, connected by no principle of harmony or congruity beyond the unity of the imagining mind.[6]

When writing of the literature expressed in the language, he had that same firm and continuous consciousness of the unity of its development. His little book *Arabic Literature* shows that by the time he was thirty he had read his way through much of it and formed his own personal judgements. His essay in *The Legacy of Islam*, one of the best of his works, shows that he had the same wide knowledge of several European literatures.[7] (He read very deeply in English and French, and to a lesser extent in German, Italian, and Spanish; he knew some Russian; his Latin was good, but he once said that his Greek and Hebrew had been casualties of the First World War; he showed surprisingly little interest in the other great Islamic languages, Persian and Turkish; Chinese was what he would really have liked to learn.)

Apart from literature, it is difficult to say how much the arts meant to him. He knew the history of European music, and listening to it gave him pleasure. As a student and colleague of Arnold he was certainly aware of the problems of Islamic art, but looking at pictures does not seem to have played a great part in his life, and although he would go a long way to see an important building, what concerned him perhaps was less its beauty than its historical significance or the technical problems involved in its construction. He had no great concern for the elegance of his possessions; he and his wife lived in an orderly, neat, and comfortable way, his clothes, his books, his furniture,

and his houses were well cared for but were for use rather than display. On the other hand he had very acute visual sensibility. His handwriting both in English and Arabic was beautiful; he could describe in detail the way in which the sunlight fell on the backs of his books at every hour of the day; he had, perhaps as an inheritance from his ancestors, a vivid sense of the land, its shapes and colours, the relations of one region to another, the products and inhabitants of each. The geography of the Muslim world lay near the centre of his interests; his first and last published statements were statements about geography.

If his intellectual curiosity began with language and literature, it reached far beyond, even in those early years. He was always trying to cross frontiers between disciplines or civilizations, to show unexpected connections or how one thing could help to explain something completely different. In his first book he combined Arabic with translated Chinese sources to illuminate the history of central Asia; if he translated Ibn Battuta, it was because his was a book which could tell us much about the life of vast parts of Asia and Africa; in the same way, Ibn al-Qalanisi could be of help to historians of the Crusades. In all this there was something of the pure self-moving curiosity of the scholar, the mind going its own way at its own pace, but there was something else, the need to impose unity on what he knew, to relate facts to principles and blend them both in a single vision; beneath the surface of this outwardly mild, self-controlled man—almost too mild, almost too much in control of himself—there was a strange and passionate imagination.

He was usually conscious of the danger that imagination and the speculative mind might outrun the need to be loyal to the facts. His self-control hid (or sometimes did not hide) an inner tension. In his dealings with other people he was just, loyal, and affectionate, but always inclined to judge them by high standards. His affections only showed themselves in almost hidden ways, by a gesture or an occasional smile of astonishing sweetness; his judgement would express itself more often in impatience than anger. He looked at himself in this way too: he was always trying to hold in a balance the need for scholarly precision and the demands of the speculative intellect and unifying imagination—everything must be linked with everything else, but in a careful and accurate way.

Although he only wrote one passage of explicit self-revelation (to be quoted later), his view of what a scholar should try to do can be deduced from what he wrote about others. Among the

obituary articles he wrote is one on his predecessor as Laudian Professor, D. S. Margoliouth, a man of very great learning and complex personality, and known for the elaborate irony with which he expressed or concealed his convictions. Gibb did not find in him the balance he sought:

> . . . the ironical tone which informed his observations disturbed many of his European and sometimes infuriated his Muslim readers. The soundness of his judgment was inevitably called in question where insight rather than literary scholarship was demanded.[8]

At the opposite extreme stood Gibb's great contemporary, the French orientalist Louis Massignon, towards whom his attitude was complex. His relations with French scholars were good; he loved their language and its culture, admired the precision and seriousness of their work and the ease with which they could express abstract ideas, and perhaps something in him responded to the formality of French manners. In Massignon he greatly appreciated the vast learning and culture, the intensity of feeling and conviction, the originality of mind, the poetry, in a word, although it is a vague word, the genius; but he had reservations about the precision of his scholarship, and there is a note of affectionate criticism in what he wrote of him:

> Louis Massignon was too rich a personality, too complex and many-sided to be enclosed within neat formulas and categories. The outstanding character of the man was a web of loyalties: overt loyalties, to Church, nation, friends, to the pledged word, the dignity of man, the cause of the disinherited and oppressed—and, above all, reconciling what in others might have issued in conflicts and contradictions, an integrity and inner loyalty to the spirit wherever he perceived it. All these were in him bound up together into an inner unity of thought and action, and having taken up a position he remained immovable from it. . . .
>
> Oriental studies could not for him be confined to the classical realms of history, literature, or philosophy. The study was not to be dissociated from the field, the ideas from their effects and manifestations in human life and society. In his historical works, as in his analyses of contemporary movements, his presentations were quickened by a perception of enduring Islamic values, that had always acted, and continued to act, upon the course of events. . . . His writings on these subjects have acquired from the qualities that he brought to them a permanent significance in Islamic studies. But just because of these qualities they are composed, as it were, in two registers. One was at the ordinary level of objective scholarship, seeking to elucidate the nature of the given phenomenon by a masterly use of the established tools of academic

research. The other was at a level on which objective data and understanding were absorbed and transformed by an individual intuition of spiritual dimensions. It was not always easy to draw a dividing line between the former and the transfiguration that resulted from the outpouring of the riches of his own personality.[9]

It was perhaps an awareness of some similar tendency in himself which contributed to his self-control. As in his life, so in his writing: once more his ideal was revealed by implication—writing of a favourite author he thus defined his style:

> . . . lively, direct, colorful, brilliantly imaginative, exuberantly eloquent Ibn Khaldun, whose ideas stream out in long cascades, sometimes indeed tumbling into excited incohesion, but for the most part held together by a taut and beautifully modulated structure of prose, controlled by precise and refined mechanisms of coordination and subordination, and articulated with a trained elegance that gives to every word the exact degree of emphasis required by his argument.[10]

Gibb's own style does not quite reach this ideal. It is forceful and well-articulated, it can express every shade of his meaning, it never tumbles over into excited incohesion, it flows easily except for a certain clumsiness when, as he was always tempted to do, he tried to express very abstract ideas. But it lacks colour, variety, and fantasy. (There is however at least one joke in his published works: a mock-serious translation from an absurd Spanish–Arabic poem. Extolling a young man's beauty the poet asks:

> How do his underclothes not waste away
> Since he is a full moon [in beauty] and they are of cotton?

But even this needs a learned gloss to explain that medieval Arabs believed moonlight could dissolve cotton.)[11]

In these early writings one strand, which was to be important later, was only just beginning to appear: concern with the religion of Islam, its past, present, and future. To quote Levi Della Vida once again, at the heart of his view of the Muslim world lay an attempt to grasp 'the specific attitude [of Muslims] towards religion'.[12] He made a first attempt to formulate this in *Whither Islam?*, where he wrote of the lack of harmony between the inner life of the Muslim community and its political development—'a thousand years of jealous autocracy, a thousand years of political quietism'[13]—and the unsettlement and psychological strain brought about in the modern age by the rapid intrusion of new ideas, the change in the balance of doctrine and ethical teaching, and the attempt to transplant new and alien institutions.

But the thought, whether on doctrinal change or its political effects, was still half-formed, and was not to mature until the late 1930s and the 1940s: the creative, self-confident years, his last in London and his first in Oxford, years also of political tension and war. At first, and for obvious reasons, the main sign of inner change was a growing concern with politics. He gave lectures and wrote articles on political problems of the Middle East and on British policy; for the first years of the War he was head of the Middle Eastern section in the wartime organization set up by the Royal Institute of International Affairs to provide information for the Foreign Office (later to become the Foreign Office Research Department). The responsibilities of power and empire meant something to him, but he was critical of some of the ways in which they were interpreted by the British government: if no satisfactory agreement was made with Egypt on a basis of equality, and if support was given without due caution to the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, the relationship between the Arab Muslim peoples and the outside world would be strained. He had similar fears about French policy in Syria, although he did not criticize it in North Africa, where France was faced with problems different from those of the Middle East, and no British interest was involved. Even before the War ended however he had begun to withdraw from these activities. His last major political article, a strong and outspoken one on Anglo-Egyptian relations, appeared in *International Affairs* in 1951.[14] After that, although he would sometimes speak or write about the social or moral factors which might affect political decisions, he seemed reluctant to be drawn into public discussion of questions of policy; only the greatest events—those of 1956 and 1967—could draw from him even a private comment.

Partly perhaps this was because of a feeling that there was little a scholar could do to solve problems or even bring pressure to bear on those concerned with them, partly to a certain lack of ease in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East as the decades passed. During the 1920s he had travelled widely in North Africa and elsewhere, and in the 1930s he went each year to Egypt as one of the few European members of the Academy of the Arabic Language. He had close friends there, he moved in the world of the liberal intellectuals and parliamentary politicians. But he did not feel quite so much at ease with a new generation and régime; he visited Egypt rarely after the 1940s, and made only short visits to other countries (including, on his last long journey, some in West Africa).

Changes in feeling and habit were linked with changes of intellectual concern and conviction. By the early 1950s British and French power was receding and the Muslim peoples were becoming responsible for their own political destiny, at least within the framework left behind by their former rulers. A European scholar could not take an effective part in their political processes, but he might hope to help them by setting those processes in a long perspective of historical development. As Gibb did so it became clear to him that modern governments and élites were acting in ignorance or rejection of their own traditions of social life and morality, and that their failures sprang from this. Henceforth his main efforts were given to the elucidation, by careful study of the past, of the specific nature of Muslim society and the beliefs and culture which lay at the heart of it.

Even this problem he tended to see at first mainly in political terms. He approached it from a background of political theory and institutional history. In the early 1930s, after the sudden death of Sir Thomas Arnold, he was teaching Islamic political theory and was much concerned with the rise and decline of states. The articles he wrote on the subject, mainly in this decade, are of great importance, and those who teach or write about it today would still tend to start from the careful distinctions he made between different kinds of theory in terms of which the exercise of power was justified: the theory of the caliphate in its various phases, that of the just sultan ruling within the bounds of the *shari'a*, the Persian idea of the king regulating the orders of society in the light of natural justice.[15] One of his best articles, written in 1932, is that on the Islamic background of Ibn Khaldun's political theory. The aim of Ibn Khaldun, he maintained, was not only to analyse the evolution of states but to reconcile the demands of the *shari'a*, the 'holy law', with the facts of history:

> since mankind will not follow the Shari'a it is condemned to an empty and unending cycle of rise and fall, conditioned by the 'natural' and inevitable consequences of the predominance of its animal instincts.[16]

In this way of looking at the past at this time we can see the influence of Arnold Toynbee, between whom and Gibb there was mutual respect: Toynbee had learnt some Arabic with him at the School, and asked him to read and comment on the passages about Islam in the early volumes of his *Study of History*.[17]

It was no doubt Toynbee's concern with problems of the relations between 'civilizations' which led the Royal Institute of

International Affairs (where he was Director of Studies) to commission a number of works about the impact of modern Western civilization on the ancient societies of Asia. Gibb was asked to write the one on Islam, together with another scholar, Harold Bowen. The two parts of what was intended to be the first volume of *Islamic Society and the West* were not published until much later, in 1950 and 1957 respectively, but the thought and research for them were done earlier, in the 1930s and 1940s. Their purpose was 'to investigate [the] inner mechanism [of Ottoman Muslim society] and . . . the forces at work to maintain or transform it',[18] and the authors began with a detailed study of that society as it was in the 1770s, just at the point where, in their view, those new forces began to affect it.

The work was intended to be a survey of published material in order to form some system of categories which might help to direct research in the Ottoman and other material being newly opened to scholars. So far at least as Gibb's share went, it was mainly based on a very detailed use of a small number of important sources: for example, the *Description de l'Égypte*, the chronicle of al-Jabarti, al-Muradi's biographical dictionary. A precise and careful picture was built up of the social and religious structure of Ottoman society, in both the Turkish and Arab parts of the Empire. The work of the two authors is not difficult to distinguish. Bowen was an Ottomanist, minute, careful, rather pedestrian when dealing with the institutions of the central government, the fiscal system, and the Anatolian provinces; Gibb dealt with the nature of civil and religious authority, and with the Arab provinces, and did so in a boldly speculative way. His are clearly the ideas about the Ottoman sultanate. In a chapter which summarizes his earlier work on political theory, the sultanate is placed within its Islamic context: not a caliphate, except in the sense given the term by the later jurists, for whom any government which ruled justly and within the shari'a could be called a caliphate; deriving less from the tradition of legal thought than from the ancient Persian ideal of kingship as being of divine origin because it was necessary to keep the world on its axis by making sure that no class transgressed the rights of any other; giving justice to subjects and demanding obedience from them—'sixty years of tyranny are better than an hour of civil strife'.[19]

In the light of this conception of authority, Gibb examined the nature of Ottoman administration in the Arab provinces, and formed a view of it more favourable than that which most

historians of his generation would have taken. Faced with the violence of factional spirit among the Arabs, which stirred the deepest passions of the soul even more than personal ambition, the Ottomans at least provided a framework of careful and regular administration, although marred by greed and cynicism, and did not interfere with the life which went on inside the framework: the life of a large number of small groups, defined by a combination of family, local, and vocational links, living under their own heads and in accordance with their own traditions.

In the second part the nature of the religious authority and its relations with government and society were studied. It was respected by the government, and in turn recognized its legitimate existence: it could not control it but would not allow itself to be controlled. The fundamental task of the 'ulama was to ensure that, no matter what political changes might come about, the religious institutions and the intellectual tradition of Islam should be preserved unshaken. This was their vocation, but there was always a tension between it and the natural 'pull' of worldly power and success; the higher 'ulama at least tended to become too closely connected with the ruling élite.

Many criticisms have been made of *Islamic Society and the West.* The most trenchant is that put forward by Norman Itzkowitz, who has cast doubt on certain leading ideas in it: in particular, the idea, derived from the work of an earlier historian, A. H. Lybyer, of the existence of two institutions, the 'ruling' and the 'religious', closely parallel to each other.[20] It may also be that in his sections on the Arab provinces Gibb was too much influenced by certain theories of Massignon about the corporate nature of Islamic society. Nevertheless, the book is still, a generation later, what its authors intended it to be: a stimulus to research and further thought.

Gibb and Bowen never wrote more than two parts of the introduction: this was partly because it seemed premature to write a work on so large a scale at a time when the Ottoman archives were only just beginning to be explored, but mainly because, even if it had been possible, it would have demanded a more complete concentration of effort, over a longer period, than either author felt able to give. By the mid 1940s the struggle with the book, and the development of Gibb's thought on the subjects with which it dealt, had brought him within sight of a range of problems which could not be tackled on this level of social and institutional history. Reflection on the inadequacy

of Muslim political systems and on the historical role of the 'ulama led him to think about the nature and development of Islam as a religious system. Between 1947 and 1953 he published a series of four works which between them form a coherent body of original thought about Islam, set in the context of his own religious beliefs: *Modern Trends in Islam* (1947), 'The structure of religious thought in Islam' (in *The Muslim World*, 1948),[21] *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (1949), and 'An interpretation of Islamic history' (in *The Journal of World History*, 1953).[21] They did not in any sense exhaust his energies or interest during these years. Now as at all stages of his career his range was wide, and he continued not only to teach many subjects but to pour out a series of articles on them: in particular, his work as editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* took much time, and some of his longer articles in it were among his major works—the article on history in the first edition, that on Arabic literature in the second.[22] But perhaps the writings on Islam are those by which he will be longest remembered: the book on Mohammedanism, at once simple and profound, easy to read but full of learning, has been for a generation the first book which most teachers recommend to those beginning the study of Islam and its history, and it is still as fresh and valuable as when it was first written.

The key to an understanding of Gibb's thought about Islam is to be found in the preface to *Modern Trends in Islam*, in his one passage of intimate self-revelation—no less intimate for being expressed in a typically tentative, impersonal, and even apologetic way:

> One other word must be said, even at the risk of appearing too self-conscious. In these days, when we are enveloped in an atmosphere charged with propaganda, it is the duty of every investigator to define precisely to himself and to his audience the principles which determine his point of view. Speaking in the first person, therefore, I make bold to say that the metaphors in which Christian doctrine is traditionally enshrined satisfy me intellectually as expressing symbolically the highest range of spiritual truth which I can conceive, provided that they are interpreted not in terms of anthropomorphic dogma but as general concepts, related to our changing views of the nature of the universe. I see the church and the congregation of Christian people as each dependent on the other for continued vitality, the church serving as the accumulated history and instrument of the Christian conscience, the permanent element which is constantly renewed by the stream of Christian experience and which gives both direction and effective power to that experience.

My view of Islam will necessarily be the counterpart of this. The Muslim church and its members constitute a similar composite, each forming and reacting to the other so long as Islam remains a living organism and its doctrines satisfy the religious consciousness of its adherents. While giving full weight to the historical structure of Muslim thought and experience, I see it also as an evolving organism, recasting from time to time the content of its symbolism, even though the recasting is concealed (as it is to a considerable extent in Christianity) by the rigidity of its outward formulas. The views expressed by living Muslims are not to be discredited a priori by the argument that these views cannot be reconciled with those of ninth-century Muslim doctors. It is understandable that modern Muslim theologians themselves should protest against innovations and should seek to tie Islam down to its medieval dogmatic formulations by denying, first of all, the possibility and, second, the legitimacy of the reconstruction of Islamic thought. But it is certainly not for Protestant Christians to refuse to Muslims, either as a community or as individuals, the right to reinterpret the documents and symbols of their faith in accordance with their own convictions.[23]

A number of themes are stated here, some familiar and some less so. The ultimate reality is God speaking directly and of His own initiative to the individual soul, and the soul responding; the 'congregation' is a community of individuals united in a common response which expresses itself in a common symbolism and worship; the 'church' in the narrower sense consists of those individuals in the congregation who act as guardians of the symbols and leaders of the worship. (Since this was what he meant by a 'church', it followed that he could do something which most orientalists would carefully avoid: use the word 'church' in an Islamic context, to refer to the 'ulama, not as a dangerous analogy but as a literal and accurate description.)

Where do these ideas come from? Most deeply perhaps they come from his own Scottish Presbyterian tradition, which was a living reality for him: he was a church-goer, although without any narrowness of allegiance—at Oxford he attended services of the Church of England in the College chapel. But he interpreted Christian doctrine in terms of the Kantian philosophy he had imbibed in Edinburgh. In his *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, Kant had distinguished between 'pure religious faith' and 'ecclesiastical faith'. The former was the religion of reason, which was already working in individuals and would in the end lead to the emergence of a universal religion and ethical state. Until that time should come, most people would live in accordance with 'ecclesiastical faith'; that is to say, some

historically revealed faith, itself derived from 'pure faith', about how God wishes to be honoured and obeyed. Such a faith was most stable when based on a scripture as well as tradition; it could lead to the creation of an 'ethical commonwealth' or church, a visible body of men united under authority. These churches could be arranged on a scale of values according to their universality, the stability of their principles, the strength of the moral union between their members, and the freedom of the individual within them. (For Kant, Islam was one of these faiths and churches, but did not stand high in the scale.)

Whether or not Gibb read Kant himself, such ideas certainly came to him through his teachers of philosophy. They were well expressed, for example, in Pringle-Pattison's Gifford Lectures, delivered in Edinburgh a few years after Gibb was a student there. The author described the historical religions as different manifestations of a common principle rooted in human nature and giving rise to specific combinations of assent to propositions, feelings, intentions of the will, and a 'religious atmosphere' realized in the collective life of a religious community. Such communities tended to persist over a long period, and to preserve not only their own beliefs and practices but something taken over from earlier ones which they were supposed to have displaced.[24]

The problem of the 'science of religion', then, was to trace the way in which a specific religion emerged from or superseded earlier ones, and in which it developed, but also to explain it as one among a number of possible manifestations of some common principle rooted in human nature. What was this underlying reality? There is some evidence that in the late 1930s and the 1940s Gibb was reading widely in books on religion, philosophy, and psychology, not from a desire to be in the fashion but in a search for categories in terms of which he could explain Islam. Sometimes his search took him into unexpected places; almost the only time I can remember him being angry is when I spoke in what seemed to him a slighting and disrespectful way about Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. A passing reference in *Modern Trends* shows where he found what he was looking for. He there acknowledged the help he had received in formulating his ideas about religion from the writings of the philosopher R. G. Collingwood, and from internal evidence it is clear which of Collingwood's books had most influence on him: not the later and better known books, but an early one, *Speculum Mentis*, with which the author was himself dissatisfied in later life. (There is

a long and careful analysis of this book among Gibb's private papers.)

Writing within a broadly Hegelian framework, Collingwood in this book constructs a scale of modes of thought, each of them trying to grasp and express reality and leading in the end to a contradiction which the mind can only resolve by moving to a higher mode. Thus in Art the imagination ranges freely, expressing its own reality in its own symbols. In the mode standing above it, that of Religion, the mind expresses not itself but some reality other than itself, but it still does so through symbols and symbolic action, the rituals of collective worship. At its highest it can lead to a breaking down of the separation between man and that Other. But religious thought ends in contradiction when it tries to express itself explicitly; religion gives rise to theology which interprets the symbols literally and so destroys them. To rise above the contradiction the mind must move to a higher mode, that of Philosophy, in which reality is expressed directly and not in metaphors.

In trying to define the specific nature of Islamic symbols and forms of worship, Gibb drew upon an important tradition of European scholarship, that formulated by I. Goldziher and laying strong emphasis upon the development of Sunnism, the slow accumulation of a tradition through an endeavour to maintain a central position between extremes. One writer of this school had a special influence on him: his fellow Scot D. B. Macdonald, who, after study at Glasgow and with E. Sachau in Berlin, spent his life at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut and the School of Missions attached to it. Macdonald's *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, published in 1903, was an impressive survey of what he regarded as the central path of development. Gibb's copy of it was acquired in 1919, and—something he did rarely—he marked in it a passage which clearly went on echoing in his mind for years: the intellectual unity of Islam, 'for good or evil, is its outstanding quality'.[25] Macdonald's other important book, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam* (1909), perhaps had an even deeper influence on Gibb. In it Macdonald dealt with what for him was the essence of religion: the confrontation of the soul with God, the occult phenomena which man has always taken to be signs of the incursion of the invisible into the visible order, the striving of the soul towards God, and the institutions which provided a shared channel for it: 'practically, the conception of the mystical, saintly life and the organization of darwish frater-

nities cover all Islam and are the stimulants and rationale of Muslim piety.'[26] Although in general Gibb learnt more from reading than from discussion, and in later years was to have some difficulty in establishing close working relations with men of his own age and stature in his own subject, in the Oxford period he seems to have received much stimulus from two colleagues, both trained in the German tradition: Richard Walzer, whose researches into the absorption of the Greek philosophical tradition into Islam helped to form his own ideas about how elements were transposed from one civilization to another; and Joseph Schacht, to whose work on Muslim jurisprudence he owed much, although he thought Schacht went too far in his rejection of the information about the Prophet's life contained in the Traditions ('through the mass of all-too-human detail there shines out unmistakably a largeness of humanity . . . which contrasts so strongly with the prevailing temper and spirit of his age and of his followers that it cannot be other than a reflection of the real man').[27]

In these works, formed by these influences, there is expounded a view of the development of Islam by a series of responses to challenges; but responses which took the form not of repudiation so much as of the incorporation of new elements into the existing structure of symbols or worship. This was a process which could never cease, because religious vision and experience always broke out of the symbolic framework. At the beginning of it stood the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'ān: an attempt to impose a new symbolic order upon the 'natural' Semitic religion of western Arabia. The Qur'ān did not reject the symbols which already existed but gave them a new meaning, and the Prophet himself became a symbol of great force, attracting piety and loyalty. There followed a period in which law and theology were being formed, and when the emerging consciousness of the community was engaged in a battle on two fronts: against the fantasies of the unrestricted religious imagination, and against the attempts of the philosophical mind to dissolve the content of revelation into rational concepts—to turn the God of Abraham into the God of the philosophers. To hold a balance between these two extremes was a delicate matter because of the essential contradiction in theology: we must try to understand, but in the end we must accept what is contained in revelation *bila kayf*—without asking how. To create this delicate balance was the achievement of al-Ash'ari, whose school became the theological 'orthodoxy' of Islam. (This is one of the

points at which Gibb's ideas have been much modified by recent work: H. Laoust's researches into the Hanbali school of thought, which have made it more difficult to regard Ash'arism as the main expression of the 'mind of the community'; G. Makdisi's distinction between Ash'ari theology and the Shafi'i school of law; and the publication of texts by al-Ash'ari and others.)

Because of its necessary emphasis on the finality of the Islamic revelation and on the independent power of God which was its message, theology tended towards theoretical and rigid formulations of the basic intuitions of the faith. But religious life could not be contained within them, and expressed itself in the organized cultivation of religious experience and a greater emphasis on the indwelling of God. A third phase now began, that of the Sufi challenge, a necessary movement but one which had its dangers. It released 'the inherited religious instincts of the masses'[28] and served as the channel through which the ancient pre-Islamic symbols came back into Islam. Once more the mind of Sunnism had to purify and absorb Sufism into the structure of 'orthodox' thought and worship. On the level of theory this was done by al-Ghazali (although here again, recent work might make us more hesitant in saying what al-Ghazali's real beliefs were), and then by some relatively little-known thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when 'a succession of remarkable scholars strove to restate the bases of Islamic theology in a manner which broke away from formalism . . . and laid new stress on the psychological and ethical elements in religion'.[29] On the level of organized devotion, it was the work of those Sufi orders which remained within the bounds of the *shari'a*: in them, 'ulama became Sufis, and legal and mystical thought mingled with each other.

The development of thought was also the development of a community, an *umma*, which shaped and was shaped by it. Gibb would have accepted the famous Tradition, 'my community will never agree upon an error', but only in a special sense: the community tended to accept whatever existed at least in a purified form, and since it was itself the final guardian and judge of truth, what it accepted *was* Islam. But the *umma* is both 'church' and 'congregation', and each has its task in the development of Islam. The 'church', in other words the body of 'ulama, is guardian of the symbols. It defines, defends, and transmits them, and the process of transmission from teacher to student is the process by which Islam continues and grows. The concept of a *silsila*, a chain of spiritual and intellectual inheritance, is

essential for an understanding of Islam. Hence, as Gibb suggested in a striking essay written a little later, the significance of one characteristic type of Islamic literature, the biographical dictionary:

> . . . the conception that underlies the oldest biographical dictionaries is that the history of the Islamic Community is essentially the contribution of individual men and women to the building up and transmission of its specific culture; that it is these persons (rather than the political governors) who represent or reflect the active forces in Muslim society . . .[30]

The 'congregation' also are guardians, in another sense. Participating as fully as they do, by piety, concern, and loyalty, they have sometimes had a more correct instinct than the 'ulama for the reality of Islam and the need for unity. In the deepest sense, they are the creators of symbols and worship; it is their creative and ever growing religious experience which the 'church' tries to formulate and preserve. The interaction of 'church' and 'congregation' within a continuously developing and expanding community, the response of this community to the demands and dangers of life in the world of power and material need, and the evolution of an Islamic culture and society out of these processes: all this forms 'Islamic history' in the real sense of the term. In his interpretative essay on it, Gibb traced the march of the *umma* through the wilderness of religious fantasies, human passions, political conflict, opportunism, and cynicism; or, to be more precise, of the Sunni *umma*, because he had no doubt that Sunni Islam was the orthodox form of Islam. 'Orthodox' was another of the words he applied to Islam with less hesitation than other scholars might have had. Sunnism was orthodoxy for him; he never visited Iran, and had a curious lack of sympathy for Shi'ism. In his view, its 'sterile opposition' had broken the unity of the *umma*; it had 'killed the Persian "humanities" and left no outlet for intellectual activity except in scholasticism'.[31]

The main body of Islam had only just avoided the snares of the world. Sometimes it had been protected or rescued by a just Muslim ruler. Once more, a movement of Gibb's imagination had to be justified by a general principle. The life of Saladin and the Muslim reaction against the Crusades in the twelfth century were favourite themes to which he often returned: his contributions to the *Philadelphia History of the Crusades* are among his most important works of detailed research.[32] Saladin was for Gibb the paradigm of the just ruler, his achievement was by

good sense and integrity to have ended the political demoralization of Islam and restored unity under Divine Law.[33] But such rulers came rarely, and what was more important in preserving the community in its right form was a kind of aloofness from power and the world: the achievement on the one hand of the 'ulama with their refusal to identify the *umma* with any political régime, and on the other of the mystics with their appeal from the visible order of the world to an invisible order ruled by a hierarchy of saints, the *qutb* and *abdal*.

The struggle had to be fought again and again. The world would always strike back: the 'ulama became subservient to the ruler, Sufi orders turned into armed movements, then into states. In the modern age the struggle was taking a new form. New challenges were being made to established ways of thinking and worshipping, and to study the responses to them was the purpose of *Modern Trends in Islam*. The 'classical' way of meeting the challenges would have been to incorporate new elements into the existing structure. In a lecture given during this period on 'the influence of Islamic culture on mediaeval Europe' Gibb put forward a theory of the conditions and limits of cultural assimilation, which suggested by implication ways in which this might have taken place in the modern Muslim world.[34] But the Muslim thinkers of the modern age seemed to him to have failed in the task (Julien Benda's *Trahison des clercs* was another book of which he made a full analysis). Instead of seeking the middle ground, they had tended either towards withdrawal from the modern world, or towards an abandonment of the careful, responsible structure of thought they had inherited: the religious sciences of Qur'ān interpretation, criticism of traditions, and jurisprudence (*tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*). In a kind of denial of responsibility to the history of Islam, a breaking of the *silsila* of teachers and witnesses, they had shown a 'disregard of all objective standards of investigation and of historical truth', and had 'debauched the intellectual insight and integrity of their fellow-Muslims'.[35] By so doing they had destroyed the defence which orthodox Islam had built against the ambitions of rulers and this was the more dangerous because those rulers were no longer acting within the framework of Islamic justice; they did not recognize the Divine Law embodied in the consciousness of the *umma*, but exploited religious feeling for political ends; by misunderstanding the 'operative factors' in the history of the *umma* they had accepted alien standards.[36] In this gloomy picture Gibb saw one ray of hope.

He had a kind of ultimate faith in the good sense and loyalty of the 'congregation', still expanding, still preserving its own mind amidst the disintegration of symbols:

> No one who has ever seen that mile-long procession of brotherhood lodges with their banners, trudging in the dust after the Holy Carpet on its annual progress through Cairo, can fail to be impressed by the vitality of the forces which they represent. Not for the first time, the *ijmaʿ* of the people is opposed to the *ijmaʿ* of the learned.[37]

These works were written during Gibb's Oxford years, the most creative of his life but also perhaps the least happy in a professional sense. He was there indeed at a moment of growth and opportunity. In 1947 a Commission of Enquiry on Oriental, Slavonic, East European, and African Studies (the Scarbrough Commission) produced a report recommending the expansion of existing facilities by the creation of strong departments maintaining a balance between linguistic and non-linguistic, classical and modern studies and having firm links with the whole network of the humanities and sciences. Oxford was to be one of the Universities where Near and Middle Eastern studies should be helped to expand. Thus Gibb, who for his first ten years had been almost the only teacher of Arabic and Islamic subjects in the University, was able to gather around him a group of colleagues, at a time when good students were coming to work with him—English students who had served in the Middle East during the War, and graduate students from America and the Middle East itself. But, although he was a successful and famous teacher, and although he very much enjoyed the life of his own college, St. John's, he was never quite at ease in Oxford. He had not been a student there; its intellectual tradition was not his; he never learnt how to do things effectively and without too much effort in that segmentary society without formal and explicit authority. What was more important, he was always aware how marginal the Faculty of Oriental Studies was, and how difficult it would be to establish close links with other Faculties. He did not find the historians of his time responsive to the idea that the history of Asia was worth studying, and by the 1950s he was coming to feel that this was harming his work. As a scholar he was asking questions to which historians might have helped him to find the answers; as a teacher, he had good students but they were not the students he now wanted, trained in some historical or sociological discipline, and coming to him to acquire not only the Arabic language but an understanding of a society and culture.

Some of his dissatisfaction he expressed in a very interesting and frank letter written at the time to one of his former pupils:

> . . . I should not be leaving Oxford if I thought there was anything more to be done here. . . . The real problem is that the big Faculties . . . are dominated by College tutors, who are not interested in anything outside the Schools' syllabuses and dead opposed to any expansion of these, especially into the Oriental field. . . . I know therefore, that if I stay here I am condemned to seven years of merely repetitive teaching without any hope of enlarging its scope.[38]

Recollected in tranquillity, it was the starting-point of one of his last writings, a lecture on *Area Studies Reconsidered*, given at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 1963:

> Almost from the time when I was appointed to the Chair of Arabic in this University, thirty-three years ago, I was conscious of a growing dissatisfaction with the narrow limits in which Oriental Studies were confined at that time. It was largely for that reason that I accepted the opportunity to move to Oxford, imagining, in my innocence, that Oxford would offer a more open field for the broadening out of Arabic and Islamic studies than was possible in the rather tightly-knit and isolated little group which at that time composed the School of Oriental Studies. Deeply as I enjoyed the years at Oxford, I was soon undeceived in these hopes; the jealous rigidity of Faculty and School lines inhibited any attempt to cross them even at the level of graduate study.[39]

Later in the lecture he spoke of the need for 'a new kind of academic amphibian, the scholar whose habitat is in one medium but who is fully at home in another', and who works closely with the orientalist whose task is to relate what the specialists do to a central core, and 'to furnish that core out of his knowledge and understanding of the invisibles—the values, attitudes and mental processes characteristic of the "great culture" . . . the long perspective of cultural habit and tradition'.[40]

Had he waited a few more years, things would have changed in Oxford. A new generation of historians was growing up, and in 1961 another report of another committee (the Hayter Committee) recommended that departments of history and social sciences should be encouraged to give a larger place to the history and societies of the world beyond Europe, that steps should be taken to train the new kind of academic amphibian, and that Oxford should be one of the centres of Middle Eastern studies. But he could not have guessed that this would happen, and had he waited for it he would by then have been near the statutory age of retirement. Long before that, as he approached

his sixtieth year, he seems to have decided to leave Oxford early and seek another field of work. A Harvard professor has told how, when consulting Gibb on possible successors to the retiring Jewett Professor, W. Thomson, he was astonished to notice a new note creeping into the correspondence: the adviser himself might be persuaded to consider an offer. The offer was made and accepted, and at the age of sixty the Laudian Professor at Oxford became the Jewett Professor at Harvard.

It was a real entry into a New World, a deliberate choice of a new path in life. But it was a decision he never regretted, although he and his wife felt the separation from children and grandchildren and from close friends. The last time I ever saw him, he spoke with great emphasis of the Harvard years as having been the happiest of his life. Happy first of all in his teaching: he had always loved the art of teaching, and by now his skill in it was fully grown. As a lecturer he was a little hesitant for words, but always found the right ones in the end; he was clear and forceful rather than polished, not witty but lively, never saying things which meant nothing, placing facts and ideas in a logical framework. As a tutor or supervisor, or in private discourse with colleagues, he could be both disconcerting and inspiring: he would sometimes be silent, sometimes follow his own line of thought regardless of what the other had come to talk about; but when the silence and distance vanished, he would try not so much to give information as to help the other to bring out whatever he had in his mind; and when what came out seemed to be of value, particularly if it helped him to carry further the process of thought on which he was himself engaged, he would be generous, exciting, himself excited; but then again he would sometimes withdraw his interest. He was best perhaps in a discussion group or seminar, and the American system of graduate education gave him more scope than the English; in such a group or in a conference of scholars, he would exercise an easy authority, as he took some theme, perhaps familiar, and carried his thought about it across the frontiers of knowledge by some unexpected route. It could be most exciting to *see* him thinking. The authority and excitement might continue and there were many former students and colleagues who would always think of him as their master. To his students he was always warm and helpful, just as he was to those who came to him for advice or information on matters on which he felt himself competent to give it; since he died, more than one of his former students has spoken or written about his unfailing

generosity and thoughtfulness, which followed them through life long after they had finished their studies with him. He had always had good students both in London and Oxford, but those of his Harvard years played a special part in his life. Some of them had had the training in history or the social sciences which he wanted, the eager curiosity of the American graduate student overcame his own shyness, and besides he had reached the age when human relationships could be fitted most easily into the framework of father and son. What they thought of him can be seen in the moving words with which one who stood close to him thanked him not only for help with his thesis but for 'the knowledge, wisdom and grace of guiding' to which he owed 'the better part of my education'.[41]

Harvard gave him scope to build not only a department of Arabic and Islamic studies but an inter-departmental 'center' for Middle Eastern studies as a framework within which orientalists and the new amphibians could work together. The Center fulfilled some of his hopes. As long as he was there he attracted loyal colleagues and good students, and the endowments which would make it possible to advance further. But he did not have time, before illness struck him, to give it the firm foundations he had hoped for. The permanent institutions of an American university are the departments which are responsible for the various disciplines; a body which cuts across the frontiers of several departments can only flourish if its members have firm roots in them. Gibb was not very successful in achieving this. Sound as his judgement was on matters of scholarship, it could be unsure and even odd where human beings were concerned. His administrative arrangements did not always have the results he intended, and those who observed him at work were never quite sure whether he had failed to understand the Harvard system or understood it rather too well. Faced with difficulties in a department he would go to a higher authority or just go his own way, and his construction had the essential fragility of a network of patron–client relations.

But even if his Harvard colleagues might find that he acted with unusual independence, they never had any doubt that his presence there was one of the glories of the University. He was better known in the university than he had been at Oxford, and it was fitting that, at the last Commencement he attended, he should have been given an honour rare for a serving member of the Faculty, an honorary Doctorate of Letters. He for his part very much enjoyed belonging to one of the great scholarly

communities of the world, and his personal relations with many of his colleagues had an ease and warmth which had been difficult for him before. (He belonged to a generation of men who rarely or never used Christian names outside the family. To colleagues and friends he had always been 'Gibb' or 'Professor Gibb', and when he became a knight few knew what name he would use. At Harvard many of his friends called him 'Hamilton', and he adopted the same mode of address. I still remember the point, after twenty years of personal acquaintance, when he first called me 'Albert'. After a decent interval I reciprocated, but with a sense of *lèse-majesté*.)

Contacts and friendships extended easily across the frontiers of subjects. Besides being Jewett Professor he was made a 'University Professor'. Holders of this title are defined by the regulations of the university as being men 'working on the frontiers of knowledge, and in such a way as to cross the conventional boundaries of the specialities'. He did indeed cross many of them: he was closely connected with the School of Divinity and the Department of History as well as that of Near East Languages, and he read widely in the social sciences, particularly social anthropology. (After his first years at Harvard he handed over the teaching of Islamic institutions not to an orientalist but to an anthropologist.)

His own work now had to be done in the intervals of teaching, administration, and acting as elder statesman of his subject. He prepared a new edition of his early book on Arabic literature; this, together with an earlier article on the same subject written for the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,[42] summed up his views on certain subjects which he had thought about and taught all his life. Much more is said than in the first edition about the relations of literature with social and political life; a favourite theme of his later work, the survival of the Persian bureaucratic tradition and its relations with the newer traditions of Arabic philology and Islamic learning, is used to illuminate the nature of certain kinds of writing. The first section, on the poetry of the 'Heroic Age', is largely rewritten under the influence of recent work on the composition of oral poetry. He took up again another subject he had studied early in life, and began to prepare a complete annotated translation of Ibn Battuta's travels: it would be of value to scholars across 'the boundaries of the specialities', and besides it was something he could do in his spare time. (Every morning he would translate a few pages in his study in Widener Library before going to his

office at the Center; the change from the solitary scholar working at home, teaching in an attic in St. John's College, and writing his letters by hand, to the scholar-administrator surrounded by secretaries in an office, was a striking one.) He also prepared a finished but still unpublished version of his lectures on Islamic history from the beginnings to the rise of the Abbasid dynasty: a sober and masterly review, taking into account recently published material, giving the results of half a century of thought, but lacking, in its written form, the excitement he could communicate in the lecture-room, and not yet fertilized by the new kind of book he was reading at this time.

He had planned to retire as professor at the end of the academic year 1963–4 but to continue for a time as Director of the Center. He had already begun to make careful and orderly preparations: he bought a house on Cumnor Hill outside Oxford, St. Antony's College offered him a special fellowship, his library was sold to Harvard to be placed in a special room on the top floor of Widener. A few months before these plans could be carried out, in the spring of 1964, he had his stroke. It was a massive one, gravely affecting his power of speech, leaving his right arm paralysed, and restricting his ability to move. He recovered partly but not wholly: by June he was strong enough to be moved to the new house near Oxford, and there he lived until the spring of 1971, when he moved to a cottage in the village of Cherington, lying just off the road from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon.

I shall always remember him as he was in these last years of infirmity, because it was then I came to know him best—I might say, in a sense, to know him at all. It was as if, under the stress of illness, the essential features of his character had broken through the restraints imposed on them by a lifetime of self-control. A new warmth came into his personal relations, just at the moment when he could not easily express it. In a calm, patient, uncomplaining way he adjusted himself to his new way of life; he could scarcely leave the house, but friends came to see him, from Oxford, London, Paris, and his specially-beloved Harvard. Through them, and by wide reading, he kept in touch with what was happening in the world of scholarship. His speech returned, but only in part; those who were there will not forget the small gathering of colleagues and students to present him with a *Festschrift* to mark his seventieth birthday, and at which he was able, with effort, to say some graceful words. He taught himself to write with his left hand (but he could no longer write

Arabic). In time he was even able to take up his work again, and to complete what he had begun although not to begin anything new. He finished the notes to the third volume of Ibn Battuta, and used his articles on Saladin as the basis of a short book; his notes for books he would not write were given to others—notes on poetry to one, on history to another, for the last volume of Ibn Battuta to a third.

As the infirmities and sorrows of age closed in on him he met them with the strength of his forbears. A leg had to be amputated. In the summer of 1969 Ella fell ill and died. A courageous spirit in a frail body, she had borne his illness with calm cheerfulness, but in the end it wore her out. She left with all who had known her the memory of a truly angelic character, and after she had gone the world became for him a shadowy place, although the outward rhythm of his life continued as before: a devoted housekeeper to look after him, days of reading, writing, and receiving friends, watching his roses and apple-tree grow, seeing children and grandchildren when they could make the journey from their homes. Confined to one house, then to one room, then to one chair, he could still look out in calm acceptance on the whole human world, and see behind it 'the vision of the great overriding movement of the Eternal Reason'.[43]

ALBERT HOURANI

NOTE ON SOURCES

G. Makdisi (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965) contains a brief biographical note by the editor and a complete bibliography down to 1965 by S. J. Shaw. I am grateful to Sir Hamilton's son, Mr. J. A. C. Gibb, and to a number of former pupils, colleagues, and friends, who have provided information and commented on the first draft of this study. It was written for the most part in the Gibb Seminar Room in Widener Library at Harvard; long hours spent sitting among his books and using them helped to create in my mind a clear image of his personality as a scholar.

1. Cf. A. L. Turner, *History of the University of Edinburgh 1883–1933* (Edinburgh, 1933), W. C. A. Ross, *The Royal High School* (Edinburgh, 1934), and G. E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1961). I owe these references to Professors C. W. Dunn and H. J. Hanham, both of Harvard University.
2. 'Edward Denison Ross, 1871–1940' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1941, pp. 49 f.
3. 'Studies in contemporary Arabic literature' in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (London, 1962), p. 304; dedication of *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, 1947).
4. Reprinted later in *Studies*, pp. 245 f.
5. G. Levi Della Vida, 'Letter of Dedication' in Makdisi, *Arabic and Islamic Studies*, p. xiii.
6. *Modern Trends*, p. 5.
7. 'Literature' in Sir T. Arnold and A. Guillaume, *The Legacy of Islam* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 180 f.
8. 'David Samuel Margoliouth, 1858–1940' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1940, p. 393.
9. 'Louis Massignon, 1882–1962' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1963, pp. 119 f.
10. Review of F. Rosenthal (tr.), *Ibn Khaldun: the Muqadimmah* in *Speculum*, xxxv (1960), p. 139.
11. *Arabic Literature*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1963), p. 112.
12. Levi Della Vida, 'Letter of Dedication', p. xiii.
13. *Whither Islam?* (London, 1932), p. 40.
14. 'Anglo-Egyptian relations: a revaluation' in *International Affairs*, xxvii (1951), pp. 440 f.
15. Chapters 8–10 in *Studies*.
16. 'The Islamic background of Ibn Khaldun's political theory' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, vii (1933), pp. 23 f.; reprinted in *Studies*, p. 174.
17. See his note on Shi'ism in A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. i (London, 1934), pp. 400 f.
18. H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. i, part i (London, 1950), p. 1.
19. Ibid., p. 30.
20. N. Itzkowitz, 'Eighteenth century Ottoman realities' in *Studia Islamica*, xvi (1962), pp. 73 f. See also review by B. Lewis in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xvi (1954), pp. 598 f.

21. Reprinted in *Studies*, pp. 3 f., 176 f.
22. 'Ta'rikh' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Supplement* (1938), pp. 233 f.; ''Arabiya' in *Encyclopaedia*, second edition, vol. i (1960), pp. 583 f.
23. *Modern Trends*, pp. x–xii.
24. A. S. Pringle-Pattison, *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 1930).
25. D. B. Macdonald, *The Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (London, 1903), p. 3. See the study of Macdonald in J. J. Waardenburg, *L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident* (The Hague, 1961), a book which throws much light on the intellectual genealogies of European students of Islam.
26. Macdonald, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam* (Chicago, 1909), p. 215.
27. *Mohammedanism* (London, 1949), p. 31.
28. 'The structure of religious thought in Islam' in *Studies*, p. 213.
29. *Mohammedanism*, p. 163.
30. 'Islamic biographical literature' in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt, *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), p. 54.
31. Note in Toynbee, *Study of History*, vol. i, p. 402; 'Structure of religious thought' in *Studies*, p. 199.
32. K. M. Setton and others, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. i (Philadelphia, 1955), chaps. 3, 14, 16, and 18, vol. ii (1962), ch. 20. See also *Studies*, chaps. 5 and 6.
33. 'The achievement of Saladin' in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xxxv (1952), reprinted in *Studies*, pp. 91 f.
34. 'The influence of Islamic culture on mediaeval Europe' in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xxxviii (1955), pp. 82 f.
35. *Modern Trends*, p. 77.
36. 'The community in Islamic history' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, cvii (1963), p. 176.
37. *Modern Trends*, p. 38.
38. Letter to Professor Bernard Lewis, 2 March 1955. I am most grateful to Professor Lewis for allowing me to quote from it.
39. *Area Studies Reconsidered* (London, 1963), p. 3.
40. Ibid., pp. 14–15.
41. I. M. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. xi.
42. See note 21.
43. *Modern Trends*, p. 126.