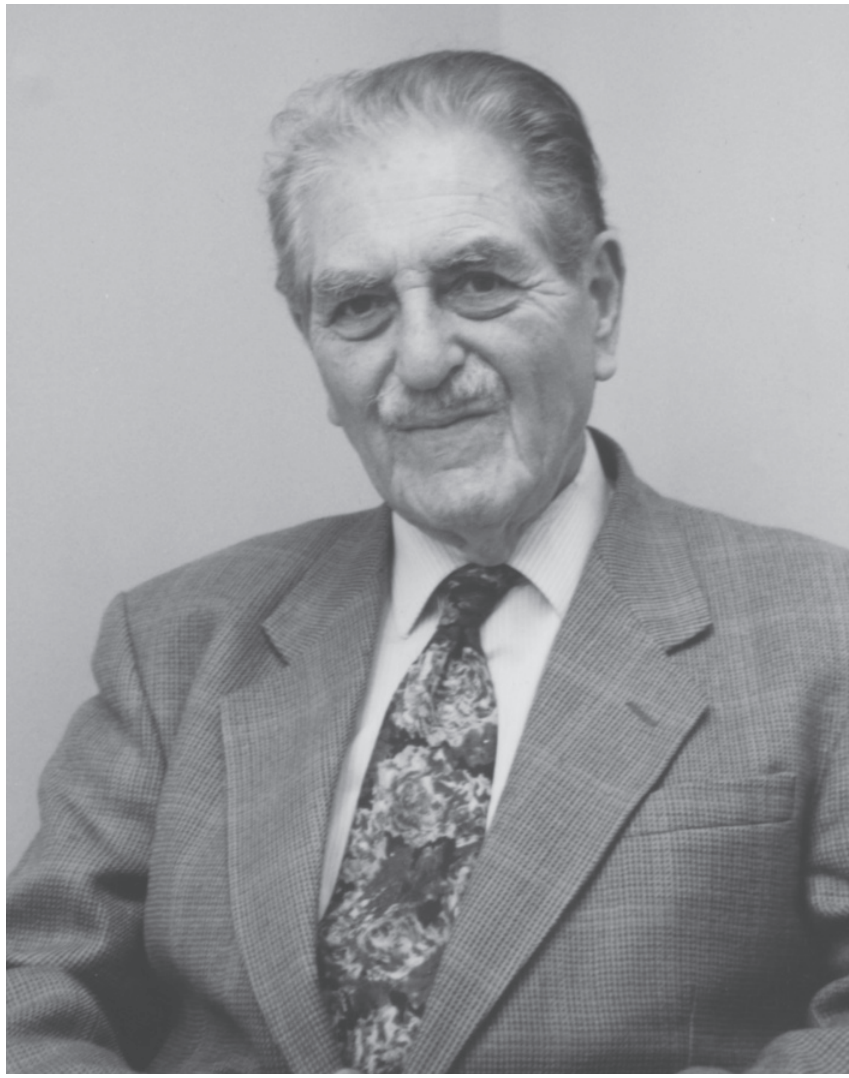

GEOFFREY LEWIS

Geoffrey Lewis Lewis
1920–2008

I. Life

Professor Geoffrey Lewis Lewis, a pioneer in Turkish Studies in Britain and an internationally admired scholar in the field, was born in London on 19 June 1920. He received his schooling at University College School in Hampstead, following which, in 1938, he went up to St John's College Oxford to read Classics. Having sat Honour Moderations in the spring of 1940, he joined the Royal Air Force in September of that year and served until 1945: he qualified for his BA by War Decree and subsequently received his MA in 1945.

At some point during his study for Honour Mods, his Latin tutor, sensing that he was getting stale, suggested that he take up Turkish as a hobby—it seems that the choice of Turkish came to him on the spur of the moment. Geoffrey took it seriously, however, and the opportunity to act on it came when he was posted to Egypt as a radar operator. He made contact with an elderly Turk in Alexandria, through whom, and through the painstaking comparison of classic English texts with their Turkish translations—these culled from the bookshops of London and sent to him by his wife, Raphaela, whom he had married in 1941—he taught himself Turkish. Returning to Oxford in 1945, and by now wholly won over to Turkish, he consulted the Laudian Professor of Arabic, [Sir] Hamilton Gibb, FBA, who welcomed the prospect of expanding the curriculum in Oriental Studies to include Turkish but recommended that Geoffrey read for the BA in Arabic and Persian as essential background to the serious study of Turkish historically as well as in its modern form. Geoffrey did

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so, completing the degree in under two years and receiving First Class Honours and the award of the James Mew Arabic Scholarship. After a six-month stay in Turkey to widen and deepen his knowledge of the language and the country he returned to Oxford to work on a doctorate. There being no one at hand competent to supervise a thesis in Turkish, he chose to work on Arabic philosophy, specifically on the Arab reception of the neo-Platonist Plotinus (the material having been mistakenly ascribed to Aristotle). The thesis was successfully submitted in 1950 and formed the basis for a later publication, as below. In the same year he was appointed Lecturer in Turkish at Oxford, where he was to remain until his retirement in 1987, holding successively the posts of Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies from 1954 to 1964, Senior University Lecturer in Turkish from 1964 to 1986, and Professor of Turkish from the latter date. The place of Turkish in the Oxford syllabus for which he had strenuously worked was firmly established by the acceptance of Turkish as a Main Language in the Honour School of Oriental Languages in 1964, this facilitated by the creation of a second post in Turkish, in history, shortly before.

His Oxford career was punctuated by a number of Visiting Professorships: at Princeton (1970–1, 1974) and the University of California, Los Angeles (1975); as holder of a British Academy Leverhulme Visiting Professorship in Turkey in 1984; and, in retirement, as Gunnar Jarring Lecturer in Stockholm in 2002. Of particular note was the invitation he received in the late 1950s from the then American Robert College in Istanbul (now Boğaziçi University), at the time almost totally devoted to engineering, to devise and implement what became known as the Bicultural Humanities Programme—or more informally 'From Plato to NATO'—in order to give students fed on a fairly unrelieved diet of science and technology some knowledge of history and culture, both eastern and western. He introduced the course as Visiting Professor in 1959–60 and continued to visit regularly in the same capacity until 1968, by which time the radical change from American to Turkish sponsorship was imminent. Notable in his tenure was the way in which his scholarly command, his warmth, wit and easy manner overcame the bewilderment of many of the students at this unexpected innovation. These same qualities infused all his teaching, of undergraduates and graduates, at Oxford and elsewhere, and made him a popular lecturer, tutor and supervisor with whom many former students kept in touch.

His life in Oxford was much enhanced by his election in 1961 to a Fellowship at St Antony's College and to an Emeritus Fellowship on his retirement. He was devoted to the College, much enjoying the fellowship

and willingly serving as Senior Tutor and Sub-Warden. He was active too in the life of the University, as an almost permanent member of the Board of the Oriental Studies Faculty and twice its chairman; as its representative on the General Board of the Faculties in the 1960s; for nearly thirty years as Chairman of the Management Committee of the Museum of the History of Science; and as a Curator of the Bodleian Library and a Visitor of the Ashmolean Museum. He was much valued as a committee member, particularly owing to his innate sense of proportion and his gentle wit which relieved the tension of many a debate.

He had as well a number of interests outside the University, most more or less specifically related to Turkey, but his long service as Trustee of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, a sponsor of scholarly editions of works on Arabic, Persian and Turkish, should be mentioned, as should the fact that he was a founding father and, from 1981 to 1983, President, of The British Society of Middle Eastern Studies. A long-time member of the Anglo-Turkish Society, a favourite activity, he served as Vice-President from 1972 to 2003, then as President from the latter year to his death. He was much involved, both formally and informally, with the nurturing of Anglo-Turkish relations: formally through membership of the British-Turkish Mixed (Cultural) Commission, from 1975 to 1995, informally through advice sought from him by British and Turkish diplomats on ways to further that goal but also through more personal advice to ease the passage of each into the other's culture, a point noted in several communications after his death. The regard in which he was held in Turkey in this respect is amply revealed by the fact that he was asked to check the English text of, and to write the foreword for, *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Istanbul, 1991), the case made to justify Turkey's credentials as a potential full member of the then European Community by Turgut Özal, Prime Minister and later President of Turkey.

Recognition of Geoffrey's work came from many sources. He was delighted by his election to a Fellowship of the Academy in 1979 and took great pride in the association (he served on its Overseas Policy Committee for no fewer than twelve years, from 1981 to 1993) as he did in the fact that his old Oxford college, St John's, elected him to an Honorary Fellowship in 2000. A member of the Turkish Language Society since 1953, his contributions to the country were recognised by the Turkish government on a number of occasions, with the award of a Certificate of Merit in 1973; of the Exceptional Service Plaque of the Foreign Ministry in 1991; and of the historic Award of Merit in 1998. In that same year HM the Queen appointed him Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.

Two Turkish universities, Boğaziçi and Istanbul, awarded him honorary doctorates, in 1986 and 1992 respectively.

In 1941 Geoffrey married Raphaela Rhoda Bale Seideman whom he had known since childhood and who was universally known as Raff. Theirs was an exceptionally close relationship in every respect, including the love of Turkey: Raff, who herself for many years taught French for the Foreign Service Programme at Queen Elizabeth House in Oxford, contributed significantly to the literature on Turkey with her lively and informative *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*, published in 1971. They had an extensive network of friends in and outside Oxford, and these, their many students and the numerous Turkish visitors to Oxford fondly remember their hospitality and interest. Of their two children, their daughter Lally died tragically in 1976, leaving two young children. Geoffrey and Raff acted with characteristic generosity of spirit, bringing their son-in-law and the children into their home and doing much to fill the void. Their own son, Jonathan, a producer of television documentaries, survives his father. Raff's death in February 2004 after more than 62 years of marriage inevitably affected Geoff deeply, but, until his own sudden death in Oxford on 12 February 2008, he remained in essence the wise, gentle and affectionate man he had always been.

II. Works

So strong did the association of Geoffrey with Turkish Studies become in his later career that it is not always remembered that he was a first-rate Arabist who, in earlier years, made significant contributions to two specialised areas of Arabic Studies as well as taking a full part in the Arabic teaching in the faculty: as noted above, his post at Oxford was, between 1954 and 1964, designated Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies, and he lectured regularly on the Qur'an amongst other topics. His doctoral thesis was concerned with the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, an Arabic text vexed in respect of both content and provenance from the early days of Arab interest in the ancient philosophers, an interest which was important in its own terms as well as being instrumental in the transmission of ancient knowledge to the West. The *Theology* in fact involves Aristotle only incidentally, deriving almost entirely from the work of the Neo-Platonist Plotinus (d. 270 CE). Geoffrey's translation of all of the extant fragments of this work, growing out of his doctoral thesis, is published in the definitive edition of Plotinus by Henry and Schwyzer (*Plotini Opera II, Enneads IV–V*, Paris, 1959).

The second of Geoffrey's publications in Arabic Studies falls in the field of the history of medicine, an edition and translation done jointly with Dr Martin Spink, a consultant pathologist, of an important medieval surgical treatise under the title *Abulcasis on Surgery and Instruments* (London, 1973). Abulcasis—the name a corruption of Abu 'l-Qāsim … al-Zahrāwī—was a tenth/eleventh-century Andalusian physician, the author of a huge medical manual in thirty books, a particularly notable feature of which is his recountal of his own experiences as a practicing physician, with case histories. The work by Spink and Lewis, the thirtieth book, covers surgery, and is especially notable for the inclusion of drawings of the surgical instruments then in use. Those close to Geoffrey, who knew of his squeamishness in relation to matters medical, regard his apparent equanimity in the face of such material as a significant triumph of mind over matter.

His first love, though, undoubtedly came to be, if it was not always, Turkish. In considering the body of his work as a whole, two consistent themes emerge, two driving forces behind it: first, a deep, continuing fascination with language, and now especially with Turkish; and second, a rooted and constantly developing love of Turkey and its people and a concomitant desire to bring its language, history and culture to the attention of the English-speaking world by a variety of means, all of them grounded in a thorough scholarly engagement with his subject. These days, with Turkey having become a favourite tourist destination as well as a 'major player' on the international scene, this lack of awareness of the country in Britain may seem strange, but matters were very different at least up until the early 1950s: even *The Times*, in a leading article in August 1949 on the proposed admission of Greece, Turkey and Iceland to the Council of Europe, could refer to Turkey as 'Muslim in tradition, with an Asiatic language in an Arabic script' (cited in *Language Reform*, pp. 38–9). It is only right to say that it had done much better in August 1928 with what Geoffrey fairly describes as a well-informed and sympathetic editorial on the impending change in Turkey from the Arabo-Persian alphabet to the Latin, the latter being formally adopted on 1 November 1928. As a general matter, however, while British travellers had been writing accounts of Turkey since the sixteenth century, British orientalist scholars had only rarely engaged with Turkish Studies, and the field had been largely left to non-specialists.

In his attempt to redress this unsatisfactory situation, Geoffrey turned his attention first to the language, publishing *Teach Yourself Turkish* in 1953 (London; revised edition 1989): the particular thrust of British-Turkish

contacts at the time is reflected in his inclusion of an appendix designed for the military with, for example, a glossary of military terms. Written with the clarity, common sense and wit which characterises all his work, the book is well-suited to its purpose and amply fulfils its promise of enabling self-instruction, while at the same time rapidly becoming a standard text for those wishing to learn Turkish in a more formal academic setting.

If *Teach Yourself* marks a successful beginning of the mission to spread knowledge of the language, *Turkey*, published by Ernest Benn as part of their Nations of the Modern World Series in 1955 (with three later editions, the third comprehensively revised under the title *Modern Turkey*: London, 1974), plays the same role in acquainting the western world with the history and politics of Turkey. Its predecessor in that series, Toynbee and Kirkwood's *Turkey*, had been published in 1926, very much *in medias res* in the sense that it covered the important events surrounding the establishment of the Republic and the first years of reforms—among them, the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate and the caliphate and the dismantling of a number of the institutional structures supporting Islam—but with much yet to come, including, for example, the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code and the Language Reform. Having been offered the option of revising Toynbee/Kirkwood or writing an entirely new work, Geoffrey chose the latter course, a choice most obviously necessitated by the huge steps Turkey had taken in adjusting to these monumental changes and in its progress towards democracy in the years since the 1920s. The virtue of Geoffrey's book lies not just in his authoritative account of these years, which he sets in appropriate historical context, but also in its evident but never uncritical sympathy for, and understanding of, the Turks.

One of the obvious impediments in the way of British understanding of the Turks—and perhaps that of the West more generally—is the fact that until recent years sadly few Turkish writings of any sort have been translated into English. Geoffrey did more than his share to try to fill this gap, translating some six books including an older Turkish and an Ottoman work as well as a collection of short stories and the memoirs of an outstanding twentieth-century diplomat. Two of these deserve particular mention, the first, *The Balance of Truth* by the distinguished seventeenth-century Ottoman historian, geographer and bibliographer Kâtib Çelebi (d. 1657), was published in 1957 (London). Perhaps the most open-minded and wide-ranging of all Ottoman scholars before the nineteenth century, he became distressed by what he saw as the bigoted fanaticism which seemed to be gaining ground in his time. Noting that the followers of a particular contemporary scholar had become notorious for their extrem-

ism, Kâtib Çelebi writes in an autobiographical section that he 'has before now guided many of them towards the frontier of moderation, and is writing the present summary in order to free them from those fetters'. He deals with some twenty-one topics that had aroused particularly fierce controversy, including, among some more purely theological arguments, ones over the lawfulness of tobacco and coffee, and of singing, dancing and whirling. In each case he urges calm and moderation, seeking to restore a sense of proportion and moderation by appeals to both religious principles and reason. His is an unusual voice to have been perpetuated down the centuries in writing, but it may be that he represented a wider middle ground than the furious debates would suggest.

The second of Geoffrey's translations especially worthy of note, one quite different in subject, language and style, is *The Book of Dede Korkut*, published in 1974 (London). *Dede Korkut*, in origin an oral epic, consists in its present form of twelve tales, part prose, part verse, collected together probably in the fifteenth century: the only extant versions reside in two sixteenth-century manuscripts, about the authorship and origins of which there is considerable uncertainty. Regarded as 'one of the most remarkable monuments of the Turkish language', and more broadly as 'the main written link between the traditional literatures of Central Asia, the Balkans, the ancient Greek, and the Muslim worlds', the tales relate to the great period of the Oghuz Turks, one of the great Turkish tribes, in the eighth to the eleventh centuries and concern mainly their struggles in northeastern Anatolia and east to the Caspian with fellow Turks (Pecheneks and Kipchaks) and, in a later overlayer, with such as the Turcoman Akkoyunlu, the Greeks of Trebizond and the Georgians. With his customary fine linguistic sensitivity, Geoffrey admirably catches the varying shifts of mood and style in the text, now heroic and dignified, now lively and colloquial. It is a pleasure to read.

Geoffrey's lifelong interests in language and philology were brought to full fruition in two major works, *Turkish Grammar* (Oxford, 1967) and *The Turkish Language Reform: a Catastrophic Success* (Oxford, 1999). The former is a comprehensive grammar of the language of the Turkish of the Republic of Turkey, principally the written language but with numerous references also to the colloquial. Unlike the eminently practical *Teach Yourself*, this is a reference grammar, designed, in Geoffrey's words, 'to present every form and construction that readers may encounter in print', and went well beyond anything yet published in English in terms of depth and sophistication. Its continuing usefulness—as a reference grammar it is fair to say that it holds the field—is indicated by the fact

that it has gone through eight reprintings, with a second edition coming out in 2000.

The second book represents the culmination of Geoffrey's work on a subject which fascinated him throughout his career and to which he devoted a number of articles and lectures over the years, namely the evolution of the Turkish language from the relative inaccessibility of Ottoman to the no-nonsense clarity of modern Turkish. Writing that the Turks were not alone in undertaking deliberate campaigns to alter more or less significant features of their languages—citing, for example, the experience of the Germans, the Swedes and the Albanians at various times in their histories as well as the battle of the French against Franglais—he notes that none of these efforts has been as long sustained or as effective as that in Turkey. It must be said that the need for reform was by any standard great. Ottoman was a true language of the elite, a compound of Turkish and the two classical Islamic languages, Arabic and Persian, which penetrated Turkish early on and ultimately virtually occupied it in terms of both grammar and vocabulary: Geoffrey cites, for example, Hagopian's *Ottoman–Turkish Conversation Grammar*, published in 1907, in which some 40 per cent of its pages are devoted to features of Arabic and Persian; and one might note with respect to vocabulary the fact that sentences in Ottoman in which all the words save the final auxiliary verb are Arabic or Persian are far from rare. Even after desultory attempts at reform dating from the mid-nineteenth century as well as modest expansion of the educational system over the same period the literacy rate still stood at 9 per cent as late as 1924.

These early attempts at reform, which had by the time of the declaration of the Republic in 1923 succeeded in ridding the language of much of the 'foreign' grammar, had been driven mainly by the newly introduced craft of journalism, with the pragmatic aim of communicating with a hoped-for expanded readership. They also contained, however, an element of idealism, of involving 'the people' more fully in society, a goal later enshrined as Populism, one of the six principles underlying the Atatürk revolution. Then, reinforced by two other such, Nationalism and Secularism, the Language Reform took off with a vengeance in the early years of the Republic, aided considerably by the fact that Atatürk himself took a deep personal interest in it and was indeed largely responsible for effecting one of the most significant steps in the process, the change from the Arabo-Persian alphabet to the Latin in November 1928. It had been apparent for some time that the centuries-old use of the Arabo-Persian alphabet in Turkish was less than satisfactory, resulting in a number of ambiguities

which hindered effective modern communication. The equivalent of the Arabic letter *k*, for example, could stand for *k, g, n* and *y* in Ottoman, while the three Arabic vowels were inadequate to express the eight in Turkish: the combined effect of this was, for example, that the Arabic equivalents of *k-w-r-k* render no fewer than seven separate words in Ottoman. A satisfactory Latin alphabet having been devised, Atatürk famously took the lead in the presentation of it to crowds in Istanbul and Anatolia, effecting in a matter of months what his advisers supposed would take years to accomplish.

While the alphabet change was highly significant, and though it was by no means universally welcomed at the time, the larger, more controversial task was the purging of the Arabic and Persian component of the vocabulary, which was pursued with greater or lesser energy until abating in the 1980s. This involved a massive effort in word collection and coinage in which the ordinary people were invited to take part through the newspapers, an effort devoted to finding equivalents for Arabic and Persian words which were, or had been, Turkish at some stage in its development or which could in some manner be appropriated as Turkish. Geoffrey proves an excellent guide through the maze of shades of opinion and methods of approach which characterised the exercise, some eminently sensible, some simply fantastic. Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of the latter was the so-called Sun Language Theory which enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1930s and which, in essence, asserted that Turkish was the mother of all languages and that, in theory at any rate, there was thus no need for purification since all the apparently non-Turkish words in the language were ultimately of Turkish origin. Even these wilder shores Geoffrey navigates with the judiciousness and gentle humanity so characteristic of his work.

Overall, as Geoffrey is quick to acknowledge, the Language Reform movement can incontestably claim considerable successes: at the most obvious level it has been to a significant degree responsible for the increase in the literacy rate from the 9 per cent of 1924 to 65 per cent in 1975 and 82.3 per cent in 1995. But there were also losses, in his view, which followed on from so radical and rapid a process of change, as the arresting subtitle of his book—*A Catastrophic Success*—suggests. The first of these was the loss of direct contact with the literature of the past, not just that of the Empire but also with that even of the 1920s and 1930s: Atatürk's great speech of 1927 on the Turkish experience since the First World War, for example, had by the early 1960s to be translated into the then current language in order to be understood by the young. Second, the purging of

the Arabic and Persian vocabulary led to an impoverishment of Turkish, the Ottoman form of which Geoffrey calls 'the only language ever to approach English in the wealth of its vocabulary', with all that this implies in the way of expressiveness and flexibility. And finally, the widespread and enthusiastic involvement of all and sundry in the process having provided a field day for amateur etymologists, much of what was done was done in ignorance and was out of keeping with the rules and conventions of the language.

Geoffrey's life and works were celebrated with the publication of a Festschrift entitled *The Balance of Truth* (Istanbul, 2000), edited by Çiğdem Balım-Harding and Colin Imber of the University of Manchester and presented to him by the Turkish Ambassador in June 2000 on the occasion of Geoffrey's eightieth birthday, a forerunner of the many warm tributes, published and unpublished, which came following his death.

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Note. The memoir is drawn from the prefatory material (including a nearly complete bibliography) in the Festschrift referenced above; from Andrew Mango's contribution—'Geoffrey Lewis Âbi'—to that Festschrift (pp. 17–22); from [Alan Jones's] Obituary of Geoffrey in *The Times*, 20 Feb. 2008; and from personal communications. The two brief quotations on p. 221 are from, respectively, Fahir İz, 'Dede Korkut' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1954–2009) vol. 2, p. 200a, and Margaret Bainbridge's review of *The Book of Dede Korkut* in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 38 (1975), p. 643.