

## OBITUARIES

LOUIS MASSIGNON (1882–1962)

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 a unity of thought and action, and having taken up a position he remained immovable from it. His personal life, like his passionate campaigns on behalf of the North Africans, lies outside our scope; but without some understanding of the man and his deep motivations it is impossible to appreciate his work as an Orientalist. Even so, the risk of misunderstanding is always present; there were times, indeed, when in private discussion or public address he seemed almost teasingly to invite misunderstanding, and he seldom went out of his way to dissipate 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, even if unchronicled by the mediaeval writer or concealed from the unseeing eye of the modern observer. This intuition was not without its dangers, even controlled as it was by an unparalleled range and comprehension of the classical and mathematical disciplines and modern techniques of social and psychological research; especially so, perhaps, when the natural thrust of his mind was towards the pursuit of the sources and resources of the spiritual life among Muslims. While Massignon clearly recognized that these were to be found in every expression of Islamic devotion, he tended rather strangely to disregard the great tradition of Sunni Islam. None, it is true, could mobilize his knowledge of orthodox law and doctrine more forcefully and even cuttingly upon occasion; but it was natural that the fields of study to which he was most compulsively drawn were those most closely related to his personal vocation.

Most of all he was attracted to the enigmatic figure of the crucified theosophist Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, to whose life and thought his major work was devoted and whose traces he never ceased to seek out in later Islamic literature and devotion. Nor is it surprising that in pursuit of themes that in some way linked the spiritual life of Muslims and Catholics he should have found a congenial element in the veneration of Fāṭima, and consequently a special field of interest in the study of Shi'ite thought in many of its manifestations, or again in the community of Abrahamic origins and such themes as the Seven Sleepers. 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.

His pursuit, however, led him also far beyond the specifically religious and ritual elements of Muslim culture. Innumerable articles attest the continuous fertility of his mind in such fields as (to name but a few) the symbolism of Muslim art, the structure of Muslim logic, the intricacies of mediaeval finance, and the organization of artisan corporations. An early concern with the characteristics of the Semitic languages, and more especially of Arabic, was later stimulated by his membership of the Arabic Academy of Cairo, to whose efforts to promote a rational modernization of Arabic he made several positive and practical contributions, while maintaining a vehement and implacable *nolo* to any hint of desecration. Out of this there developed eventually a kind of Hermetic view of Arabic and Semitic, which, it must be confessed, he expressed at times in elliptic studies that to the uninitiate almost rivalled the mysteries of the ancient Hermetica.

With all this he had a passionate interest in every aspect and region of contemporary Muslim life and thought. No scholar of our times has so constantly and tirelessly shuttled around the world of Islam; and although a high proportion of these journeys was undertaken on official missions he seldom neglected the opportunities that they offered him of extending his intimate contacts

with Muslims of every description, or of enriching his data for the study of Islamic culture and mysticism. It was the mature deposit of these contacts that distinguished his *Annuaire du Monde musulman* from the general run of statistical compilations, and that gave to his lectures and conversation their unforgettable qualities of depth and fervency. At the same time he showed as eager a concern with the spiritual life of the Eastern Christian (especially Uniate) Churches, which found expression in *Les Mardis de Dar el-Salam*, and latterly also with the pacifism of Gandhi, in whom he discerned a kindred spirit.

Inevitably, in the overheated political atmosphere of today, some of these activities seemed, to those who did not know him, to involve a certain ambiguity and led to the kind of misunderstandings I have already mentioned. But of the deep love and respect that he inspired among Muslims it is for Muslims to speak. For us, the lesson which by his example he impressed upon the Orientalists of his generation was that even classical Orientalism is no longer adequate without some degree of committedness to the vital forces that have given meaning and value to the diverse aspects of Eastern cultures.

H. A. R. GIBB.

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#### D. S. RICE (1913–1962)

DAVID STORM RICE who died on 19th April of last year at the age of forty-nine had earned an outstanding reputation in Islamic archaeology. He was born in Vienna, and educated in Haifa. After completing his Arabic studies at the École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes and the École Pratique des Hautes Études of the Collège de France, he joined the French Institute of Damascus then under the directorship of Robert Montagne. At the latter's suggestion, Rice undertook the study of the dialects and customs of the three Aramaic-speaking villages in the Anti-Lebanon and lived for eight months of 1936 among the villagers. His book, *Études sur les Villages Araméens de l'Anti-Liban* for which he was awarded the degree of Docteur-ès-Lettres in the University of Paris, appeared in 1939 and displayed those gifts which set their stamp on all his subsequent work: a linguistic flair, accurate observation, imagination and an historical sense, and considerable powers of presentation and self-expression. The book was illustrated with