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Edmund Burke, III

ISLAMIC HISTORY AS WORLD HISTORY: MARSHALL HODGSON, 'THE VENTURE OF ISLAM'

At a time when orientalism is under attack both from within and without the profession, the publication of Marshall G. S. Hodgson's three-volume work, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*[1] is an event of major importance. So rich is its subject, so complex and ambitious its analytic scheme and serious its moral purpose that it is difficult in brief compass to give an idea of the book. In the following pages, I discuss those aspects of the work that seem to me most important for an understanding of its achievement and significance. In the end, I shall argue, *The Venture of Islam* must be seen as the most ambitious and successful effort to salvage the orientalist tradition to date.

Having said this, I should add that *The Venture of Islam* is also a controversial work, one likely to generate continuing debate both on points of detail and on its overall vision of the history of Islamic civilization. This it is deliberately, combatively, and at times perversely.[2] Already, it has been criticized as a highly personal and partisan account. Such charges, it must be said, are true, but they are also beside the point. Indeed, the very greatness of the book stems from Hodgson's own personality, his cranky obsession with terminology and presuppositions, his insistence on seeing Islamic civilization in a world historical context, and his stubborn Quaker moral conscience. The rest is scholarly monographs. There is much about Hodgson's spirit that recalls the youthful impatience with mediocrity which so marked the writings of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the founders of the *Annales* school.[3] Perhaps it is not too much to hope

[1] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (3 vols.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), Vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam*; Vol. 2, *The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*; and Vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*.

[2] Hodgson's footnotes are one of the delights of the work and are not be overlooked. They collectively provide a systematic settling of accounts with the field, and a fertile list of topics for future research.

[3] I am thinking especially of Lucien Febvre's *Combats pour l'histoire* (Paris, 1953), portions of which have been published in English as *A New Kind of History* (New York, 1973). Hodgson's effort differs from that of the *Annales* historians, of course, in that he focused upon the study of civilizations (understood chiefly in terms of the high cultural artifacts of the major literary traditions), while they emphasized social and economic history. It is in the spirit of the two, and the concern with methodology, that they resemble one another.

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that a new generation of scholars, nourished by the example of Hodgson, will follow in the path that he has traced out.

The Venture of Islam is both an original scholarly synthesis and a major new textbook for undergraduate survey courses on Islamic civilization. Toward the end of this essay, I shall have more to say on the difficulties of trying to read it both ways at once. Here, I should like to stress that the work is first and foremost a textbook, whose purpose is to seek an understanding of the human achievement of Islamic civilization on its own terms. At its most general, by tracing the history of Islamic civilization, it seeks to inform the reader about the nature of civilization. It examines Islamic civilization as a part of the human heritage and seeks to demonstrate its importance in world history. More specifically, through the study of the societies and cultures that provided the context for the actions of concerned Muslims, Hodgson seeks to explain why they behaved as they did.

ISLAM IN THE MIRROR OF MARSHALL G. S. HODGSON

By all accounts, Marshall Hodgson was an unusual person. Even in the rather Bohemian atmosphere of the University of Chicago in the late 1950s, he stood out for his ascetic temperament, militant vegetarianism, and leftish political beliefs. His prickly obsession with details, his vaulting ambition, and his inability to suffer fools made him often a difficult colleague. One senses from accounts like the rather uncharitable one of Saul Bellow[4] that he was an elusive figure – fascinating, frequently insufferable, always brilliant. No doubt his personality had much to do with the fact that he left few followers and no school to carry on his work. His death in 1968, at the age of forty-seven, left *The Venture of Islam* (on which he had been working for over a decade) two-thirds finished. In the end, *The Venture of Islam* became as much his personal venture as Islam's. A very great debt is owed to Reuben Smith, for many years his closest collaborator, who selflessly saw the manuscript through to publication.[5]

The Venture of Islam is as much the product of a particular time and place as it is of a particular man. Its pages are suffused with the atmosphere of the University of Chicago in the late 1950s and early 1960s during the latter phase of the remarkable Hutchins experiment. In particular, the book owes much to its origins as the text for the undergraduate survey of Islamic civilization, a course taught by Marshall Hodgson from its inception in 1958. The book went through several early editions, and was accompanied by a three-volume *Introduction*

[4] Saul Bellow, *To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 105–109.

[5] See the Preface by Smith for an account of the state of the manuscript on Hodgson's death, and the nature of his editorial assistance. In general, Smith was scrupulous to avoid changes that went beyond the stylistic. The published version of the work is thus substantially as Hodgson left it.

to Islamic Civilization, a series of selected readings from the Islamic classics in English translation.[6] A notable part of the undergraduate program at the University of Chicago was the study of world civilizations through their classical writings. Originally, the program had been limited to the study of Western civilization, but was broadened in the late 1950s to include surveys of the civilizations of India, China, and Islam. Inevitably, Hodgson's approach to Islamic civilization was greatly colored by the 'great books' orientation of the college curriculum. It was also influenced by the conception of *civilization* developed by the younger Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, which provided the overarching framework for the sequence of courses. In still other ways, *The Venture of Islam* owes much to Hodgson's membership on the Committee on Social Thought, a unique interdisciplinary graduate program of broad and eclectic scope. (At the time, of his death, Hodgson was chairman of the Committee). Here, the influence of John U. Nef and Mircea Eliade seems to have been most important, together with that of Edward Shils. The book also reveals the influence of Hodgson's colleagues in Islamic studies: Gustave von Grunebaum (to whom it is jointly dedicated with John U. Nef), Muhsin Mahdi, Robert McC. Adams, Wilferd Madelung, Clifford Geertz, Lloyd Fallers, and of course Reuben Smith. Finally, mention must be made of William McNeill, whose *Rise of the West*[7] played a significant role both as model and as foil in the working out of Hodgson's framework of world history. Simply to list the names reminds one of how remarkable an intellectual environment the University of Chicago was in those days. As Albert Hourani has said, it is difficult to imagine *The Venture of Islam* having been written anywhere else.[8]

I have argued that I consider *The Venture of Islam* to be as much Hodgson's venture as Islam's. To an extraordinary degree, the work is shaped and informed by the personal beliefs and ethical concerns of its author. In just what ways is this case the case? One way to approach this subject is through the two persons who seem most to be the touchstones to Hodgson's thought: Louis Massignon and John Woolman. Their spirit suffuses virtually every page of the work. From a consideration of these men and their meaning for Marshall Hodgson, it is possible to derive the chief characteristics of the work.

A striking feature of *The Venture of Islam* is the tone of empathy and respect which it adopts toward Islam. This characteristic serves to distinguish the book from the majority of more 'objective' studies. Hodgson has taken pains 'to remove his shoes before entering the mosque' (in the words of Mahmoud Ayyub), and in the process he encourages his reader to enter fully into the spirit of the civilization. Here the talisman is the work of Louis Massignon (especially

[6] The reader was a companion to a *History of Islamic Civilization* published in 1958 in an offset edition. This gave way to a first edition of *The Venture of Islam* (in two volumes) in 1961, also in offset, intended for students at The University of Chicago.

[7] William McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[8] See his review of *The Venture of Islam*, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 37, 1 (1978), 53–62.

articles like his 'Salman Pak et les premices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien[9]), and the latter's efforts to achieve an understanding of Islam from within. From Massignon, Hodgson has borrowed the psychosociological 'science of compassion.' It is the constant effort of the scholar to 'never be satisfied to cease asking "but why?" until he had driven his understanding to the point where he has an immediate grasp of what a given position meant, such that every nuance of the data is accounted for and withal, given a total of presuppositions and circumstances, he could feel himself doing the same.'[10]

Ultimately, it is to Wilhelm Dilthey and Carl Jung that Hodgson looks for the justification of this application of the principle of *verstehen*. Characteristically, where with Massignon this method often resulted in a murky mysticism, Hodgson makes of it a controlled effort of the historical imagination.

John Woolman, an eighteenth-century American Quaker, is the other major guide to understanding Hodgson's intent. Scarcely known today outside of the Society of Friends, Woolman in his own time was a pacifist, an opponent of slavery, and a sharp critic of the mercantile values of colonial Pennsylvania. His *Journal* has continued to exert an enormous influence among Quakers.[11] It is with an epigram from Woolman that the work begins: 'To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favors are peculiar to one nation and to exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding.' The citation is clearly intended as an implicit judgment upon the smug Europocentrism that has informed most of the writing on Islam by Western scholars. With this device emblazoned on his escutcheon, Hodgson sets forth to combat the many errors and presuppositions of previous studies. A central purpose of *The Venture of Islam* is to demonstrate the possibilities of a new kind of Islamic history, methodologically self-conscious and guided by a more adequate framework of world history. Hodgson argues his case at length in the text and in the numerous footnotes sprinkled throughout the work. It is for this reason that the work begins with a lengthy methodological section entitled 'Introduction to the Study of Islamic Civilization.' In this syllabus of errors, we see Hodgson at his most polemical, as well as his most teacherly. The central concepts and epistemological assumptions of orientalism and of civilizational studies are submitted to scathing examination. Nothing is exempt, not even the venerable Mercator projection map, which Hodgson argues is a 'Jim-Crow projection' that has seriously warped our image of the world.

In a more general sense, the citation of Woolman serves to focus attention on Hodgson's Quaker beliefs. In ways both great and small, *The Venture of Islam* is marked by the impress of Hodgson's Quaker conscience. It is axiomatic for Hodgson that 'the individual sensibility, focused in a point of conscience, is one of the ultimate roots of history.' A major theme of the three volumes is

[9] Louis Massignon, 'Salman Pak et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien,' *Société des Etudes Iraniens*, 7 (1934).

[10] *The Venture of Islam*, I, 379 n. 6.

[11] John Woolman, *The Journal, and Other Writings* (New York and London, 1952).

the capacity of the Qur'anic message repeatedly to inspire men of conscience to confront the dilemmas of their age in response to the challenge of its ideals. Thus the work proceeds by a series of meditations on the styles of piety of selected Muslim moral epigones: Hasan al-Basri, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Jalaluddin Rumi, the Mughal sultan Akbar, and the modernists Muhammad 'Abduh and Muhammad Iqbal. What interests Hodgson about these men is their effort to work out anew the implications of the act of Islam in their own age. In such an approach to Islamic history, it is almost as if Hodgson had somehow reinvented the Muslim biographical dictionary, albeit one in Quaker disguise. This represents a sharp break with the conventional political/dynastic way of presenting Islamic history in which the heroes are the great generals, statesmen, and builders of empire. It also constitutes one of the most effective means of encouraging the reader to momentarily suspend disbelief and enter into the mental universe of particular Muslims.

Hodgson's Quakerism manifests itself in still other ways. One is in his scandalized response to the fact that the initial spread of Islam owed much to the sword. But his pacifism is outraged when it comes to a consideration of the terror tactics employed by the Mongols in their advance into the lands of Islam. Hodgson exhibits an almost morbid fascination with the towers of human skulls erected by the Mongols to demonstrate the folly of resistance. His attitude toward caliphal absolutism is similarly tinged with an abiding suspicion of the state which I take to be Quaker (although it may also represent the influence of Leo Strauss, a Chicago colleague). It is perhaps for this reason that Hodgson prefers the flexible international political order of the mid-tenth to mid-thirteenth centuries, which he claims was characterized by a relatively open social structure and relative individual liberty.

Hodgson's moral stance is most evident in the epilogue, 'The Islamic Heritage and the Modern Conscience.' In it he reveals his belief in the moral unity of mankind in the modern age, and asks what meaning the Islamic religious heritage can have for modern human beings. He gives a number of answers: one is that we are all (including the West) in the same boat, as a consequence of the unsettling of all moral heritages in the modern world. Thus the study of the fate of the Islamic heritage can instruct us about our own and become part of the common patrimony of mankind. More revealingly, however, Hodgson invokes the Quaker example when he hopes that the Islamic community, as a place where concerned individuals can jointly give witness to their beliefs, may share in shaping the course of humanity as a whole. By some subtle alchemy of the spirit, in Hodgson's hands the history of Islamic civilization comes to resemble in the operation of its ideals through time a history of the Society of Friends.

ISLAMIC HISTORY AS WORLD HISTORY

One's first impressions of *The Venture of Islam* are rather overwhelming. It is painted on so vast a canvas, so thickly populated with historical figures drawn

from so many ages and climes, and so rich in new ideas and concepts, that the reader may miss the fact that it is built upon an explicit framework of world history and a theory of civilizational studies. This section treats Hodgson's attempt to situate Islamic history in a world historical context – a necessary preliminary to which is a searching examination of the methodological presuppositions of the orientalist tradition. The following section treats Hodgson's theory of civilizational studies.

Marshall Hodgson was not only a person of humanistic conscience and eclectic, far-ranging curiosity – he was also a systematic thinker who delighted in the search for patterns in world history. Long before the current impasse of the orientalist tradition had become glaringly evident, Hodgson was already convinced of the need for a radical reorientation of our historical and geographical attitudes toward the rest of the world. In my opinion, the effort to write a history of Islamic civilization informed by the multiple awarenesses that derive from such an undertaking constitutes Hodgson's most important achievement. One may dispute his views of particular features of the civilization which he calls Islamic: nonetheless, he has accomplished a feat of enormous significance in enabling us to see, for the first time, that civilization whole and entire in its unfolding through time and in its relations with its neighbors.

It is crucial to an understanding of *The Venture of Islam* to recognize that it is based upon an explicit framework of world history, and that its author was at once profoundly immersed in the classics of Islamic civilization and a world historian. Hodgson left several hundred pages of an uncompleted world history at his death. What that finished work would have looked like, we cannot say. But its general outlines are clear from his previous work. Among Hodgson's earliest publications is an article which appeared in the *Journal of World History* in 1954 called 'Hemispheric Interregional History as an Approach to World History.'[12] Here in brilliant but highly schematic outline are to be found the central themes that subsequent works would but fill out in greater detail.[13] In this article Hodgson argues that a necessary preliminary to a new framework of world history is a systematic criticism of the basic presuppositions of Western historiography. Only with a radical reorientation of our historical and geographical attitudes about the world is it possible to undertake this task. Accordingly, an important segment of Hodgson's energies are focused in this article upon the methodology of world history. Only with this accomplished does he go on to present his own framework.

Hodgson's critique of the Western tradition of world history centers on such issues as the problem of perspective (in world historical terms, Europe is a fringe area of the Afro-Eurasian zone of agrarianate citied life, and it does not

[12] Marshall Hodgson, 'Hemispheric Inter-regional History as an Approach to World History,' *Journal of World History*, 1, 3 (1954), 715–723.

[13] See also Hodgson's 'The Inter-relations of Societies in History,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 227–250; and 'The Great Western Transmutation,' *Chicago Today*, n.v. (1967), 40–50.

emerge on the center of the world stage until 1800), the problem of terminology (the use of such truncating terms as 'the Orient' and 'Asia' as opposed to 'the Occident' and 'the West' to refer to the rest of human literate society), and the unconscious racism of the Mercator projection map (with its Eurocentric distortion of the southern hemisphere). The lines of argument developed by Hodgson in this article provide the basis of his criticisms of the orientalist tradition in the 'Introduction to the Study of Islamic Civilization' which opens the first volume of *The Venture of Islam*. A brief digression to consider these criticisms should make clear the radical nature of Hodgson's conception of his task.

Hodgson's attack on the orientalist tradition of scholarship is noteworthy for several reasons. One is that it comes from someone whose training, and in many ways professional self-image, were those of an orientalist. Among the most successful passages in *The Venture of Islam* are those in which Hodgson works his way through a text, guiding the reader to a richer and more complete understanding of the resonance it must have had in its own time and place. Yet Hodgson was profoundly discontented with the results of the philological approach to civilizations. He was in search of a more complex vision, one less the prisoner of a narrow textualism and more open to the interplay of cultures across linguistic barriers. He was opposed to the epistemological assumptions that inform the orientalist tradition. Finally, he insisted that discussions of Islamic culture be securely rooted in a historically specific context. Hodgson's critique of orientalism is therefore one that comes, in a sense, from within the tradition. But it is also, revealingly, one that is based upon a radically different conception of the nature of the historian's task.

Most recent attacks upon orientalism have emerged within the context of the anticolonial struggle.[14] Insofar as orientalism served as a cover and justification for Western dominance, this was no doubt inevitable and even (despite certain excesses) justifiable. While by no means indifferent to the political uses to which orientalism has been put, Hodgson situates the problem at a more general level of discourse.[15] Thus he distinguishes five frameworks within which students of Islamic studies have tended to operate: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Marxism, and what he calls 'Westernism,' each with its own characteristic set of epistemological assumptions and complementary patterns of distortion. Yet the absence of explicit commitment to one of these traditions, Hodgson points out, provides no assurance of objectivity. Indeed, he says, it may simply disguise an unanalyzed, piecemeal commitment to partisan viewpoints. Similarly, 'it is no

[14] Among others, see A. L. Tibawi, 'English Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of Their Approach to Islam and to Arab Nationalism,' *Muslim World*, 53, 3–4 (1963), 185–204, 298–313; Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'L'Orientalisme en crise,' *Diogène*, 24 (1963), 109–142; Abdullah Laroui, *L'Idéologie arabe contemporaine* (Paris, 1967) and *La crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalisme ou historicisme?* (Paris, 1974). See also Albert Hourani, 'Islam and the Philosophers of History,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, 3 (1967), 206–268, and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Atheneum, 1978).

[15] *The Venture of Islam*, I, 26–30.

guarantee of balanced insight to be a Muslim, nor of impartiality, to be a non-Muslim.'[16] A degree of objectivity can only be attained through constant methodological self-consciousness, and by embracing the tensions between one's own 'great tradition' and that of Islam. In the effort to write history from a world historical perspective, not only Christians and Westernists are guilty of biases deriving from their ultimate orientations, but also Marxists and cultural nationalists of all stripes. Hodgson's critique of orientalism is accordingly rooted in quite a different set of premises as the recent attacks on that tradition, even while there is much in their denunciations with which he would sympathize. I shall return to Hodgson's critique of the orientalist tradition in the section that follows.

What is Hodgson's framework of world history? A more truly adequate world history, he argues, would have to begin with the proposition that the history of human literate society must be the history of Asia and its outliers, and that Europe has no privileged role in such a story. Here we touch the heart of Hodgson's quarrel with such writers as William McNeill, whose *Rise of the West*, while a major advance over previous attempts at a world history, is flawed in its basic conception. A world history worthy of the name must focus upon interdependent interregional developments on a hemisphere-wide basis. One implication of this approach is an emphasis upon literate societies (especially the four great core areas in which civilization developed), at the expense of central Asian pastoralists and Burmese hill folk. What fascinated Hodgson was the possibility of telling the tale of humanity as a whole, but this time from the perspective of global history, and not in a skewed, Western, self-justificatory version. His history would be one that concerned itself especially with those phenomena which cross regional boundaries: the spread of Hellenistic art, the development of mathematics, the diffusion of Indian forms of monasticism, the establishment of the Mongol empire. For Hodgson, it was axiomatic that the constant acquisition of new techniques (cultural and otherwise) and discoveries all over the world cumulatively led to changes in the possibilities of future development everywhere. The spread of gunpowder weapons is but a particularly dramatic example of the operation of this principle. In his emphasis upon the interconnections between civilizations and upon the cumulative development of the common stock of human techniques and cultural resources, Hodgson's Quaker convictions appear with clarity: all men are brothers, and in the eye of history, Islam is but one venture among others.

Hodgson utilizes a number of different periodizations of history in his presentation. One is a twofold division between the Agrarian age (to 1800 C.E.) and Modern times, which serves to frame his discussion of the Great Western Transmutation (on which more in a moment). From the perspective of the history of civilizations, however, a periodization composed of four major divisions is utilized: (1) the early civilizations (to 800 B.C.), (2) the Axial age (800 to 200 B.C.), (3) the post-Axial age (200 B.C. to 1800 C.E.), and (4) the Modern

[16] Ibid., p. 27.

age (since 1800 C.E.) The term Axial age Hodgson borrows from Karl Jaspers to refer to the great period of cultural fluorescence which was formative of Chinese, Indian, Mediterranean, and Irano-Semitic civilizations. Islamic civilization emerges in the post-Axial period of agrarianate citied life. With the emergence of Islamic civilization, the Nile to Oxus zone, which had hitherto been divided into warring camps, reasserts its primacy within the ecumene. While preceding centuries had witnessed the gradual development of a tendency toward religious communalism within the region, with separate literary languages carrying different strands of a common cultural tradition, the coming of Islam reversed this trend, and witnessed the unfolding of a cosmopolitan civilization carried by first one, then several Islamic languages. In world historical terms, Islamic civilization represented an attempt to establish a total civilization on a hemisphere-wide basis, embracing most of the ecumene. The Islamic venture underwent a series of transformations over time. Not until the onset of modernity did the persisting regional configurations within the ecumene reassert themselves, and unifying forces gradually weaken. The way was left open for European domination, followed by the rise of nationalism in the Islamic world.

Central to Hodgson's method of doing world history is his use of ideal types to inform and orient his analysis. This gives his study of Islamic civilization an analytical power lacking in other parallel efforts. While critical of aspects of the work of Max Weber, Hodgson has evidently learned much from it. But it is the method of Weber, and not so much his conclusions, which Hodgson has adopted. Thus, for example, his use of the twin concepts of agrarianate citied life and technicalism underpins his efforts at explaining what it is which sets off the premodern era (to c. 1800 C.E.) from the modern age. As we shall see shortly, Hodgson has derived a series of ideal types which he associates with each of the major phases of Islamic civilization, based upon their social, economic, and cultural characteristics. The pyramiding of these ideal types thus provides *The Venture of Islam* with an architectonic structure of extraordinary richness and complexity. (Those who have misread Hodgson's intent as merely descriptive should look again.)

An examination of the ideal types developed by Hodgson to replace the tradition/modernity dichotomy, that of the Agrarian age and Technicalism, may serve to illustrate his overall method. The first concept of this couplet, the Agrarian age, refers to all of human history from the rise of civilizations until roughly 1800. It is developed in the opening section of Volume One in considerable detail. Civilizations of the premodern era, Hodgson posits, were ultimately based upon their ability to extract land rents of some sort, with other sources of wealth playing a distinctly secondary role. The surplus generated by the agrarian economy was thus limited by the possibilities of agricultural production. Neither commerce nor industrial production (still less pastoralism) could provide sufficient revenue to supplant the primary dependence of the privileged classes upon agriculture. Since literacy was a virtual monopoly of the privileged, the cultural production of a given society was in turn dependent

upon agrarianate revenues. Intensive investment of this necessarily limited surplus could under favorable conditions produce a cultural florescence. But all such florescences were limited in duration and extent. Inevitably, less favorable conditions would reassert themselves, and the civilization would conform once again to more normal agrarianate standards of expectation. (The same built-in ceiling determined the careers of political and economic florescences.) By this analysis, Hodgson argues that great breakthroughs, of the sort that gave birth to Modernity, were impossible under agrarianate conditions. This is to say that while innovation and change could and did exist in the agrarian age, no such set of changes could proceed to the point where they began to transform the very nature of the relationship between man and the environment.

The rise of the West, or what Hodgson calls the Great Western Transmutation, presents a sharp contrast with the Agrarian age, and thus with the course of human history.[17] Beginning about 1600, Western society experienced a series of unprecedented changes that intersected and built upon one another in ways that soon altered the very context of historical action by freeing cultural change from its agrarian base. Hitherto, within the Afro-Eurasian historical complex the overall rise in the level of social power – which had cumulatively been quite marked – had occurred on a basis of rough parity. Any really basic new developments had been gradually adopted everywhere within the space of four or five centuries. Thus the superiority of the Arabs over the Portuguese in the eighth and ninth centuries and of the Portuguese over the Arabs in the sixteenth were both relatively ephemeral developments, soon balanced by appropriate adjustments over time. The Western Transmutation broke down the historical presuppositions by which such gradual diffusions had maintained a rough parity between the regions of the Afro-Eurasian ecumene. Western society experienced a cumulative and interdependent set of changes in key sectors whose decisive effects made themselves felt everywhere from the beginning, in a steadily increasing but discontinuous fashion. The very bases of agrarian life found themselves progressively undermined, though initially at least old lifeways seemed to continue unchanged. Henceforth even routine acts acquired a new significance. A new historical age was born, the age of Technicalism.

What is notable about Hodgson's discussion of the onset of modernity is less his analysis of the overall process of change (called 'technicalization'), than his insertion of it into a world historical context. Several important consequences flow from this. One is that by situating the Western Transmutation in the history of citied life throughout the hemisphere, he establishes its connections to all that had come before. 'Without the cumulative history of the whole Afro-Eurasian Oikoumene, of which the Occident had been an integral part, the Western Transmutation would be almost unthinkable.'[18] A host of inventions and discoveries originating in other regions (among them gunpowder, the compass, and printing) played a major role in the Western breakthrough.

[17] Ibid., III, 176–200. Cf. also his 'The Great Western Transmutation.'

[18] *The Venture of Islam*, III, 198.

So too did the existence of a vast world market, itself largely the work of Muslim merchants and traders. The rise of the West, when viewed in this fashion, no longer seems quite the inevitable development it has widely been assumed to have been, nor does Western civilization appear to have been unique. The line that runs from the Greeks to the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution is finally an optical illusion, the product of a highly selective historical imagination. From the vantage point of world history, the Western Transmutation is the cumulation of processes of cultural change going on throughout the ecumene for more than a millennium.

A second consequence of viewing the rise of the West as a world historical phenomenon is that it enables Hodgson to address the issue of what he calls 'the development gap.' If the concept is old-fashioned, the insight is contemporary. Once under way, Hodgson argues, the Western Transmutation 'could neither be parallelled independently nor be borrowed wholesale.'[19] It could also not be escaped. The unprecedented level of social power of the West enabled it to intervene in other societies in countless ways and almost from the beginning to set the terms of its relationship with them. The social basis of civilized life was transformed. For the rest of the ecumene, 'what was significant and creative in cultural activity was keyed not to the problems of an urban elite in an agrarian society but to those of non-technicalized elites in a technicalistic world.'[20] The decisive altering of the context of historical action meant that for non-Western peoples 'the same forces that built up the economies and cultures in the advanced lands broke down theirs, and they became the "underdeveloped" lands, those with relatively low investment levels.'[21] In his efforts to conceive of the processes of modernization as occurring from their inception on a world scale, Hodgson's work parallels that of neo-Marxist 'dependency' theorists such as André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Immanuel Wallerstein.[22] Like them, he is interested in the pattern of relations between 'core' and 'periphery' of the world market. He has a number of prescient observations to make on the significance of the industrial and democratic revolutions for non-Western societies. While finally his understanding of the Western Transmutation is much more in tune with the theorists of modernization than with the neo-Marxists, by situating it in a world historical context, Hodgson took a decisive step toward breaking with the modernization paradigm. Had he lived to revise the final sections of *The Venture of Islam*, it is likely he would have gone on to develop a more comprehensive theory of his own. Regardless, it is significant that Hodgson was under no illusions as to the possibility of Western-style development occurring outside the West.

What is it that distinguishes modern times from the agrarian age? Hodgson's answer is *technicalization*, a concept he defines as 'a condition of calculative

[19] Ibid., p. 200. [20] Ibid., p. 202. [21] Ibid., p. 203.

[22] André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1969); Samir Amin, *Le developpement inégal* (Paris, 1973); and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, Vol. 1, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York and London, 1974).

(and hence innovative) technical specialization, in which the several specialities are interdependent on a large enough scale to determine patterns of expectation in key sectors of the society.'[23] The brilliance of this conception may at first escape notice, and Hodgson's clotted prose style does not help matters. Yet in the concept of technicalism, Hodgson shows himself to have been an important, if unconventional, social thinker. Concepts such as industrialization and capitalism privilege certain aspects of the process by which the transformation took place, but they leave unexplained its astonishing capacity to effect far-reaching changes in even the noneconomic sectors. They are neither sufficiently precise, nor sufficiently general. For Hodgson, the very essence of the process was a cultural one: the transformation of one's way of looking at the world according to calculative rational principles. Here one senses the influence of the Weber of *The Protestant Ethic*. Indeed the concept of technicalism may be seen as an extended gloss on Weber's *rationalization* (though Hodgson argues that Weber's term drastically overstates the extent to which rationality is uniquely characteristic of the modern age). Technicalism finally is associated with certain moral qualities, most notably vastly greater efficiency and technical precision, and a certain kind of person, the autonomous individual of humane and cooperative spirit. As an intellectual construct, technicalism goes far toward illuminating the cultural aspects of the complex process by which the modern age has come into being.[24]

World history has a reputation of being the playground of dilettantes, full of airy generalities and poor metaphysics. Hodgson's secure grounding in the culture of a particular civilization, and his methodological selfconsciousness (which in another person might have induced a severe case of intellectual paralysis), enabled him to bring an unaccustomed rigor to the study of world history. *The Venture of Islam*, for all its faults and quirky inconsistencies, reveals the many benefits that may derive from the attempt to place the history of Islamic civilization in a world historical context. Its lessons, therefore, go beyond the provincial confines of Islamic studies.

'THE VENTURE OF ISLAM' AND CIVILIZATIONAL STUDIES

Few scholars today feel comfortable working with a concept as broad as *civilization*. Ours is a time of careful monographs, not of universal history. When assessing Hodgson's contribution to civilizational studies, however, one

[23] *The Venture of Islam*, III, 186.

[24] That is, the concept of technicialism is keyed to the requirements of a cultural history. It is largely congruent with classical modernization theory of the early 1960s in Hodgson's usage, and indeed the later term for him denotes the political and economic aspects of the Western Transmutation. While a form of 'modernizationism,' Hodgson's efforts to situate the process in a world context and in terms of the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world make him an interesting transitional figure. Had he lived to complete the revisions of Book Six, I suspect that his ambivalences toward modernization theory would have become even more manifest.

must remember that the study of civilizations had an honored place at the University of Chicago during the period he was writing *The Venture of Islam.* Although Hodgson struggles valiantly to rehabilitate the concept of civilization, I find this level of his analysis the most difficult to accept. Yet even here, the great care which he has taken to make himself understood makes a dialogue possible. Grant him his initial premises, and he can make a powerful case for himself. What is Hodgson's approach to civilizational studies? How does it inform his understanding of Islamic civilization?

Those who would utilize the concept of civilization must deal with the extensive criticisms that have been made of it.[25] A major difficulty facing those who have employed it has been the tendency to view civilizations as timeless essences whose fate is predetermined at the moment of inception by their constituent elements. Islamic civilization has frequently been viewed in this way. A second difficulty has been in distinguishing between *civilizations* and *cultures.* (How large a unit is the term 'civilization' to include? A city-state? A literate tradition? An empire?) A third and related problem is that of determining where one civilization leaves off and another begins. (Viewed in one way, Christian Byzantium is a part of Greek civilization; viewed in another, it is a part of Christendom.) A final criticism is the culturalist bias of civilizational studies. What connections are to be made between the level of elite lettered culture (on which the study of civilizations necessarily operates), and the historically specific social and economic contexts in which the civilization is rooted, across regional and class lines? It is a merit of Hodgson's approach that he recognizes the cogency of these criticisms, and he seeks to provide answers to them.

Central to Hodgson's approach is the notion that cultures and civilizations are dynamic rather than static, and that they are characterized by internal differentiation and continuing dialogue with their formative ideals such that certain ideals may dominate at one point, only to recede later. Civilizations, then, are not determined once and for all by their intellectual traits (let alone essences), and they are not the prisoners of the dead hand of the past. A civilization, for Hodgson, is a compound culture, 'a relatively extensive grouping of interrelated cultures insofar as they have shared in cumulative traditions in the form of high culture, on the urban, literate level.'[26] As for the difficulty of deciding to which civilization a particular cultural entity belongs, Hodgson sensibly points out that such questions cannot be conclusively resolved. For some purposes, Islamic civilization may be viewed as continuous with the Irano-Semitic tradition, and for others it is radically discontinuous. Hodgson is careful to define civilizations in an open-ended way, without reference to supposed life

[25] See Robert McC. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society* (Chicago, 1966), and Ruth Tringham, 'The Concept of "Civilization" in European Archeology,' in Jeremy A. Sabloff and C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, eds., *The Rise and Fall of Civilizations* (Menlo Park, 1974), for recent discussions of the use of the term.

[26] *The Venture of Islam,* I, 91.

cycles: his discussions are exempt from hypostasizing so-called innate traits in particular civilizations.

What is Islamic about Islamic civilization? Hodgson's response reveals his general approach to civilizational studies. It is the presence of Islamic ideals, he argues, that marks off Islamic civilization from those that preceded it. These ideals provide the central standards of legitimation of the society. The dialogue of successive generations of Muslims with these ideals, that is, with the Qur'anic message as revealed to Muhammad, constitutes (in a sense constructs) the civilization of Islam. In this dialogue, there have been two major variants: the Sunni tradition and the Shi'a tradition. The main bearers of these ideals at any one time were not numerous, certainly never as extensive as the literate population. Rather, their numbers were limited to the small group of individuals who in every age have taken for themselves the task of seeking to realize these ideals. This group Hodgson calls the 'piety-minded' (or later, the '*sharī'a*-minded'). The civilization produced by them can be considered in two dimensions. Most narrowly, it can be considered as religious, and the ensuing dialogue as a religious one. But it can also be considered in its wider, civilizational, aspects (including Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslims insofar as they participated in the dialogue). To clearly distinguish the latter from the former, Hodgson has coined the term *Islamicate* (on the model of Italianate).

The enormous extent of Islamic civilization also poses a problem for Hodgson. How is it possible to speak meaningfully about a civilization which spanned the Afro-Eurasian ecumene from Morocco to China, and which has endured from the seventh century until the present? The criticisms of those interested in tracing the social and economic history of specific parts of the Islamic world acquire pertinence at this point. Hodgson agrees that a civilizational history cannot address the diverse experiences of Muslims (especially nonelite ones) living in a variety of historically specific times and places. There is thus an important range of problems about which Hodgson concedes that he can say little. But, he argues, if one is interested in the unity, rather than the diversity, of the historical experience of Muslims, then the concept of civilization acquires cogency, and social and economic historians can have little to contribute at this level of analysis. There is a unity to Islamic civilization, at least until modern times, because Muslims (unlike Christians and Buddhists) remained in contact with one another and with the formative ideals of their civilization. There is an integrality to their dialogue down through the ages which makes Islamic civilization susceptible of being studied historically. Muslims shared a common point of departure, a common vocabulary, and (until relatively late) several common languages for discussing a range of important topics.[27]

Hodgson's approach to civilizational studies has some important advantages. The notion of a dialogue with the formative ideals permits him to conceive of an Islamic civilization that is sufficiently generously defined so as to admit all

[27] See Hodgon's essay, 'The Unity of Later Islamic History,' *Journal of World History*, 5 (1960), 879–914, for a discussion of the problem of unity.

manner of subdialogues, parallel (often competing) cultural traditions, and regional variations. There is less chance of succumbing to the tendency to hypostasize with such a point of departure. Most importantly, this approach enables him to make room for a full treatment of the Shi'a variant of Islamic civilization in ways that neatly avoid having to refer to a putative Sunni 'orthodox' interpretation. By thus escaping from the sterile and shortsighted debate over what 'real' Islam might be, Hodgson has performed a major service. Similarly, his insistence on situating the origins of Islamic civilization in the context of the citied tradition of the Nile-to-Oxus, or what he calls (following Toynbee) 'Irano-Semitic' civilization, makes clear the extent to which the rise of Islam represents a logical development of historic trends in the region and in the ecumene, as well as a sharp break with them. It also reduces the dangers of implicitly assimilating the destiny of Islamic civilization to that of the Arabs, who were its first carriers. Hodgson comes to this conclusion not out of some unacknowledged philo-Iranism, or an anti-Arab bias, but as a consequence of his efforts to study Islamic civilization in a world historical context.

An important aspect of Hodgson's method of civilizational studies is the contention that the cultural dialectic is a twofold process: the dialogue of the piety-minded with the formative ideals of the civilization, on the one hand, and the less direct relationship between the material bases of the society and its cultural products (in short, its civilization), on the other. As we have seen, Hodgson posits that under agrarian conditions, all civilizations ('Western' as well as 'oriental') were much more directly constrained by their material surroundings than we are. Thus cultural florescences, whatever their duration and brilliance, could only proceed so far before they reached an impasse. On the surface, this seems to smack of either a shallow Marxism (prosperity = cultural greatness; depression = cultural decadence) or a crude organicism (civilizations have life cycles). Hodgson's argument is rather different. If all Agrarian-age civilizations (Western included) were limited in their capacity to generate continual innovation, then it follows that all were essentially conservative in their evaluation of prospective innovations. Consequently, in considering them, we must shed our modern biases which tend to equate success with change. The function of education in the Agrarian age, Hodgson contends, was less to teach students how to think than to teach them how to act, less to study observable facts than to inculcate cultural norms. In pursuing this line of reasoning, he arrives at a major reevaluation of the civilization of the middle periods of Islamic history (945–1500 C.E.), which have commonly been regarded as a period of decline. I shall have more to say about this aspect of his work in the next section. Finally, questions of decadence, or some supposed law of civilizations whereby decay and disintegration are inevitable, are ruled invalid when approached from such a perspective. Did the Middle East decline, or did the West rise? The most that Hodgson will allow is that 'a society may encourage investment in one sort of opportunity so heavily that it cannot quickly marshal its resources in other directions when new circumstances make other sorts of investment more profit-

able.' Thus 'the very excellence with which Islamicate culture had met the needs of the Agrarian age may have impeded its advance beyond it.'[28]

Hodgson's theory of civilizational studies suggests that an inherently conservative culture will be offset by the periodic interventions of the men and women of conscience in each era, whose insights forge new strands in the ongoing cultural dialogue. This approach is successful as a pedagogical device. The reader is encouraged to take seriously the historical context in which these figures lived, and not merely to content himself with the putative contributions of each to Islamic history. Without this method, the tendency of Hodgson's mind toward abstract thinking would totally overwhelm, and his argument would be less convincing. Yet there are serious objections which can be raised against a theory of civilizations which places such weight upon the experiences of a few quite atypical individuals. Not only is Hodgson's theory too much the affair of Weberian virtuosos; in addition, we are not informed of the criteria by which they have been selected. Hodgson's piety-minded individuals appear larger than life, while ordinary Muslim men and women, who had no such exalted notions of the faith and culture in which they were embedded, are largely unrecognized, their concerns unvoiced, their connections with the great tradition (and other lesser traditions) largely unexamined.

Hodgson's approach to civilizations is vulnerable on other grounds as well. A major conceptual problem lies in his idea that civilizations can be characterized by their formative ideals. But, we may inquire, how does one select which of the numerous ideals that can be extracted from the Qur'an and other authoritative Muslim writings are to be regarded as formative? While the problem of deciding what constitutes 'real Islam' is put out by the door (by admitting a plurality of dialogues), it returns by the window. Hodgson's personal moral stance was so bound up with his sense of what Islamic civilization was all about that his views about what constituted its formative ideals cannot help but be influenced. By emphasizing the personal moral responsibility of the individual Muslim before God, and even more so by advancing an interpretation of the principles of the *shari'a* which emphasizes the rights of individuals against the collectivity (especially the state), Hodgson has boldly challenged the less moralistic interpretations of Gibb, von Grunebaum, and others. He has also laid himself open to the same charge of hypostasizing which he levels at others. Thus while Hodgson's intensely personal and obsessively systematic approach to civilizational studies has much to commend it, it is by no means exempt from criticism. In the search for a more adequate approach to civilizational studies, the idealist assumptions on which it is constructed (despite the sophistication of their presentation) continue to be, for this reader at least, unacceptable. The important question remains: is it possible to write meaningfully about civilizations without making such assumptions? What seems needed is an approach to culture which makes of it neither a mere reflection of material conditions nor the unfolding of an

[28] *The Venture of Islam*, III, 204.

ideal essence through time. For all its Eurocentrism, the more open, less systematic approach of McNeill seems preferable.

THE PATTERNS OF ISLAMIC HISTORY

The Venture of Islam has a kind of architectonic structure, the complex patterning of whose major components is traced on a variety of different levels of abstraction. It also invokes a rather different periodization of Islamic history, or rather a whole series of them. What sort of Islamic history does this produce? How does Hodgson's version of that history jibe with the standard accounts? What, finally, are the chief advantages of his effort to insert Islamic history into a world historical context? In addressing these questions, I shall necessarily leave aside the numerous points of detail where Hodgson has erred, or where recent developments in the field have passed him by, since in a work of this scope there must inevitably be many. First, we look at Hodgson's interpretation of Islamic history.

On the most general level of abstraction, it is Hodgson's thesis that Islamic civilization served chiefly to institutionalize the more egalitarian and cosmopolitan tendencies in Irano-Semitic culture, giving a key role to the urban and communal expectations associated with the prominence of mercantile interests in the Nile-to-Oxus region. In a posthumous article, he argued that the development of these egalitarian and cosmopolitan features within the region has been the chief role of Islam in world history.[29]

On another level of abstraction, the history of Islamic civilization can be divided into three parts, the Formative Period, the Middle Periods, and the period of the Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times. One volume of *The Venture of Islam* is devoted to each. In the Formative Period (c. 600–945 C.E.), the chief developments are the replacement of Syriac and Pahlavi as the main vehicles of culture by Arabic, the emergence of a single comprehensive Muslim community in place of the earlier communal divisions of the region, and the failure of efforts to reestablish an absolutist agrarian empire, resulting in the development of a new, more flexible kind of social order. The Middle Periods (945–1503 C.E.) are marked by the emergence of an international society based upon the separation between state and society, the diffusion of Sufism, the development of Persian as a second major language of Islamic high culture, and the coming to maturity of the dialogue between the intellectual traditions. The Middle Periods were for Hodgson the high point of Islamic civilization, in which a cosmopolitan high culture coexisted with a society of great flexibility. The third phase of Islamic history, that of the Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times, is characterized by the reassertion of the old communal and regional divisions within the ecumene. New regional empires were formed: the Mughal, the Safavi, and the Ottoman, but they only partly compensated for the political

[29] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, 'The Role of Islam in World History,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1, 1 (1970), 99–123.

weakness of post-Mongol regimes. Cultural conservatism now worked to close off opportunities for innovation. Neither the revived Shi'ism of the Safavis, nor the Falsafized Sunnism of the Mughals and Ottomans proved adequate to the task of renewal. Simultaneously, the world historical context was altered by the rise of the West and the onset of the age of Technicalism. This sealed the fate of Islamic civilization – together with all other civilizations based upon major religious heritages.

Still a third level of analysis can be distinguished. *The Venture of Islam* is divided into six books, corresponding to the six phases in the development of the civilization: the period of Genesis (to 692 C.E.), the High Caliphate (to 945), the International Civilization (to 1258), the Age of Mongol Prestige (to 1503), the era of the Gunpowder Empires (to c. 1800) and Modern Times. This periodization of Islamic history contrasts revealingly with the standard dynastic chronological framework. It stresses continuities across dynastic lines and is keyed to the main phases in the evolution of the civilization. The six periods are anchored, as we shall see, by a set of social and cultural features (themselves forming ideal types) which enable Hodgson to set off one from another. The unity of Islamic history is above all dependent upon the integrality of the dialogue down through history.

Alongside these periodizations of Islamic history, Hodgson offers a number of specialized chronologies which focus on more specific developments. For example, there are tables that contrast significant developments in Islamic civilization with contemporary events in China, India, and Europe. There are also charts of Muslim philosophic schools, Sufi brotherhoods, Shi'a geneologies, Belletrists, and the like. As the canvas on which he works becomes larger, Hodgson adds tables that show events across the Islamic world, region by region. In this way, he gets the reader to develop an eye for tracing particular strands of Islamic culture, while simultaneously keeping the civilization itself in world historical context. We have definitively left behind the world of linear political time, to enter a realm in which broad historical patterns are orchestrated in ways that contrast with and reinforce one another in a variety of rhythms and tempi over the period of a millennium. In itself, this constitutes an enormous enrichment of our understanding of the unfolding of the civilization of Islam through time.

As a cultural history, *The Venture of Islam* traces the evolution of the intellectual traditions of the Nile-to-Oxus region from their inception to their final undermining in the modern world. Hodgson distinguishes three main intellectual traditions that have operated in the region in the post-Axial age: prophetic monotheism, Greek natural science and philosophy, and the Persian imperial tradition. With the coming of Islam, these traditions did not die out but were reformulated along Islamicate lines. The first and most important was the development of the Islamic religious sciences: Qur'anic exegesis, *ḥadīth* criticism, and the study of *fiqh*. Hodgson was concerned with showing how Islam refashioned and continued preexisting themes in the Irano-Semitic tradition of

prophetic monotheism. The touchstone of his analysis is his emphasis upon the formative effect of the assertion of *shar'ī* concepts of legal and social relations upon the social and political organization of the community of believers. The second major intellectual tradition which gradually became folded into the emerging Islamic cultural dialogue was the Persian tradition of absolutist rule. Hodgson shows how the development of the courtly culture of *adab* built upon, yet also transformed, this tradition as it came into dialogue with the other emerging Islamic intellectual traditions. The tradition of Greek natural science and philosophy (essentially the legacy of Hellenism) is the third major avenue along which Islamic thought tended to develop. Like the adab tradition, initially at odds with the concerns of the piety-minded, the tradition of *falsafah* gradually became incorporated into the Islamic dialogue, as a result especially of the work of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. By the end of the High Caliphate, the intellectual traditions had achieved fully Islamic form. From then onward, their mutual interpenetration and interaction helped to shape the fabric of Islamic culture. By the sixteenth century, while the capacity for self-renewal of the civilizational dialogue had not totally disappeared, increasingly the natural tendencies toward cultural conservatism of the Agrarian age had reasserted themselves. Accordingly, the Safavi, no less than the Ottoman and the Mughal, efforts at a cultural renewal were unsuccessful. In modern times the Islamic heritage has had diminished relevance to Muslims, as under the impact of technicalism, it no less than the other principal religious heritages had had to contend with a radically altered context for historic action. This, in highly schematic form, is the structure of the history of Islamic culture as it is presented by Hodgson.

Corresponding to each of Hodgson's six phases of Islamic history is a political formation, presented in the guise of an ideal type: Arab rule, caliphal absolutism, the *a'yān/amīr* system, the military patronage stage, the gunpowder empires, modern nation-states. During the first phase of Islamic history, society was organized around the principle of the primacy of the Arabs. Political legitimacy was based upon the notion of *jamā'ah* – the necessity of unity among the ruling caste of Arab Muslims.

During the phase of caliphal absolutism, which began in late Marwanid times and continued till 945 C.E., the old tradition of Persian kingship powerfully influenced the organization of the state around a centralized imperial bureaucracy and army. Although many of the piety-minded opposed caliphal absolutism, for several centuries it constituted a potent principle of social and political organization. Ultimately, however, the forces of cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism in the region most closely identified with mercantile interests found themselves overly constrained by such a system.

As a result, Hodgson argues, a decentralized and flexible new international society emerged in the Early Middle Period, with its own implicit balance of social forces. This society, which Hodgson characterizes as the a'yān/amīr system, showed a remarkable openness and malleability. Several important

formative elements helped to secure this trend. One was the militarization of agrarian authority, a process that began during the phase of caliphal absolutism. Through the evolution of the institution of *iqtā'*, a new group of largely Turkish military rulers, the amīrs, came into existence. The political structure of the state and the extraction of agrarian revenues were decentralized into many autonomous and quasi-autonomous units. The caliphate itself lapsed into political irrelevance. Meanwhile, over and against the amīrs another powerful social force was emerging: the mercantile interests in the cities and the newly prominent *'ulamā'*, or more generally, the a'yān. Their strength derived from the legitimacy that the 'ulamā' incarnated as the chief interpreters of the sharī'a (whose dictates served to focus and organize the activities of the community) as well as from the medial economic position of the merchants. During this highly cosmopolitan phase of Islamic history, the cultural dialogue reached its widest extent, and the interaction among the various strands that composed it reached its greatest intensity. A final formative movement in this period was the granting of *droit de cité* to the exponents of *ṭarīqah* Sufism, and the crystallization of the various *ṭuruq*. This greatly increased the penetration of the faith into lower social orders and aided the process of its diffusion abroad.

The Mongol catastrophe put an end to the international society of the Early Middle Period and inaugurated a new phase of Islamic history: the age of Mongol prestige. The Islamic successor states that emerged in the wake of the Mongol conquest were powerfully influenced by the dynastic prestige of the conquerors. Hodgson develops the concept of the military/patronage state as a means of highlighting its characteristic social formation. The predominantly Turkish elites who held sway during this period conceived of the state administration and the army as extensions of the royal household. Following the Mongol example, they were great benefactors of culture, founders of cities, and builders of architectural masterpieces. The influence of steppe institutions upon the social and political life in the Nile-to-Oxus region reached its apex during this period.

As the sixteenth century began these states gave way to the more stable gunpowder empires of early modern times, among which the Mughal, Safavi, and Ottoman empires were the most important. The reassertion of the absolutist tradition in the region, together with the continuance and further development of many of the basic characteristics of the military patronage states, produced a new age of Muslim greatness both political (where their achievements are evident) and intellectual; although clearly marked by the conservative spirit, Hodgson argues that these regimes were far from stagnant culturally, and that some sectors experienced significant innovation.

Of course, the forces of change were already flowing in another direction. With the advent of the age of Technicalism, human history entered a decisive phase. In this section of the work, Hodgson focuses first on the origins of the Western Transmutation, and then on its impact around the globe. European economic and political dominance over the lands of Islam is followed in our own century by the rise of nationalism and the emergence of nation states.

While the idea of technicalism constitutes a potent conceptual tool, the literature upon which Hodgson draws in his treatment of the modern period is at least a generation out of date. Given the meagre theoretical and empirical literature upon which he draws, it is remarkable how well he does.[30] Book Six existed only in draft form at Hodgson's death, and has been published substantially as it was. This is unfortunate, as the weaknesses of Book Six mar one's overall impressions of *The Venture of Islam*, and certainly lessen its suitability as an undergraduate text. There is a deeper cause for dissatisfaction with Book Six, to which Hodgson himself is sensitive: by the modern period, the concept of Islamic civilization has lost whatever utility it may once have had. The continuous cultural dialogue on which he bases the concept was profoundly disrupted by the reassertion of regional languages and traditions within the ecumene. Whatever international elite culture may once have existed was seriously undermined by 1800, such that (for example) Moroccan Muslims could communicate only with difficulty with their African or Indonesian coreligionists. In some ways it might have been a neater conclusion to end the work with the dawning of the age of Technicalism. But one can see why Hodgson was tempted to carry it up to the contemporary period. This makes it all the more regrettable that he did not live to revise the final sections of his manuscript.

For Hodgson, the unity of Islamic history was a function of the ongoing dialogue of successive generations of Muslims with the formative ideals of the civilization. Concretely, this meant a preoccupation with the elaboration of Islamic doctrine and piety by the 'ulamā', the corps of religious specialists charged with maintaining the integrity and vitality of the faith. In this study the concept of the sharī'a looms as particularly important, since it provides the foundation for Hodgson's interpretation. It shapes his treatment of the Formative Period, provides the basic explanation of the operation of the a'yān/amīr system of the Middle Periods (where it reaches a kind of apotheosis), and constitutes (with the concept of Sufism, on which more in a moment) the guiding concept in explaining the unity of the later periods.

From the first pages of *The Venture of Islam* it is apparent that the term 'Sharī'a' has a special importance for Hodgson: it serves to designate not only Islamic law, but the central core of the civilization. The origins of the religious impulses that gave rise to Islam, Hodgson traces to the ethical concerns of Irano-Semitic prophetic monotheism. The working out of the egalitarian and populistic implications of the original Qur'anic message provides the motive

[30] For example, virtually all of the literature on the social and economic history of Turkey, Iran, and the Arab East has appeared since Book Six was written. While the bibliography includes such classics as Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* and Bernard Lewis's *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, it is unclear from reading the text that Hodgson was able to make much use even of these works. Of theoretical literature, such works as Barrington Moore, Jr.'s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* and Eric Wolf's *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, not to speak of the entire critical literature on modernization theories, have appeared since Book Six was written. There are worlds of thought and experience which separate the early 1960s, when this section was being written, from our own.

force of Islamic history. By the end of the Formative Period, a religious law binding on all Muslims had crystallized in response to the egalitarian and populistic concerns of the piety-minded. The sharī'a provided Muslims with a focus for self-realization: its social and legal patterns gradually penetrated virtually all aspects of life, determining the organization of the community and carving out an autonomous arena where the 'ulamā' were supreme, over and against the courtly culture of the Abbasids and their successors. The chapter in Book Two on the shar'ī Islamic vision is a brilliant presentation of the process by which the sharī'a came into being. There and in the following chapter on Muslim personal piety, Hodgson emphasizes the potency of the Qur'an and of the image of the early Islamic community in providing an authoritative model of the just society and a focal point for worship.

However convincingly presented, this analysis contains the seeds of those same essentialist difficulties that Hodgson has rightly deplored in the work of others. By the time that we reach the chapter 'Cultural Patterning in Islamdom and the Occident,' where he presents an extended contrast between the two civilizations in the thirteenth century, Hodgson presents the sharī'a as nothing less than the organizing principle of Islamic society. In a comparison between Christianity and Islam as frameworks of religious life, he underscores the contrast between a religion whose central theme is the demand for personal responsiveness to redemptive love in an uncorrupted world with one whose theme is the demand for personal responsibility for the moral ordering of the natural world. He then traces the practical implications of each for the organization of the social order and the elaboration of culture. Thus he emphasizes the contractualism of Muslim civilization (the primacy of the rights of the individual over the collective) against what he calls the hierarchical corporativism of the medieval Occident: the a'yān/amīr system contrasted with medieval feudalism, the arabesque contrasted with the Gothic cathedral. Hodgson's argument is a tour de force, but ultimately the level of abstraction at which it is pitched renders it unconvincing.

Sufism is the other major concept in Hodgson's discussion of the unity of the Islamic civilizational dialogue. Taken together, the sections on Sufism are one of the best concise presentations of the development of Islamic mysticism, a splendidly sensitive introduction to a complex and sprawling phenomenon. But as contrasted with his careful distinctions in presenting the concept of the sharī'a, Hodgson's discussion of Sufism is informed by no such analytical power. He defines Sufism as mysticism, but neither is ever adequately explained. Polymorphous and often profane, the variety of Sufism and its resistance to intellectualizing elude Hodgson's categories. Only on the level of high love mysticism (the Sufism of Bistami, Rumi, and al-Ghazali) can Hodgson bring to bear his elaborate conceptual schemes and his 'science of compassion' in ways that inform and enlighten. Brief sections on how to read Sufi texts, and a sustained meditation on a passage from Rumi's *Masnavi*, demonstrate the appeal and cogency of this method. Against the Sufism of the popular turuq, saint cults, and

curing practices, Hodgson is powerless. At this point, the limits of his cultural elitism come out most sharply. In his scandalized attitude toward the corruption and degeneracy of the popular brotherhoods, Hodgson brings to mind the puritanical moralism of the reforming 'ulamā' who are the chief heroes of *The Venture of Islam*. Those who seek a sociological, rather than a merely logical, presentation of the role of Sufism in shaping the fabric of Islamic societies should look elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

As should be evident from the foregoing, I regard *The Venture of Islam* as a remarkably impressive achievement. It has a richness and complexity beside which all other accounts of Islamic civilization seem pale. In many ways, its appearance represents a culmination of the Western tradition of Islamic studies. Necessarily, such an undertaking must be a highly personal one, and this *The Venture of Islam* is to an unusual degree. Yet Hodgson was also unusually self-conscious of the epistemological assumptions of the tradition in which he had been trained, and has consistently sought to place Islamic civilization in a world historical context. It is this feature of the work, in my opinion, which gives it lasting importance. Otherwise the cranky personal obsessions that frequently threaten to distract the reader could not be kept successfully at bay. Because *The Venture of Islam* is both so personal and so relentlessly impersonal a work, it is a very great feat of the historical imagination.

Hodgson's most important achievement, and the place where he had the most to teach us all (non-Islamics scholars included), lies in his effort to devise a new framework for the writing of world history. After reading him, even those of us who never attempt a hemispheric interregional approach to world history will become aware of the pitfalls of any less inclusive approach; his *Venture* points to the necessity for a thoroughgoing reappraisal of many of our central assumptions about the historical process. By continually seeking to insert the story of Islamic civilization into the history of human literate society, Hodgson has broken sharply with the old paradigms and taken a major step toward a new kind of history. His use of ideal types and his careful definition of key concepts provide a refreshing change from the smug assumptions that have guided past efforts at a history of Islamic civilization. The attempt to situate the rise of the West in a world historical context, in particular, merits the serious attention of all those concerned to understand the great transmutation which separates us from the world we have lost.

Hodgson's attempt to rehabilitate civilization as a useful concept in historical studies (and hence in the orientalist tradition) is more problematical. As I have endeavoured to show, the attempt rests, in the final analysis, on Hodgson's use of the concept of sharī'a. Despite a serious effort to divest the study of civilizations from racialist assumptions, hypostasizing, and other errors, the idealist assumptions which lie behind the concept of sharī'a push him irrevocably toward

cultural essentialism and thereby vitiate much of his achievement. While denying that he is engaged in a search for the 'real Islam,' Hodgson's venture is one that ultimately seeks to identify Islam with its formative ideals, and thus transposes the search from the level of sect (e.g., Sunni *vs.* Shi'a) to that of the religion as a whole. To the extent that it is possible to write a history of a civilization without falling victim to the old mistakes, one can applaud Hodgson's effort. But to the extent that historians are increasingly concerning themselves with the social and economic history of Muslims, rather than with their 'civilization,' Hodgson's venture appears as a splendid anachronism.

The Venture of Islam is both an original synthetic account of the civilization of Islam whole and entire and a textbook for university undergraduates. It has the virtues of both sorts of works: it is very teacherly in places (it offers advice on how to understand Persian miniatures, Sufi writings, the forms of Muslim piety, and the work of specific writers like Tabari, Rumi, and Ibn Khaldun among others), and very scholarly and stimulating in others. By seeking to cover the entire range of Islamic history, and to do so within a single narrative framework, it has made a unique and important contribution to historical scholarship. But there are some important defects in trying to do both things at once. Thus, for example, *The Venture of Islam* is written on so abstract a level that it is difficult to teach to undergraduates. It also presumes far too much of students (or even colleagues) in the way of background. It utilizes a complex and eccentric language which is often distracting, such that Hodgson's thought often seems overly dense and impenetrable. If in the end the work is successful both as text and as scholarly synthesis (on balance I believe that it is), this is due to the high level of the author's personal engagement, which tends to call forth a correspondingly high-level engagement on the part of the reader.

The Venture of Islam challenges the reader on a variety of levels at once in the manner of a Sufi tale. It is mentally and morally stretching both for rank beginners (who miss the esoteric, abstract discussions) and more experienced readers (who will find it full of stimulating insights, often wrong-headed *obiter dicta*, and methodological encomia). I have found it endlessly fascinating and provocative: despite its many difficulties, *The Venture of Islam* deserves the widest possible audience.

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