

HOMAGE TO EDMUND BOSWORTH

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In the normal way of things I would have hoped to offer a (more or less!) traditional academic article for the *Festschrift* in Bosworth's honour, but age and health problems have colluded to frustrate my purpose. However, by the kind accommodation of the editor of this volume, I am allowed to pay a direct tribute from personal experience, and from the heart, rather than obliquely by way of research and reasoned argument.

In those studies associated with the Middle East and the Islamic world, over the last 40 years or so, Edmund Bosworth has played a part of unique significance and force. Virtually no other scholar of our day, in the whole Western world, has contributed so much, in so many areas, and at such diverse levels. And all this he has done without forfeiting any of his qualities as a human being, for he is essentially what the Irish are reputed to call "a lovely man" and Yiddish-speakers a *mensch*. There are, in my own experience, only a small minority of academics about whom this could be sincerely said, but I should be most surprised if any—let alone many—would rise up to contest, or even qualify, such a judgment in this case. Should such there be, "bad cess" to them anyway! If Bosworth has been at all driven by ambitions, they have been reasonable, controlled, and always directed towards the practical end of "getting a job done".

But for the moment I will leave aside the strictly personal. I suppose that virtually any of Edmund Bosworth's colleagues in the field, if asked to label him succinctly, would designate him as a "historian" and the "longtime British editor of the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam*". Yet while such categorisations would be valid in essence, they would convey a most inadequate idea of this scholar's stature and breadth.

In the first place, in his work as a historian, he is that rarity, a "straight" historian (a First Class in Modern History at Oxford) who—after "auditing" various Middle Eastern courses while at Oxford and then working for two years as a Civil Servant—went on, while no longer in his first youth, to the serious academic study of Middle

Eastern culture and languages. This he did in the Edinburgh school, gaining another First Class degree and finally the Ph.D. (Most historians, and other discipline-based scholars, in our field have—for various reasons—found this an impossibly hard row to hoe, and consequently must get along as best they can without a convincing mastery of all the tools. At the same time, those who do fully possess such tools have to pursue their work in areas of history, sociology, philosophy, and so forth without ever meeting complete “disciplinary” acceptance in most cases. The overall work done is rarely negligible, but the situation on both sides is far from ideal.)

Secondly—and by no means unrelated to both his personality and his earlier career-paths—Bosworth is an unusually wide-ranging historian. For the most part his “period” is pre-modern, but he could not rightly be classified as a medievalist, certainly not in any restricted sense. His “geographical” interests have tended towards Iran and Central Asia, but are not limited to those areas by any means. (It should be particularly remarked that he has played an outstanding part in the great Columbia Ṭabarī project, as both editor and contributor: this could be seen as a happy union of all his professional talents.) Again, his historical bent, while ostensibly political (or religio-political, as is necessarily the case in addressing the world of Islam), takes into its purview social conditions, economic structures, both the high culture and the sub-cultures—and much else besides. And always his investigations and conclusions rest on the solid foundations of primary documents and texts, not merely on translations or secondary works.

Thirdly, and not least, Bosworth writes lucidly, even elegantly, and in an unfailingly interesting manner. Those scholars who have had occasion to consult professionally his close on 20 books, and his hundreds of articles—that is to say virtually everyone in the field—must often have lingered to enjoy the experience for its own sake, for here is not a trace of the turgidity, dullness, and desiccation which some regard as the essential hallmarks of sound scholarship. I do not know if he at all subscribes to G.M. Trevelyan’s apprehension of Clio as the traditional “muse”, but—with all his scientific accuracy and objectivity—he certainly remains a humanist in the best classical sense.

In his work as a pivotal editor of *EI*², Edmund Bosworth has performed prodigies of heroic endeavour, miraculously preserving in the process his sanity and even a charitable and boyish good-humour. It is difficult to imagine the project having stayed alive, let alone

prospered as it has, without his vital contribution. If only his magic touch could be invoked in *all* such ventures!

All who have edited even a very modest collection or two are likely to retain acute, and often excruciating, memories of their dealings with contributors on the one hand and publishers on the other. With the former there are the "no shows", the promised articles or chapters that simply never arrive; while others arrive late, often impossibly so. There are the mildly or severely substandard offerings, requiring some surgery or, in extreme cases, a gentle quietus. Then, again, there come the hobby-horses, not infrequently ridden to the wildest lengths. Still more difficult to handle are the *prima donnas*, those who demand special treatment or insist on their perfect ability to "perform" in a language not their own and all too imperfectly mastered. And so on and so forth; and however lucky editors may be with many of their contributors, these substantial minorities must always be reckoned with, especially in a project of such vast and enduring proportions as the *Encyclopaedia*. Yet I have rarely heard Bosworth refer to such trials and vexations other than casually and obliquely, much less in a tone of complaint or sympathy-seeking. His evident integrity and sincerity, his decency and tact, his serious and generous concern—all these have surely been drawn on heavily, constantly, and to good effect with all but the most recalcitrant. One thing I do know: on numerous occasions he has had no choice but to write or rewrite the needed material, at very short notice, in a modern version of the ancient accomplishment of *irtijāl*. In such circumstances, it is not the least of his virtues that he could always muster the energy, the pragmatic good-sense, the dedication, and the professional expertise to perform this uncalled-for exercise. Such benevolent denizens are rarely encountered in the groves of academe, not only because they are few in number but by virtue also of their inherent shyness and modesty.

On the other side of the editing operation, I believe Bosworth's experience with the publishers to have been reasonably good, partly perhaps due to the terms under which the project was conceived and set up, and partly as an intrinsic factor of the publishers' own longstanding professional and specialised experience. But as we all know, publishers, their own in-house editors, and printers can all and always—at least potentially—introduce problems of their own, often not to be resolved without confrontation and compromise in which the rôle of the academic editors must be crucial and ultimately

decisive. To Edmund Bosworth's qualities so far enumerated must here be added clarity of thought and firmness of decision.

To turn now from the scholar and the editor, the public figure known to all concerned with the culture of the Middle East and the world of Islam, to some more personal impressions of my own. My personal knowledge of Bosworth goes back some thirty years.

In the mid-60s, when I was striving to build the new Department of Islamic (later Middle East and Islamic) Studies at the University of Toronto, I was sufficiently taken with what I had seen and heard of Bosworth and his work to invite him to Toronto as a professorial Visitor for one year. It was clear enough that, in doing so, I hoped (if everything proved satisfactory on both sides) to convert the visiting appointment into a substantive one as soon as practicable. (My hopes were shared by my own colleague Roger Savory, who had himself followed such a course a few years earlier with what has remained a most notable success to the present day.) In the event, and for various reasons, fortune did not favour us, and Bosworth returned to Britain, but for some while the decision did seem to hang in the balance. Over the years since then, he (often accompanied by his wife Annette) has come back to us on several occasions, sometimes to give a guest-lecture or two, but also to visit his old colleagues and other friends. In this way he has remained *au courant* of developments at the University and in the Toronto area generally (to say nothing of Canada at large) to a degree that few, if any, non-residents could claim to be.

His "visiting" year (1965-6) was a remarkable professional and personal success, with all the attributes mentioned above coming fully into play—even at his then relatively young age. Having myself weathered (and later experienced vicariously) the several problems faced by foreign scholars trying—if only half-heartedly in some cases—to adapt to the Canadian social and academic scene, I was filled with admiration at Edmund Bosworth's smooth entry and assimilation. He truly has the gift for making, in the literal sense of the term, "the best" of any situation. With colleagues and students alike his popularity was immediate and sustained. He worked assiduously in all areas (teaching, research, and even "administration"), never—like some "visitors"—treating his appointment as a sinecure and a quasi-vacation with pay, not to say, "a bit of a lark". Moreover, his industry would have counted for much less, had it not been grounded in a quick intelligence and the ability to absorb and apply. With all

his natural Yorkshire frankness, his many questions and comments were patently intended to elicit information to be put to practical use, so as to save himself and others from embarrassing misunderstandings: he never, to my knowledge, committed the very common, and deeply resented, cardinal sin of patronising Canadians and telling them how things were done in Britain, especially at Oxbridge. I suspect that this was because, again, he quickly appreciated that many Canadians, native or immigrant, in fact already knew such things by personal experience of Britain, the USA, and other lands and had already come to conclusions of their own.

Nor was the success of this period confined to his academic life, for he displayed a like keenness to get to know Canadians and Canadian life generally. I had been fortunate to secure for him and his family a year's rental on the house of another colleague, in West Toronto. Such arrangements sometimes bring heartaches on all sides, but I believe this was a virtually unqualified good-deal. Certainly, I had rightly judged both parties to be "reasonable people". (A few years later, and there might have been the extra advantage of the rapid-transit subway-extension to that area, as he himself wryly observed on a subsequent visit.) Helped partly by their Anglican affiliation, the Bosworths rapidly gained a place in the local community, and I gather that many of the friends then made are still visited whenever Edmund and Annette come to Toronto. Indeed, their "socialisation" has extended beyond Toronto and its region into Ontario generally and other parts of Canada as well. Ironically, I must admit that they have made a much more wholehearted "go" of this than I myself have ever done.

Had they stayed, there is little doubt that (as with the Savorys and a few others) theirs would have been one of the most notable cases of assimilation on record from that golden age of European immigration into Canada, the 1950s and '60s. As in other societies and academic institutions in the Western world, they would have had to contend later with a decline, a loss of quality, and even some decay; but their coping with these problems in their native land would suggest that they would have survived philosophically, not to say optimistically and positively, in Toronto equally well.

Edmund may be unaware (unless our tongues have slipped) that he is still fondly and familiarly remembered at Toronto as "Bozzy"—a sort of cross between Dickens' "Boz" and Disraeli's "Dizzy", which in itself perhaps lends a reassuring 19th-century flavour to one who

is otherwise "always up with the latest", and even often "ahead of the game". Annette too is most kindly recalled, but (as she may be relieved to hear) without any sobriquet of her own. No doubt, though, she has picked up one or more in the course of life with Edmund, always a ready man with a quip or an apt turn of phrase!

Floreant ad multos annos!