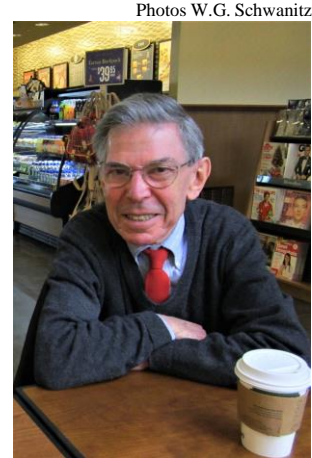




## Lionel Gossman

### *Our Fine Friend, a Mensch*

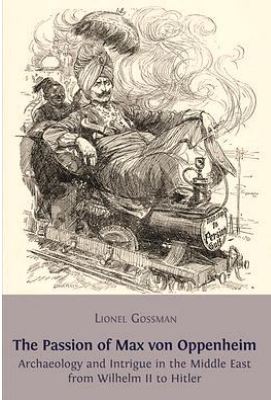
This December we exchanged the usual number of emails, for a decade all in all a few hundred. I was not so much alarmed by the Covid-19 conditions. As Lionel wrote, “well, maybe not good, but tolerable, essentially self-quarantined, with basically very few outings. Just a daily walk in the neighborhood... it would be prudent to hang on for a bit longer and to meet at a place where we can sit outside. Maybe Friday’s now has outside tables.” Then he stated that “for someone who has never been seriously ill for 91 years, this is also psycho-logically wearying. As for the outcome, who knows? Just wanted to say why I have been out of touch and am likely to remain so. Hope you and family are OK, and Tim is thriving.” Our dear friend passed on January 11 in Philadelphia.



Photos W.G. Schwanitz

Lionel Gossman 1929-2021

#### The Passion of Max von Oppenheim



We look back to a long friendship. He was so delightful, a happy academic and a restless mind, always ready for new insights spiced with good humor. A Scottish-American scholar of French literature, having taught Romance Languages at Johns Hopkins University and Princeton University, his *oeuvre* is enormous. I was especially struck by his book on “The Passion of Max von Oppenheim: Archaeology and Intrigue in the Middle East from Wilhelm II to Hitler.” Lionel was a meticulous researcher and so mindful to deal with the past carefully. I met students of his carrying later his best humanistic and multi-lingual legacy of the *Weltbürger*. Let me just mention some of his findings on Max von Oppenheim (1860-1946).

Among the book’s epigraphs (of course Shakespeare’s *Othello*), is one by John Buchan’s 1916 *Greenmantle*: “You never know what will start off a Jihad!” Therewith, Lionel nailed much of the story of this enigmatic and intriguing character. He gleaned his all-important 1914 memorandum for the Kaiser (and the caliph) that lays out in great detail a strategy for inciting jihad among the Muslim subjects of Germany’s enemies – the British, the French, and the Russians – against their colonial masters during World War One. He found his political activities in both world wars “puzzling and unsettling, for he came from a highly assimilated, and strongly nationalist German-Jewish milieu,” the so-called “Kaiser-Juden.”

In his introduction Lionel wonders that there never seems to have been the slightest crack in Max von Oppenheim’s absolute identification with and dedication to Germany. He always insisted that he won the confidence of the Bedouins not, as many other explorers had done, by adopting the disguise of a Muslim Arab but by presenting himself as nothing but the German aristocrat he was (or strove to be). For a deep revision of Arab past since the Great War started, Lionel’s book becomes a key work: what happened to Islam since 1914?

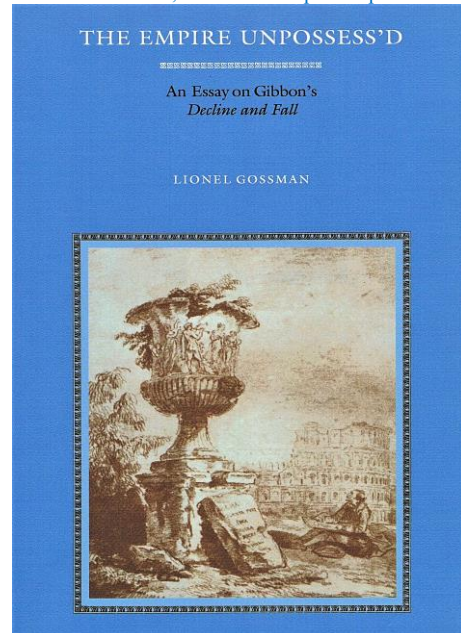
Jeffrey Lionel, so his full name, right away extended his love onto my family, including my younger daughter Katja. Here is how my son Timothy W. remembers him: My debts to Lionel would be hard to pin down in a book, let alone a few paltry lines. In addition to the usual words that come to mind when thinking of lost friends – he was kind, courteous, a good listener, a delightful conversationalist, witty, well-meaning, generous – my mind is filled with the thanks I owe him, as he gave me memories of countless enjoyable moments. And he gave me books, far too many to list here.

I especially enjoyed one he penned himself: “The Empire Unpossess’d: An Essay on Gibbon’s Decline and Fall.” In addition to being an erudite scholarly analysis of Gibbon’s influential work, this book is invigorated by Lionel’s charming wit. The introduction shows how his analysis of “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” had personal relevance for someone who lived through the decline of the British Empire, of which he always considered himself a subject out of “piety, affection, and gratitude.”

Lionel speaks of his generation that after the Second World War “the seemingly vast power we had dreamed of turning to noble ends had been changed, in an astonishingly short time, into a kind of political Pantaloon, still commanding enough strength on the international stage to obstruct a few straggling opponents, but devoid of grandeur, heroism, or dignity.”

Lionel wrote his wonderful work with keen intellect and joy, which comes to light in every chapter. I have read many good books, but Lionel’s book is so far the only time I have had the opportunity to personally thank the author for enriching my life through such excellent, thoughtful writing. I cherish his book even more because I have his signature on it not once but twice – once when he gave it to me, and once after we discussed it and Lionel penciled in “And he actually read it!!”

L. Gossman 1981, 2009: *The Empire Unpossess’d*



I have already become effusive by just discussing one of my many debts to this brilliant scholar and dear friend. So, I’ll cut myself short and jump to my biggest debt: Lionel introduced me to my best friend, Gio. Though I can no longer enjoy Lionel’s brilliance and wit, he brought me together with a kindred spirit who shares a likewise intelligent humor. Whenever I laugh at one of Gio’s so amusing academic anecdotes, I will also give my thanks to Lionel for being my good friend not once but twice – once himself, and once by enabling a once-in-a-lifetime friendship.

Indeed, we will miss Lionel very much, his wisdom in our lunches at Market Fair, photo, and the pure joy of spending quality time together.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz