

Towards Building
a British Islam
New Muslims' Perspectives

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Chapter 5

Post-World War II Case Studies:
Case Study II – Gai Eaton or
Hasan Abdal Hakim

Eaton Charles Le Gai
050609

Charles Le Gai Eaton (or Hasan Abdal Hakim) was one of the most prominent and highly respected Muslim converts in Britain. After his recent death early this year, he was described as 'a towering patriarch of British Islam'.¹ His departure was also viewed as the 'end of an era for Britain'.² These comments may sound glossy or emotional, but they certainly reflect sincere and deep appreciation for the comfort that this man and his books have offered people in the confused world in which we live today. Kind, articulate and straight to the point, Eaton was a man of integrity and intellectual sincerity and a seeker of the Truth. He was born in Switzerland to British parents on 1 January 1921; his father, Francis Errington, was a prominent lawyer while his mother, Ruth, was, according to him, 'a feminist, an Ibsenite, a Wagnerian and an admirer of the German philosopher Nietzsche'.³ His mother was the dominant figure in his upbringing, and he was much closer to her than his father, sharing her bed until the age of six. Eaton was sent to various schools in both Britain and Switzerland and before the age of 14 he was sent to Charterhouse, one of the original nine public schools in England. When he finished school, he went to King's College, Cambridge, to study history. After graduating shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Eaton was commissioned into the British Army in 1941. Leaving the army in 1943, he worked as a stage manager and actor. In 1944, he married the famous actress, Kay Clayton, but their marriage was short-lived although it produced his first son, named Leo. From 1945 until his retirement in 1977, he worked in many professions: actor, journalist, university lecturer and finally diplomat in many countries such as Jamaica, Egypt, India and Ghana. From 1977 to 1999, he worked part-time in the Islamic Centre in London as a consultant on Islamic issues and also as the editor of the journal, *The Islamic Quarterly*. In 1956, he married again; his second wife, the Jamaican artist, Corah Hamilton, stayed Christian until her

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yet another dimension to our understanding of his personality as well as of the times in which he lived. Since he is not well-known as a philosopher, this treatise had been ignored by subsequent medieval authors “with the interesting exception of Ibn Taymiyya” (p. 715), who commented on it, reproducing almost half of Thābit’s text in his *Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘aql wal-naql* (p. 729). The translators highlight the importance of Thābit’s work in their introduction (pp. 715-33), and present the actual text, and its translation with a commentary.

Thābit ibn Qurra, a one-time money changer from a remote town, played a significant role in the transformation of the “Archimedean tradition in infinitesimal geometry and that of Apollonius in the geometry of conics and the geometry of position...[and] also had a contribution to make to the philosophical tradition in subjecting Aristotelian physics, and the ontology whose vehicle it was, to an orderly criticism in aid of a mathematical formalism that took its inspiration from Plato” (p. vi).

Thābit ibn Qurra: Science and Philosophy in Ninth-Century Baghdad is an important work that has the potential of opening several fresh lines of research both about the life and work of a very gifted and eager man who brought critical attitudes to science, as well as in the broader discipline of history of Islamic science, specifically regarding a period that has received “snap judgements that researchers are too often tempted to substitute for the historical framework that is not to hand” (p. v).

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CHARLES LE GAI EATON:
THE LAST OF A GROUP OF UNIQUE MEN LEAVES US

Muzaffar Iqbal

By the time I was 15, I had discovered that there was something called ‘philosophy’ and that the word meant ‘love of wisdom’. Wisdom was what I sought, so the satisfaction of my need must lie hidden in these heavy books written by wise men. With a feeling of intense excitement, like an explorer already in sight of the undiscovered land, I ploughed through Descartes, Kant, Hume, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Bertrand Russell, or else read works which explained their teachings. It was not long before I realized that something was wrong. I might as well have been eating sand as seeking nourishment from this quarter. These men knew nothing. They were only speculating, spinning ideas out of their own poor heads, and anyone can speculate (including a school boy). How could a 15 or 16-year-old have had the impudence to dismiss the whole of Western secular philosophy as worthless? One does not have to be mature to distinguish between what the Qur’an calls *ẓann* (‘opinion’) and true Knowledge. At the same time my mother’s constant insistence that I should take no notice of what others thought or said obliged me to trust my own judgment. Western culture treated these ‘philosophers’ as great men, and students in universities studied their works with respect. But what was that to me?”

Charles Le Gai Eaton (Hasan ‘Abdul-Ḥakīm)

With his departure from Earth on February 26, 2010, at the ripe age of 89, the world has lost the last of a group of European converts to Islam who found the spiritual certainty and veritable truth of Islam through the life and works of

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