

Martin Gilbert and the Mosaic of Modern History

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Abstract

This bibliographical essay addresses the work of Martin Gilbert, one of the most prolific modern historians and one whose writing has been universally acclaimed. For discussion, the essay divides his body of work into several categories, each reflecting one of his areas of interest.

Since Gilbert has been the official Churchill biographer since the death of Randolph Churchill, the essay treats the Churchill works first. These are followed by sections on Jewish studies, modern European histories, map work and atlases, and film and television work. The essay concludes with a couple paragraphs about his most recent project.

The writers find common threads that Gilbert follows as he turns from one subject to another. They point out his many strengths, which far outweigh his flaws. These strengths include a plethora of fascinating details, historical facts with which Gilbert allows the story to tell itself. He leaves interpretation to the reader, who may draw his or her own conclusions based upon the bounty of Sir Martin's copious research.

It is perhaps a bit unusual to present a bibliographical study of a historian still in his most productive years, but Martin Gilbert is an unusual historian. A discussion of his work to date is both informative and constructive for several reasons. Although he has only neared the mid-point of his career, he has published far more than the vast majority of his contemporaries. Also, his work has received near universal acclaim. Part of its appeal may lie in his ability to break down the huge panorama of modern history into individual bits of human experience that the reader readily understands. He brings overwhelming events, statistics, and characters within our grasp. As an artist, he would be an impressionist, painting colorful patches, which we see, as we step back, blend into a complete picture.

The core of Gilbert's work is centered in the Churchill books. As the official Churchill biographer, he has written six of an eight-volume Churchill biography, having taken up the project at Volume III, after the death in 1968 of Randolph Churchill, the project's instigator. Gilbert joined a team of research assistants in 1962, working with the younger Churchill on the earlier volumes. There can be little doubt that his earlier work in *The Appeasers* and in *The Roots of Appeasement* led him to begin this landmark work on Churchill and that the later histories and Jewish studies sprang from interests nurtured during that project. Throughout the

multi-volume Churchill work, Gilbert faithfully carries out Randolph Churchill's intention of using primary sources and allowing the subject to tell his own story through correspondence, memoranda, and the contents of personal archives. These written records clarify and sometimes contradict impressions made by Churchill's public actions and speeches.

The Churchill works have a broad appeal to various levels of readers. Gilbert has written a biography for school children, while the casual reader can benefit from an overview of Churchill's life and character in the single volume work. The student or historian can explore the more detailed account in the eight-volume set. The serious Churchill scholar can delve into the seven books of supporting documents, which represent perhaps the most important aspect of the collaboration between Gilbert and Randolph Churchill. Here the two men have preserved a precious resource for future scholars. The research behind the biographies develops into an intriguing story of its own, told in his 1994 work *In Search of Churchill*. Considering all of his Churchill work, one feels that the eight-volume biography represents a development of themes set forth by Randolph Churchill, while *Churchill, A Life* reflects Gilbert's own views.

In *Churchill: A Life*, Gilbert distills into a single volume a wealth of information that he has amassed from the following sources: Churchill's own political, literary, and personal correspondence; his wife Clementine's letters from him; the official government archive; the contents of the private archives of his friends, colleagues, and opponents; and the recollections of members of his family, friends, and contemporaries, including Churchill's literary assistants and secretaries. The last source is one that Gilbert has compiled himself over thirty years' time. From these sources, Gilbert composes a balanced presentation of Churchill, the private person, as well as the public figure.

From comments made by people who knew him well, both admirers and opponents, the personality and character of Churchill emerge. Gilbert quotes the remarks of many of Churchill's contemporaries; these reflect their estimation of Churchill on a personal level: T. E. Lawrence responds to Churchill's autobiography *My Early Life*, "Not many people could have lived 25 years so without malice" (1, p. 496). Churchill's secretaries remark on "his devotion to work and duty" (1, p. 764) and on his "imagination and resolution" (1, p. 773). A long-standing critic notes in his diary, "It is the combination of simplicity, energy and intellectual agility that is so entertaining" (1, p. 634). The author himself attributes to Churchill remarkable resilience and joie de vivre (1, p. 715).

Quotes from Churchill's stirring speeches and memorable comments depict clearly his deep devotion to the principles of democracy. Gilbert notes that he referred to himself as a "Child of the House of Commons," calling it "the workshop of democracy" (1, p. 893). To a war-time colleague, he remarked, of his political defeat, "They are perfectly entitled to vote as they please. This is democracy. This is what we've been fighting for" (1, p. 856).

The author states that "there was something special in Churchill's language, tone and mood which made . . . his speeches a tonic" (1, p. 634). With lines from his speeches, Gilbert illustrates Churchill's courage. At a cabinet meeting, Churchill responded with a fiery outburst to the suggestion of negotiating with Hitler: "If this long island history of ours is to end at last, let it end only when each one of us lies choking in his own blood upon the ground" (1, p. 651).

Lines from Churchill's correspondence reflect his frustration with the policy of appeasement before World War II: ". . . we seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later, on even more adverse terms than at present" (1, p. 595).

Gilbert includes an early example of Churchill's writing, in an excerpt from an article describing the Boer War: "Ah, horrible war, amazing medley of the glorious and squalid, the pitiful and the sublime, if modern men of light and leading saw your face closer, simple folk would see it hardly ever" (1, p. 122). Later, he would write of the horrors of modern mechanized warfare: "The wars of peoples will be more terrible than the wars of kings" (1, p. 143).

In several places in his narrative, Gilbert points to Churchill's foresight and his ability to predict future developments in world affairs. An example is his response to critics who felt that he was obsessed with the developing danger of communism: "I may

get rid of my 'obsession' or you may get rid of me, but you will not get rid of Russia" (1, p. 416).

Gilbert refutes several myths about Churchill; for example, he maintains that while Churchill was accused of aggressiveness against labor, he favored reconciliation and arbitration. While criticized for his opposition to the suffragettes, he supported the vote for women in 1917. While serving as Home Secretary in 1910, he was accused by Labour leaders of sending troops to provoke a confrontation during a coal strike in Wales. Gilbert refers to the opportunity, offered by Churchill, as arbitration and asserts that he ordered the soldiers to assemble nearby in case their help was needed by local police (1, p. 220). Gilbert asserts that the portrayal of Churchill as an opponent of the Suffragette movement is theoretically unfounded; it emerged from the misinterpretation of an incident in which he called for the arrest of a ring leader following an attack on Cabinet members by Suffragettes and their male supporters (1, p. 221). Churchill advocated voting rights for women, in principle, and he demonstrated his support by voting favorably for women's suffrage in 1917 (1, p. 222).

The appeal of Churchill's wry humor and mastery of words is evident throughout Gilbert's narrative. Admiring the beautiful seaside setting of his quarters in Russia during the Yalta Conference, he called it the "Riviera of Hades" (1, p. 819).

In Search of Churchill, A Historian's Journey is the story of twenty-five years of exhaustive research undertaken by Professor Gilbert in preparation for writing Churchill's life story. In the first chapters, he introduces Randolph Churchill as a man capable of irascibility as well as great warmth and generosity. Here and throughout subsequent chapters, Gilbert populates the familiar events of recent history with real people. He depicts Churchill as a leader possessing the essential qualities of a Prime Minister: "genius and plod" (2, p. 216). In a chapter with that title, Gilbert outlines the improvements in Britain that were set in motion by Churchill. There are many, but Gilbert also points out some that have been attributed to others. In defense of the notion that Churchill was harsh, Gilbert offers this quote from him: "[...] I may seem to be fierce, but I am fierce only with one man—Hitler" (2, p. 192). Expressing the compassion behind the hard exterior is Churchill's response to a film showing the effect of night bombing

over Germany: “Are we beasts?” (2, p. 184)

Through well-chosen quotations, he shows the reader that Churchill was always quick and direct in expressing himself. Pressing the urgency of readiness in case of war and criticizing British defenses, which he was told would improve with time, Churchill asked simply, “Shall we have time?” (2, p. 123)

As in the biographies, Gilbert includes several examples of Churchill’s wit. One is his comment on the subject of culture: “Cultured people are merely the glittering scum which floats upon the deep river of production” (2, p. 228). Another is Churchill’s remark that evidence supporting the belief in God could be found in “. . . the existence of Lenin and Trotsky, for whom a hell was needed” (2, p. 227).

The individual books of the eight-volume biography provide fuller accounts of the events of Churchill’s life; for example, Volume III, *The Challenge of War*, fills in the details of his activities related to the Gallipoli Peninsula and the Dardanelles at the beginning of World War I. Here Gilbert addresses the impression made by Churchill’s enthusiasm for attacking Turkey through the Dardanelles, an impression that long marked him as bloodthirsty and headstrong, unattractive qualities in a leader. Gilbert challenges Churchill’s critics on several points: First, he asserts that Churchill did not conceive the idea of a drive through the Dardanelles but preferred an action on the north German coast. Further, he did not choose to limit the attack to the navy but argued in vain for support from land troops. While he neither planned nor oversaw the action on the Gallipoli Peninsula, he advocated support toward victory once the attack was made, believing that Turkey’s defeat would shorten the war in Europe (3, p. xxxiv). Gilbert maintains that Churchill’s decisions at the Admiralty depended upon the approval of others; Prime Minister Asquith was the final authority in all war policy. Lord Kitchener and Sir Edmond Gray sometimes opposed his views. The professional Admiralty advisors could stand in his way, as they did when he pushed for a second attack on the Dardanelles (3, p. xxxv).

Gilbert suggests that the Dardanelles Commission operated without the advantage of all of the facts. Churchill based his defense on his personal archives and recollections, neither source being entirely dependable without benefit of the complete government records available today. Gilbert has supplemented these official records with the writings of Churchill’s contemporaries, including fellow Cabinet members, political critics, and colleagues at the Admiralty. He relies on these sources to reconstruct events daily and even hourly. One of the contemporary historian’s advantages, Gilbert maintains, is access to recently opened records documenting Churchill’s early career.

In Volume IV, *World in Torment*, Gilbert follows Churchill’s administrative activities during the six years of Lloyd George’s premiership, from 1916 to 1922, when Churchill served in several Cabinet positions. He describes the important role Churchill played in introducing the Irish Free State Bill, getting it passed in the House of Commons, insisting on free elections in Ireland, and working toward peace between the North and the South. Throughout these years, as well as his entire political career, Churchill urged clear policies and decisive action; that is, “Ponder and then *act*” (4, p. 895).

Volume V, *The Prophet of Truth*, covers the years from 1922 to 1939 and includes the ten-year period during which Churchill was out of office, following the fall of the Conservative Party government in 1929. Gilbert identifies two areas in which Churchill embraced unpopular issues, without regard for political advantage, during these, *The Wilderness Years*: Opposition to the government's India policy and insistence on the importance of rearmament after 1933. Gilbert points out that the unpopularity of Churchill's views excluded him from the Cabinet but did not break his resolve. He quotes from one of Churchill's letter to his wife: "No doubt it is not popular to say these things but I am accustomed to abuse and I expect to have a great deal more of it before I have finished. Somebody has to state the truth" (5, p. xx).

Volume VI, *Finest Hour*, includes, among other materials, Randolph Churchill's recollections of the Second World War period; these were taken down by Gilbert before the younger Churchill's untimely death. In this volume, Gilbert again addresses the questions surrounding the bombing of Coventry. Gilbert outlines the steps that led Churchill to believe that the attack would target London: When the Enigma Code was broken and the plan for a major bombing attack was revealed, several target areas seemed possible, but information from a German prisoner narrowed them down to Coventry or Birmingham. His revelation was disregarded, however, by a senior officer who had information that led him to believe that the attack would target London. At 1:00 on the afternoon of the bombing, it was learned that it would occur that night; at 3:00, it was learned that radio beams were intersecting over Coventry. Gilbert asserts that Churchill read the first of the two messages but probably not the second. Those alerted as to the actual target did what they could to defend Coventry, without care to protect the source of their information. This defense included sending eight British bombers to disable the enemy air base from which the attack would be launched (6, p. 914). Alerted ground defenses in Coventry forced the bombers to remain high, and the anti-aircraft gun activity was greater than that produced in London on any one night previously (6, p. 915).

Volume VII, *Road to Victory*, covers the war years and focuses on Churchill's participation in the wartime conferences of World War II. Here Gilbert uses two previously unpublished sources: Churchill's private papers, supplemented by official records from the Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Defense, as well as those of the War Cabinet and its committees. He utilizes the familiar method of cataloging the daily business of British war policy-making, and here again, personal recollections and quotes enliven the narrative. For example, he notes that when asked by an American newspaper reporter, in 1941, how long it would take to win the war, Churchill replied, "If we manage it well, it will only take half as long as if we manage it badly" (7, p. 25).

In this volume, Gilbert's treatment of Churchill's relationship with Stalin is of particular interest. The author includes Averill Harriman's description of a 1942 Moscow meeting during which Stalin became insulting, suggesting that the British were afraid to fight the Germans. Harriman recalls Churchill's response, describing the heroism of the British during the year in which they fought alone. He became so impassioned that he ran ahead of the interpreter, who, absorbed in the rhetoric, fell silent. Although the translation was completed later, at this point, Harriman recalls, Stalin laughed and said, "Your words are not important, what is vital is your spirit" (7, p. 186).

In Volume VIII, *Never Despair*, Gilbert rounds out his detailed account of Churchill's life and considers the years from 1945 to the time of Churchill's death in 1965. This includes the defeat of Germany, Churchill's six years as leader of the political opposition, and his second premiership. Of particular interest is Gilbert's explanation of the Conservative Party defeat after World War II: He maintains that the British voters seemed to want Churchill but not his party's government. Gilbert suggests that the voters reacted against Chamberlain and his colleagues, but that it was Churchill who suffered. The voting public believed the conservative party to be reactionary and therefore unfit to provide leadership during peacetime. Differentiating between Churchill, the national hero, and Churchill, the political party leader, they retained their affection for the former while rejecting the latter.

This abiding affection was expressed at the time of Churchill's death. Gilbert describes a scene recorded by one of Churchill's secretaries, who accompanied his casket on the funeral train. From the train window, he saw two men expressing their respect: one, an old soldier, standing to attention in his R. A. F. uniform, on top of the flat roof of a small house, and a farmer, standing in a field, with his head bowed and his cap in his hand (8, p. 1363). He depicts this scene as representative of Churchill's impact on the life of the common man.

A recent addition to Gilbert's books of Churchillian documents, *Winston Churchill and Emery Reves, Correspondence, 1937 - 1964*, edited and annotated by the author, introduces the literary agent who circulated Churchill's articles and books outside of Britain and helped to spread Churchill's philosophy worldwide. His is a compelling story of bravery, sacrifice, and determination. Gilbert defines the motivation behind Reves's organization: to arrange publication of works on world issues, for writers outside their native countries, in order to foster international understanding. The correspondence includes both business letters and those expressing the friendship that developed between Churchill and Reves and his American-born wife.

Throughout his Churchillian works, Gilbert repeats the theme of Churchill as the champion of freedom. Churchill's advocacy of the freedom of Jewish immigrants to settle in Israel, the flow of immigration increasing during and following World War II, leads Gilbert to address the events of the Holocaust and the development of the Jewish state.

Among his modern Jewish histories and, specifically, his Holocaust works, two books are unique in format and in viewpoint: *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* and *The Boys, The Untold Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors*. In *Holocaust Journey*, Gilbert documents, day by day, and place by place, a two-week trip that he undertook in the summer of 1996, with a group of his graduate students from University College in London. The party included eleven students and Ben Helfgott, a Holocaust survivor.

Starting in London, they traveled through Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Slovak Republic, visiting those places where the events of the Holocaust occurred as well as those with a rich Jewish heritage. They traveled mostly by rail, often over the same route taken by the prisoners on the death trains. Excerpts from readings given by Professor Gilbert, based on his research of the events that took place at each stop, are included in the text, as well as the

reactions of individual members of the group.

Among his explanatory remarks, Professor Gilbert offers insights into the long history of anti-Semitism. He writes that Jews were blamed for the spread of the Black Death in Brussels in 1348 and '49 and that they were repeatedly accused of desecrating the host. He describes similar historical incidents in other areas, including the murder of Jews in Prague during the first Crusade. Similarly, townspeople blamed Cracow Jews for the town fire of 1494 and expelled them. When the Nazis came to power, leaders like Heinrich Himmler accused the Jewish people of wishing to destroy Germany and called for their destruction. In his notes for a stop in Aachen, the old capital of the Carolingian Empire, he writes that, ironically, Jews had occupied the town for 1,200 years in 1997, while Hitler's so-called Thousand Year Reich lasted for only twelve years.

Professor Gilbert points out that the Jews were not the only ethnic group persecuted by the Nazis: Seventy thousand Germans – the old, the disabled, the mentally ill, as well as infants -- were murdered first. During the T4 Operation shortly after the war began, the Nazis practiced euthanasia on sick Germans, as well as Jews, by injection or by gas. Ninety-nine percent of the Russian prisoners of war, some 3,500,000 Russian soldiers, died at the hands of the Nazis, who murdered three million Polish non-Jews as well as three million Polish Jews (9, p. 305.) During the Harvest Festival massacre at Majdanek in Poland, 350,000 were killed, including Jews and non-Jews from Russia, Poland, and eleven other countries. In writing about the suffering of the Polish people, Gilbert notes Ben Helfgott's concern that theirs be remembered along with that of the Jews.

Among many accounts of murder, some stories of resistance and individual defiance stand out in this narrative. There were escapes, and there were revolts. He describes an uprising at the death camp of Sobibor, where three hundred escaped but three hundred died. He relates the sad outcome of two escapes from Belzec, one by a boy who hid in a latrine pit until he could run away. The escapees found that no one believed them. The Germans' story of a work camp was easier to accept.

Others achieved a personal victory of sorts. Gilbert tells the story of elderly Jewish women who, when deportation was imminent, slept in the cemetery, so that when the Germans found them, they could die among their own people.

Among the heroes of the Holocaust is another who chose suicide over dishonor. Professor Gilbert describes how the Chairman of the Jewish Council in Warsaw killed himself rather than prepare lists of Jews for deportation. Other heroes noted by Gilbert as the group traveled through their towns are the Secretary of the Warsaw Jewish Council and his wife, who saved many children from going to their deaths at Majdanek. Gilbert mentions Oskar Schindler, who saved many Jews from exportation to the camps by employing them at his factory in Cracow and later brought one thousand Jews from Plaszow to work in his munitions factory. A lesser-known factory owner, Julius Madritsch, paid the Nazis to save the Jews who worked for him in Tarnow.

Gilbert puts to rest a couple of myths: that of the Danish king and his subjects wearing yellow

arm bands in support of the Jews, and that of victims' ashes being made into soap. He lets one legend stand: that of the sixteenth century rabbi known as Rema, whose gravestone was among those being used by the Nazis for target practice. When the soldiers' bullets rebounded from his, they were frightened and did not come back.

Professor Gilbert recounts the fears of some Holocaust survivors that when the eyewitnesses are gone, the events will be forgotten. Some believed that these events would not be taken seriously; in the words of the resistance fighter Adolf Liebesking, "We are fighting for three lines in a history book" (9, p. 186). Others feared that Jewish history might become Holocaust-centered to the detriment of Jewish culture and Jewish creativity.

The reader encounters powerful passages not soon forgotten. One describes the village of Lidice, Austria, which the Nazis destroyed, killing every occupant, because the villagers refused to reveal the assassin of Reinhard Heydrich. Another is the account of the old man running along beside the death train as it passed through his village, trying to catch a glimpse, his first and last, of his infant grandchild, who was on board. It is frightening to read about the graffiti, seen by Gilbert's group, depicting a Star of David and a gallows, symbols of Nazi hatred still evident in Germany today. Two words inscribed on the Treblinka memorial underscore the importance of remembering the harsh lessons of the Holocaust: "Never again" (9, p. 335).

The Boys recounts the modern odyssey of Polish children through the nightmare world of Hitler's Holocaust, a unique passage in the annals of World War II history. Martin Gilbert skillfully combines individual stories, from 150 sources, of 732 Holocaust survivors into a whole that, while appalling in its detail, is somehow optimistic overall.

By attending their annual reunions, he became acquainted with the group known collectively as the boys, although eighty of them are women. He agreed to their request to record their valuable first-person accounts before they were lost forever.

The reader follows the boys' story from pre-war Poland to the wartime ghettos, the slave labor camps and death camps, the death marches, and finally to freedom, first in the hostels of Great Britain, where they faced a new life alone. He records the boys' early memories of anti-Semitism which would develop into full-fledged support for the Nazi occupation. For most, this was an attitude with which they had learned to deal even though they did not fully understand it. The well-ordered world of childhood in pre-war Polish villages quickly took on nightmare qualities with the German invasion of Poland in September, 1939.

Initially, the Germans concentrated the Polish Jews in ghettos, bringing rural Jews into cities such as Lodz and Warsaw. As the quality of life deteriorated, it was often these children who kept their families alive by stealing out of the ghetto at night and appropriating such things as food and cigarettes. Cold and hunger became commonplace, and while it took its toll on the sick and the elderly, the children managed to draw on the stamina of youth to survive.

It would take all the reserves they could muster to face the next phase, however. By mid-1940 the ghettos were being depopulated both through the murder of those who could not be of use to the Germans, and by the transportation to the slave labor camps of those capable of work. The

most bizarre section of the book deals with the death marches that the S.S. forced the camp inmates to make in order to keep them from being rescued as long as possible by the advancing allies. In the end, most of the boys came to Theresianstadt where they were selected for transportation to England.

One of the boys describes his experiences by saying that he became an adult at age eleven and, five years later, an old man. A representative statistic is that of a village of eight hundred, out of which four survived the war. Gilbert records the events that led from security to destruction and grief so skillfully that each account retains its sharpness and none loses its power upon the reader. The reader's sympathies never become dulled by repetition, as each narrative has a freshness that cannot help but provoke a deep emotional reaction. Even the most deliberate reader must respond to such accounts as that of the Jewish mother, selected to go to the gas chamber, who turns back to tell her children goodbye.

Through the stories of torture, starvation, and mass murder, optimism and courage emerge. Ironically, it was that optimism that allowed the early events of the Holocaust to proceed unchallenged. The boys explain that the German occupation of Poland after World War I, before Hitler came to power, had been tolerable, that early Jew-baiting was seen as victory-related and temporary, and, perhaps most significantly, that no one could imagine the inhumanity of which the Nazis were capable.

Toward the end of the book, the words of Ben Helfgott offer what is perhaps the strongest testimony to the triumph of that group of 732 youngsters from the concentration camps. He describes their group as "[...] having no delinquents, criminals, revenge-seekers and, above all, none of us is consumed with hatred and venom" (10, p. 453).

Two works that are representative of Gilbert's Jewish studies emerge from the author's personal interest in Israel as the center of his Jewish heritage and in Jerusalem as his part-time place of residence. While both include references to ancient beginnings, in *Israel*, as in *Jerusalem in the 20th Century*, he concentrates on the events of recent history.

With his usual thoroughness and attention to detail, Gilbert, in *Israel*, investigates the origins and development of the state of Israel during its first fifty years. He stresses the uniqueness of Israel, the only intentionally created modern nation state.

Although the Jewish people have dreamed of returning from exile since the destruction of the second temple in 70 A. D., Professor Gilbert picks up their story at the turn of the century, with the formative meetings of the World Zionist Organization. He traces the development of the idea of Zionism during the latter third of the nineteenth century in the Russian-born organization, Lovers of Zion, established in 1884. While Russian-born Jews never made up more than two percent of the population of modern Israel, Gilbert illustrates the power of their dream, born of the terror of the Russian pogroms. The Zionists fostered settlement of the Jews in Israel, particularly in Tel Aviv, the first all-Jewish city, and in the kibbutz cooperative communities. Gilbert defines the goal of Zionism as the universal recognition of the legitimacy of Israel.

As the first European Jews began the settlement of Palestine, Gilbert carefully shows the

origins and development of the hostility between them and the Palestinian Arabs. Further immigration, especially by Jews from other eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland, served to exacerbate the situation.

The question of a Jewish presence in the Holy Land became a major part of the tension between the Ottoman Empire and the British. Although Gilbert describes the part played by the events of the first World War and the Balfour Declaration in the unfolding drama, the reader ponders the reasons behind the ambivalent attitude of the British during the period from 1900 to the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1947. If anything could improve this excellent work, the inclusion of more discussion of this issue might be appropriate.

The author stresses the determination and courage of the Jewish people to overcome fierce opposition and to live productively, at peace in the land of their heritage. Accounts of war and terrorism are interspersed with descriptions of new settlements (which continued to emerge, despite the most difficult circumstances), cultural events, and archeological discoveries which confirm the longevity of the Hebrew presence. He points out that the fort at Gezu, captured by the Haganah during the fight for control of the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem Road, belonged to the Hebrews once before: Pharaoh first gave it to King Solomon as a wedding gift. In contrast to this, the author describes the modern Israeli lifestyle in a new society where Jews of many different backgrounds are united by the Hebrew language, compulsory military service, and the yearly cycle of holidays.

Throughout the work, he introduces the larger-than-life figures who populate Israel's history: David ben Gurion, Ezer Weizmann, Moshe Dyan, and many others. Sometimes, he brings them into the narrative by presenting unremarkable, but often prophetic, background information first, before revealing the person's identity. He introduces a Russian-born Milwaukee Jewish girl, disappointed that she was not allowed to fight with a Jewish legion in World War I. She later changed her name to Golda Meier.

Often he includes insightful quotations from Israel's leaders. An example is Yitzhak Rabin's defense for negotiating with the P. L. O.; he explains that one does not make peace with one's friends, but with one's enemies (11, p. 566).

Among the supporting characters that Gilbert introduces is Orde Wingate, a British volunteer who, although he was not Jewish, preceded his night raids by reading descriptions of his targets from the Bible. The author describes how, years later, Orde's widow included, the Bible he had carried with him on these campaigns in supplies air-dropped to a besieged Israeli village.

In each case, Gilbert shows both the heroic and the human sides of these people. It is this that keeps the book history, rather than allowing it to descend into myth. Even so, this is not entirely objective history. Professor Gilbert never steps away from his Jewish perspective. This is not simply the story of a people; it is the story of what Gilbert sees as *his* people. Because of the positive representation of the topic, *Israel* will stand for a long time as the definitive history of this remarkable people and their state.

In *Jerusalem in the 20th Century*, as in *Israel*, Gilbert presents a modern setting with ancient roots. Jerusalem, his adopted home, is close in distance as well as in tradition to King David's once royal city, three thousand years old. He introduces Jerusalem as a small, turn-of-the-century provincial town of the Ottoman empire. When the Zionist leader Theodore Herzl visited in 1897, he envisioned a thriving city within a Jewish state. Gilbert follows Jerusalem's development as it became the embodiment of Herzl's dream as the capital of an independent nation, although unrecognized as such by world leaders.

Gilbert defines the equivocal nature of the British influence in Jerusalem. On one hand, Britain fostered the prosperity of the city: the British army, under Sir Edmund Allenby freed it from the Turks in 1917, the British government encouraged city growth by Jewish immigration, and British rule introduced modern improvements. However, despite encouraging self-government, the British chose a succession of Arabs to serve in positions of civic leadership. Among these, the most controversial was the appointment of Haj Amin as Mufti in 1920, Amin being an advocate of anti-British and anti-Jewish sentiment. Gilbert suggests that he was considered a moderating influence in the Arab community: Previously, the annual Muslim Nebi Musa celebrations had led to violence; upon his appointment, the crowds were calm (12, p. 96). Peace was short-lived, however, and the seeds of Arab resentment of both the Jewish and the British presence in Jerusalem developed into continuous strife.

In 1948, when the battle of Jerusalem resulted in the creation of the state of Israel, Jerusalem was a divided city. Although population growth accentuated the division, the city was officially reunited after the six-day war of 1967, when Jerusalem was a battleground for the second time in twenty years. Today, Jewish and Arabic sectors maintain uneasy coexistence, living separately but sharing some public spaces and charitable organizations. The author notes, however, that Christian Arab neighborhoods are suffering from Muslim hostility. Gilbert points out that Jewish initiative has brought modern improvements that benefit the Arab community as well as their own. He describes Jerusalem in terms of prosperity for both Jews and Arabs and as a religious center for the Muslim faith as well. He credits the beneficial interests of three of the world's major religions in Jerusalem, each wishing to keep Jerusalem secure for worship and pilgrimage.

The author does see signs of settlement for Jerusalem's conflicts, an indicator being the 1994 peace talks between Israel and Yassir Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization. Gilbert expresses hope that after a half century of hostility between Jews and Arabs, Jerusalem may emerge as a city that is as peaceful as it is prosperous.

The story of Jerusalem is multi-faceted; Professor Gilbert includes the development of its art and culture. The paradigm of this is the creation of a Jewish university, which he traces from its conception by Dr. Weizmann at an early Zionist Congress, to its place of prominence in contemporary Jerusalem.

In typical fashion, Gilbert presents facts and individuals and allows the story to unfold. He includes the lively and often wise responses of ordinary human beings. He tells the story of an Arab janitor at a Jewish seminary, abandoned after riots in 1936. The janitor stayed on, looking after the synagogue and a library containing three thousand books. Asked years later if

he was afraid when other synagogues were bombed, he replied, “The holy place watched over me more than I watched over it” (12, p. 297).

Links with ancient history and with Jewish heritage are apparent throughout the work. For example, Gilbert describes a 1913 archeological dig, the first in Jerusalem to be performed at a Jewish site, financed by Jewish resources, and overseen by a Jewish

archeologist. He recalls visiting the site, where huge stones from the Herodian Temple had been hurled down by Romans in 70 A. D. onto the street below, the same street where tourists walk today. Gilbert also points out that defeated Turks fled from Jerusalem in 1917, coincidentally, on the day of Hanukah, the Jewish holiday commemorating the recapture of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 B. C. The span of Jerusalem’s history becomes apparent when Gilbert enumerates the years separating these events: 2082.

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Beyond the Churchill works and those concerning the Holocaust and Israel, two books stand out among Gilbert’s general histories of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century: *The European Powers 1900 - 1945* and *The Day the War Ended*.

In The European Powers, he follows the decline of the European empires from the settling of their internal problems at the turn of the century to their eclipse after World War II. Gilbert describes how, in 1900, political unrest, famine, and plague in India, as well as war with the Boers in South Africa, brought to a close the era of romantic imperial war. He includes a description of the atrocities of Belgium’s King Leopold, who, with cruelty toward African natives in his pursuit of rubber and ivory, made a mockery of the civilizing mission of European empires.

He relates the events and alliances leading to World War I: Russia, committed to defend Serbia, mobilized on the frontier between Austria and Germany, which caused the latter to declare war; Britain, committed to defend Belgium, entered the war when Germany tried to cross its neutral territory to attack France; Austria, who had set out only to crush the Serbs, found itself pushed by Germany into war with Russia.

The author describes the developments that caused those who hoped for a short and glorious war to be disappointed: trench warfare, poison gas, the armored tank, and the awful casualties at Verdun and the Battle of the Somme. Against this background, Gilbert depicts the events of the Bolshevik Revolution which took Russia out of the war, the tide-turning entry of the United States, the strife between the Arabs and the Turks, in which Lawrence of Arabia played a role, the removal by death of the influence of Franz Josef in Austria-Hungary and Rasputin in Russia, the abdication of Czar Nicholas II, followed by the takeover of Russia by Lenin, who opposed the war and entered into an armistice with Germany eight months before the war ended. By that time, he writes, Europe was exhausted, her money spent, her youth dead, and both liberal and autocratic governments changed forever. Liberal governments, he explains, had been forced to increase the powers of the state in order to mobilize for war, while throughout

Europe, traditions had been cast aside; only Britain kept her monarchy intact.

Of the violence that erupted in Germany after the war, partly due to resentment of the harshness of the Versailles Treaty, and of the political intrigue surrounding it that the public was not aware of, Gilbert states, “[...] the public is rarely in a position to know its own immediate history. For this reason, its judgment is often awry” (13, p. 107). He suggests that post-war violence in Germany lasted too long: assassinations and approval of them, plus persecutions, particularly of Jews, made bloodshed seem normal. Out of this cauldron of brutality, Hitler emerged, a master of diplomacy and persuasion, whose methods of propaganda were effective. Early in World War II, the British, who had hoped that Hitler would become moderate as he gained responsibility and that Germany would serve as a shield against Russian communism, dropped leaflets rather than bombs and failed to sink German ships in port, for fear of harming civilians.

Gilbert describes the vulnerability of the countries Hitler conquered: The Austrians fell because of unresolved domestic problems and failure to recognize the German threat; despite the freedom of self-determination and the wisdom and moderation of President Masaryk, the new nation of Czechoslovakia, comprised of people who had resisted the Habsburgs more vigorously than they would the communists later on, fell apart, partly because of German intrigue. Gilbert refers to the folly of Hitler’s declaring war on the United States, after he had already conquered Europe, and to the decisive impact of radar and long-range aircraft on World War II. He summarizes, as follows: “The Second World War was not dominated by the movement of troops or the frequency of battles. The most significant aspect of the war was the cruel treatment of civilian populations” (13, p. 265).

Although lacking some of the polish of his later work, *The European Powers* demonstrates through its literary innocence the author’s passion for his craft. Primarily a political history, it includes just enough biography and social commentary to render the book eminently readable. One of the most interesting of the early chapters deals with European possessions in Africa, a topic which is not usually treated with such thoroughness. Gilbert illustrates quite capably how the difficulties and tensions that the colonial powers experienced in ruling their often obstreperous African colonies affected their other decisions, both domestic and continental.

No work of this size could possibly cover all the events of Europe during this period. But some of the omissions stand out. Perhaps the best example is the brevity with which Gilbert treats the Spanish Civil War. Surely the agonies created in this horrible conflict deserve a fuller treatment than they are given; if for no other reason, they highlight the complete political impotence of the League of Nations.

Even though the work was written in 1965 when the author could see only a small portion of the European renaissance which has since developed, his speculations on the continent’s future closely approximate actual developments.

In *The Day the War Ended*, Gilbert describes the events of that historic day through the recollections of many people in a wide variety of circumstances. A successful storytelling technique that Sir Martin uses to advantage in this and other works, such as *Israel*, is the

response to experience of men who later achieved distinction; for example, he includes in his narrative about reactions to the liberation of Nazi prisoners that of Governor Hugh Carey of New York: "I made a vow as I stood there at Nordhausen, face to face with the survivors of death, that as long as I live, I will fight for peace, for the rights of mankind and against any form of hate, bias and prejudice" (14, p. 10).

Among the recollections of soldiers, few are as happy as those of Sergeant Frank Tucker, pictured on the book's cover. While VE-Day meant a joyful homecoming to him, many of Sir Martin's other correspondents recall different reactions. Some feared being assigned to duty in the continuing conflict with Japan. After witnessing scenes of horror at the discovery and release of concentration camp prisoners, one former GI recalls the scorn with which Allied soldiers returned the smiles and waves of defeated Germans. Although wine literally flowed down the gutters in Tunis, some survivors of battle found that initial feelings of joy and relief were quickly replaced by lingering feelings of guilt at being spared while comrades had been wounded or killed (14, p. 268).

Among the stories that Gilbert relates are those of prisoners whose elation upon being released was tempered by illness and the effects of starvation, as well as by realization that their homes had been destroyed and their families scattered and, in many cases, murdered.

Some expressed disbelief at the atrocities of the Holocaust. Civilians who were safe at home on VE-Day, and before, shouted "Lies! Frauds! Fake!" while watching a filmed account of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen (14, p. 212). Their reaction caused consternation in the Jewish diarist who recorded the event. A Jewish viewer of such films describes her reaction to the anonymity, as well as the brutality, of the mass murders in the camps.

Among the displaced persons at the end of the war, Russians—freed prisoners as well as soldiers—faced conditions at home as frightening as those of combat. Gilbert describes how Jewish refugees found themselves unwelcome wherever they turned, even in the emerging Jewish state of Israel. One freed Jewish prisoner recalls being told, "Don't head east; they don't like us there. But don't head west either, because they don't like us anywhere" (14, p. 362).

Against the background of the realignment of conquered countries, the author relates the negotiations and correspondence among Allied leaders. Of particular interest is the telegraph message in which Churchill warns Truman about Russian land-grabbing and the development of the Iron Curtain. The author explains why the leading Soviet delegate to the U. N. insisted upon having veto power: He had been present in 1939 when the League of Nations condemned the Soviet Union for invading Finland, and he wanted to avoid such chastisement in the future.

While some German leaders and collaborators surrendered with dignity, others sought to escape by various means, including suicide, and Gilbert recounts their reactions to Allied victory. From an entry in a war diary, Gilbert describes the stirring final parade of the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps. In their traditional uniforms, they displayed brilliant horsemanship and seemed "a last triumphant reminder of the pageantry of warfare before the advent of mechanization" (14, p. 273).

A former British Intelligence Officer recalls accepting the surrender of a German mine sweeper, the commander of which expressed pride at being a Nazi and doubt about the truth of accounts of atrocities in the concentration camps. After visiting one of the camps himself, he addressed his men and told them that he was ashamed to be a German officer.

Gilbert quotes a letter about the sadness on VE-Day of the “survivors, those whose lives are ruined by their sons’, husbands’, or fathers’ sacrifices for ideologies. The men don’t feel anything: they’re out of it. It’s the living who are the casualties” (14, p. 407).

Even as the author describes the capture of the last Japanese soldiers, left behind on a remote island for thirty years, he explains how the events set in motion by Hitler continue to affect the world of today.

Gilbert draws the maps that accompany the narrative in these and most of his other works, his aim being to show every place mentioned in the text. His skill as a cartographer has attracted much interest; Gilbert’s maps appear in about thirty books by other authors.

In addition to his illustrative maps, Sir Martin has produced a body of atlases describing not only the geography of many regions but also such specific aspects as their economic histories. Containing a generous amount of text—more than is standard—Gilbert’s atlases are valuable sources of information for students and are useful companions to the historical works.

Not confined to the written word, Professor Gilbert has turned to motion picture and television work as well; he received an Academy Award in 1981 for the best short documentary, the film *Genocide*. He brings his knowledge of the places and events of modern history to television viewers through two productions, available on video tape. During the two-tape presentation of *Jerusalem*, Gilbert proves an instructive narrator as well as a genial host in the city that is his second home, where he finds inspiration and which he clearly enjoys exploring.

Readers of his Churchill works will welcome the opportunity to view Sir Martin’s biographical research transformed with typical storytelling skill into a set of four video tapes, a lively presentation that captures the robust energy of Gilbert’s hero and, sadly, his decline in later years. Viewers who have observed the events of Churchill’s career first-hand will relish having the matchless rhetoric brought to life again. Appealing not only to an audience familiar with their subjects, the Gilbert videos also offer a compelling introduction to his writings.

Although he has produced some sixty volumes at this writing, Martin Gilbert continues to build a body of work that reflects his stature as one of the foremost historians of our time. His most recent project is a three-volume series of twentieth century histories. The first volume, *A History of the Twentieth Century 1900-1933*, opens with the Boer Wars and the Boxer Rebellion, continues to chronicle three decades of violent conflict, marked at the midpoint by World War I, and closes with the Great Depression in the United States. Gilbert quotes Winston Churchill’s summation of the early years of the century: “What a disappointment the twentieth century has been. How terrible and how melancholy in the long series of disastrous events which have darkened its first twenty years” (15, p. 648).

Sir Martin identifies three documents that played a significant role in the events of the early twentieth century: the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia in 1914, the Treaty of Versailles, and *Mein Kampf*. To give a balanced view, he outlines advances in technology, medicine, and the arts. Overall, he depicts an era in which the world of the common person was transformed.

As the transformation continues, so does Gilbert's body of work. The books discussed here will no doubt come to be known as his early works. They deserve attention as they demonstrate his ability to weave together the myriad facts of history, revealed through his copious research, into an engaging narrative. As one of the most prolific historians of our time, Gilbert is only just approaching the apex of his career. Readers may anticipate future volumes matching a standard of excellence that is now well-established.

Reading him is like piecing together one of those jigsaw puzzles, created with computer technology, that combine thousands of tiny photographs into digital mosaics. As in the Byzantine art form, the combination of small, colored chips creates the effect of a painted picture. Such is the work of Martin Gilbert, and it is just as absorbing.

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Biographical Sketches

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