
Obituary

DAVID ORRIN MORGAN (1945–2019)

David Morgan was born on 29 April 1945, and was educated first at Rugby and then at Worcester College, Oxford, where he read Modern History. After graduating in 1966, he gained a postgraduate certificate in Education and taught History for three years at Watford Grammar School, before returning to the academic world as a PhD student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1970 under the supervision of the late Professor Ann K.S. ('Nancy') Lambton, from whom he learned Persian. There was an inevitability about his choice of the Mongols as a research topic. At the age of fourteen, he had read *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy* by Michael Prawdin (1940; English translation 1952). It was by no means the best book ever published on the subject, as David was later to observe on more than one occasion. But it was at that time the only one in English other than Sir Henry Howorth's voluminous *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th Century* (1876–88); and it kindled an absorbing interest that lasted for the whole of his life. He submitted his thesis, 'Aspects of Mongol Rule in Persia', and gained his doctorate, in 1977. He became a full member of the lecturing staff at SOAS in 1979, and in 1988 was promoted to Reader in the History of the Middle East. Apart from a semester's visiting fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, and a year's visiting fellowship at Dartmouth College, Massachusetts, he remained at SOAS until 1999. Then he was appointed Professor of History and Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a post from which he formally retired in 2010, though continuing to teach for one semester a year until 2013.

David's first book, *The Mongols*, published in Blackwell's The Peoples of Europe series in 1986, made him a household name for all who have any interest in the subject. It did not merely become the first port of call for anyone who wanted a first-class introduction to the Mongol empire; it contrived also to be a thoughtful and penetrating basis for future scholarship. A second book, *Medieval Persia 1040–1797* (Longman's History of the Near East series) appeared two years later, in 1988, and similarly prospered. This was the only single-authored work in any language to cover the entire period of Persian history from the advent of the Seljuqs to the beginning of the Qājār dynasty—and the first to make sense of it. Among the reasons for the success of both works was the clarity and accessibility of David's style and his engaging flashes of humour. In the introduction to *The Mongols*, he says: "I have tried to bear in mind that this may, for some, be the only book on the Mongols that they ever look at—while trusting that this will not be the inevitable result of reading it". To judge from the high reputation of the book and the phenomenally impressive sales

figures, his trust appears to have been well-grounded. Scholarship on virtually every aspect of Mongol history has indeed burgeoned during the interval. But thirty-three years later, after well over twenty printings of the first edition and with a second edition out since 2007, *The Mongols* has still not been wholly superseded and continues to be viewed as the standard work. It has been translated into several languages, including Mongolian and Japanese. A new edition of *Medieval Persia* was published by Routledge in 2016.

David Morgan had many other publications to his name. Of the books he edited, some were produced alone, as was *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds* (1982), and some were the fruit of collaboration, as were *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (Hakluyt Society, 1990), *The Mongol Empire and Its Legacy* (Brill, 1999), *Late Classical Persian Sufism...1501-1750* (OneWorld, 1999), and *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, volume III: *The Eastern Islamic World, Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries* (2010). In addition he published a string of articles and contributions to volumes of conference papers. His interest focused especially on Persia under the Mongol Ilkhans (1260–1353), where he addressed big questions. Who ran the Ilkhanate—Mongols or Persians? Why did the Ilkhanate collapse so rapidly? Was Mongol rule, on balance, detrimental to Persia's development or beneficial?

Nor did his contribution end there. He served on the editorial boards of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* and of the *Journal of the RAS*. Taking over the editorship of the latter journal in 1987, he maintained and consolidated the trend, begun under his predecessor Charles Beckingham, of expanding the scope of coverage well beyond the bounds of the one-time British Empire to embrace the entire Asian landmass; and he was unstinting in the time he spent on this task. Until 2013 he was also chair of the editorial board of the Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization series, in which capacity he sponsored the publication of a large number of books on Islamic history, often by early-career scholars; he remained a member of the board until his death. A few years ago the British Institute of Persian Studies did him the signal honour of electing him as its Honorary Vice-President.

Within a career spanning almost four decades, David taught a broad range of courses including not merely the Mongol Empire but medieval Islamic history, the Crusades, the history of Muslim South Asia and Afghanistan and even more modern topics such as The Great Game. He supervised numerous PhD students, several of whom themselves went on to distinguished academic careers. Successive generations of undergraduates found his teaching inspiring; although his notorious habit, in lectures and seminars, of disagreeing with what he had written himself some years previously was a source of consternation to those students for whom the tutor's printed utterances possessed an almost sacerdotal quality.

It is a testimony to his stature that on a number of occasions he was asked to write the foreword/afterword to volumes of essays on the Mongols or to provide the introduction to a reprinted translation of a major primary source like Boyle's *Juwayni: The History of the World Conqueror* or E. A. Wallis Budge's *The Monks of Kublai Khan*. In both the UK and the USA he was frequently approached, too, by journalists for comments on the Arab Spring or the current situation in Afghanistan or Iraq. In May 2016 he was presented with a festschrift, *The Mongols and Post-Mongol Asia* (volume 26, parts 1–2, of this *Journal*), edited by his one-time doctoral student, Professor Timothy May, and comprising twenty-nine essays dedicated by friends and former colleagues and students to a leading figure in his field.

David Morgan died in Harefield Hospital, Middlesex, on 23 October 2019 at the age of seventy-four, after a short illness and following an operation to replace an aortic valve. He leaves his beloved wife of forty years' standing, Johanna; three daughters; and a grandson. We extend our deepest sympathy to them in their bereavement. David will be widely and sorely missed. His historical interests extended well beyond the Mongols and the world of Islam, and he had an impressive knowledge of English and European history, on which he read avidly. As someone who has known him for forty-four years, I shall always recall with warm pleasure our conversations, including those at his homes in Tring and in Madison, where our discussions before dinner were lubricated by a gin and tonic ('the Elixir of Life', as he always called it). His openness, kindness and ready humour, his modesty and lack of pretension won him the affection and regard of a great many people, both within and outside the academic world, and the lasting gratitude of younger scholars who benefited from his guidance and whose work he helped to nurture towards publication. Not merely have the fields of Mongol and Islamic history suffered a heavy loss; many of us, no less importantly, have lost a good and much valued friend.

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