
Introduction

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The Mongols as part of popular imagination have acquired the reputation of providing nothing more than a fierce but amusing footnote in history, men on horseback who appeared from nowhere in the thirteenth-century and receded into obscurity a century or so later. As the articles in this volume demonstrate, the popular imagination is un-nuanced and, far from being transitory rogues, the Mongols, and their complex narratives, made a significant impact upon many histories and cultures across the world as they expanded through Asia changing, modifying and absorbing much in their wake.

Professor David O. Morgan's contribution to our understanding of these dynamics cannot be overstated. While teaching at SOAS, and later at Wisconsin, as this special issue to mark his retirement testifies, he inspired many cohorts of students to search beyond the romantic stereotype, to learn languages and to examine a vast array of primary sources on the trail of the religious, economic, political and artistic legacies that this Steppe community forged. And, as well as providing inspiration to others, David researched, wrote and published prolifically. His books include *The Mongols* (1985), which has been described as the absolutely standard text on the subject, and *The Mongol Empire and its Legacy* (1999), which he co-authored with Reuven Amitai-Preiss. He also contributed to the *New Cambridge History of Islam* and numerous scholarly journals throughout the world but his commitment to publishing and pushing scholarly boundaries went further than merely expanding his own bibliography.

In 1988 David succeeded Professor Charles Beckingham as Editor of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and only resigned the post when he left Britain for the United States in 2000. During the 12 years of his editorship not only did the Journal profit greatly from his intimate scholarly knowledge of the Mongol Empire and its peripheries, but it also benefitted from his contacts with scholars working on subjects as far apart as Quranic law in Medieval Damascus and the impact of drought in thirteenth-century China. As a long-established journal whose early contributors had been part of Britain's colonial and imperial experience, the JRAS once had a tendency to over-concentrate on the cultures and histories of British-held territories whilst ignoring the narratives of those peoples and places associated with the vast tracts of land not coloured pink in 1930s' school atlases. Professor Beckingham's interest in the power of myth and maritime contacts had been extremely useful in addressing, and redressing, this 'historical' imbalance, but David's hordes brought fresh engagement with political history, governance, grazing, architecture and all aspects of human experience that belong to the interior of the Asian landmass, whether as the products of sedentary existence or as part of

a nomadic way of life. David thus consolidated the Journal's shift from its earlier approach and allowed the Mongols the chance to destroy the remnants of our dusty image whilst constructing a thoroughly international publication. David, back in Britain, continues to research, write and provide invaluable help to a new generation of Mongol scholars.

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Editor