

CENTRAL AND INNER ASIA

DAVID MORGAN:

The Mongols. (Second Edition.)

(The Peoples of Europe.) xxii, 246 pp. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2007. £19.99. ISBN 978 1 4051 3539 9.

I first encountered this book in manuscript form early in 1986 while I was a visiting student at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Figuring that I would want to read this book anyway, and wanting to ingratiate myself with my teacher, I asked then Dr Morgan if he would like me to read a set of proofs. I think that he was glad to have me do so, and I set about my task. The result was that I had this early opportunity to read carefully what has come to be recognized as the best *tour d'horizon* in the English language on the Mongol Empire and its role in world history. I was rewarded for my efforts by an expression of thanks in a postscript to the introduction of the book and a signed copy from the author.

I have referred to this volume and dipped into it countless times over the following two decades, and that original copy has become quite worn, and filled with many marks and notes. I was thus quite pleased when the *Bulletin* turned to me with the offer to review the second edition: at last, a clean copy. No less important, it has given me the opportunity to re-read the entire work from cover to cover, along with the additional chapter (9) that aims to bring it up to date in the light of recent research. My overall reaction is that the original text holds up rather nicely after twenty some years, and the final chapter ("The Mongol Empire since 1985") does a fine job of summarizing trends and results in the study of medieval Mongolian history, at least in the main research languages of Western Europe. The additional detailed bibliographical section devoted to these last two decades of research will prove extremely useful, even if the author claims that it is not comprehensive.

I do have, however, my disagreements with some points, and in fact in one case this goes back to my student days in London. The first of these is more a question of emphasis. In his original discussion of sources (pp. 5–25), Morgan gave short shift to the important and interesting material in Arabic, which to my mind can at times be decisive for understanding matters related to Mongolian culture and history in the late middle ages, and not only regarding their relations *vis-à-vis* the Mamluks, their conquest of much of the Middle East and subsequent rule, and their eventual conversion to Islam in western Asia. In neither the bibliography to the original edition nor that for the later period is there any mention of Klaus Lech's consummate edition of the relevant section of the encyclopedia by Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 1348: *Das Mongolische Weltreich: al-ʿUmarī's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, Wiesbaden, 1968) with its hundreds of pages of introductory material and notes, along with a translation. While al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) has yet to receive the same meticulous attention by an editor and translator for the section devoted to the Mongols in his encyclopedia *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, the publication of volume 27 (Cairo, 1984) that contains these 120 pages might

also have warranted a mention in the later bibliography. This being said, on p. 185 (in the new chapter 9) there is a short discussion of recent research based on Arabic sources, or rather where Arabic works are integrated into a wider panoply of original sources, and this inspires satisfaction and gratification (not least since I am one of the scholars mentioned).

A second point reflects a more principled disagreement. This regards the question of the significance of the role of the Mongol imperial ideology in inspiring and continuing to motivate the Mongol campaigns of expansion. Professor Morgan writes (p. 13) that "... it is true that in the light of their early successes and perhaps under the influence of Turkish or Chinese ideas, the Mongols did come to believe that they had a divine commission to conquer the world, but the world-view revealed by the *Secret History* is rather different. Here it is Mongolia itself, and the internal affairs of the tribes, that really matter most". Without relating to this matter directly, in the new final chapter he writes (p. 187): "In particular, we can say very little with certainty, or even plausibility, about motivation. Why did Chinggis set out on his career of conquest, and why did that career follow the course that it did?" I feel that Morgan has underestimated the role of the ideological component in Chinggis Khan's thinking, even if this was not very evident early in his adult life. Professor J. M. Smith, Jr., has cogently shown ("The Mongols and world-conquest", *Mongolica*, 5 [26] (1994), 206–14) to my mind that there are clear contemporary statements for this imperialist world outlook. This article is cited in the new bibliography, but its conclusions evidently have not been accepted by Morgan, who does not seem to attribute much importance to this ideology in later conquests either. I would suggest that these ideas did matter a great deal, although they were far from being the only motivations for Mongol imperialism, either in Chinggis Khan's time or afterwards.

Finally, I might briefly note that I am less convinced than Morgan (p. 206) regarding the idea raised in the article by C. Tyler-Smith et al., "The genetic legacy of the Mongols", *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 72/1 (17 January 2003), 717–21, suggesting that 16 million male individuals in Asia today are direct descendants of Chinggis Khan. I will not repeat what I wrote in a review recently published in *JRAS* (vol. 17/4, p. 470), so I will just state here that to my mind the long-term direct contribution of Chinggis Khan and his offspring to the current demographical situation of Asia, Inner or otherwise, was as decisive as touted in that paper.

The Mongols has a nice mixture of narrative chapters and those devoted to themes (specifically "Nomads of the steppe: Asia before Chingiz Khan" and "Nature and institutions of the Mongol Empire"), which together provide a chronological framework as well as a focused and in-depth discussion on key matters. I have used this book continually for many years as one of the central textbooks for my courses on the Mongols and related subjects, and will do so with the new edition. No less important, it will continue to serve me as a ready reference for information and a rich repository of ideas and insights on the Mongol world empire and its successor states.

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