
An Introduction to David Morgan

David Morgan



The working title for this festschrift was ‘Papers for the Padishah’. It was discarded for the sake of propriety as well as the well-known decree that all academic books must include a colon, a decree which some would say is worthy of Chinggis Khan himself. Nonetheless, I believe it is fair to consider David O. Morgan the Padishah of the study of the Mongol Empire. David, ever humble, would simply wave this title away and offer another scholar the throne. In this sense, David is like Ogodei Khan—generous, well-liked by all, and he laid much of the modern foundations for the study of the Mongols. Yet, David, like Ghazan Khan, always kept one foot firmly in Iranian Studies as well, thus giving him claim to the title of Padishah. David’s similarity to the Mongols does not end there, however, as he carved his own intellectual empire.

The foundations of Professor Morgan’s empire began when he acquired Michael Prawdin’s *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy* as a prize at Rugby. From there he studied at Oxford before venturing into the field of secondary education. He then proceeded to earn his doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, where he studied Persian under the instruction of the late Ann K. S. Lambton. As Persian was not offered at Wisconsin when I was a student, he tutored me in his book-lined study, complete with a roaring fire in the fireplace. While I struggled through it, he often noted that that he was Lambton’s second worst student—the worst being a future ambassador to Iran, of course.

David's first appointment was to the School of Oriental and African Studies where he spent twenty years, rising to the position of Reader. A one-year Visiting Professorship at Dartmouth College demonstrated to his family that America was not as uncivilised as one would gather from television. This proved providential as the University of Wisconsin then lured him away from SOAS. There he remained until he retired formally in 2010 and was named Professor Emeritus. His full retirement and permanent return to England took place in 2013.

One of the underappreciated aspects of David Morgan's career is his teaching. Whether at SOAS or Wisconsin, David taught a wide range of courses that demonstrated mastery of not only an impressive geographic space, but also of temporal space. At the undergraduate level, he taught courses that ranged from the pre-Islamic era to the nineteenth century. Of course, there were the usual courses on various themes of Iranian history and the Mongol Empire, but David could bookend these with courses on the Crusades and then a course on the History of South Asia to 1750. Additionally, he was willing to look at these topics from a traditional approach as well as placing them in a larger context through world history.

At the graduate level, similar themes existed but also variations that changed to meet the needs of the era. Shortly after the events of 9/11, David offered a seminar on the History of Afghanistan (from Alexander to the Taliban) at the University of Wisconsin. He later offered a more narrowly focused seminar on the Great Game that extended to the Taliban and a course on Jihad in Islamic History. Of course, students could still get their fill of the Crusades and the Mongols—two topics that students never tire of, but which few universities in the United States offer.

While teaching hundreds of students, David also demonstrated a penchant for writing and produced two books that remain foundational texts in their respective fields. *Medieval Persia* (1988) underwent at least six subsequent printings and one unauthorised Persian translation, and a second edition came out in 2015. He is better known, however, for *The Mongols*, which remains the standard text even though it was published in 1986. The first edition underwent 21 reprintings before the publisher finally convinced him to publish a second edition, which has since been reprinted at least six more times and translated into five languages, including an unauthorised Persian translation. The new edition is receiving a new Spanish translation as well as a Mongolian translation. While not confirmed, we should expect a new unauthorised Persian translation as well, now standard for David's books.

Writing two of the most widely read books on medieval Iran and the Mongols (is there one more widely read?) would be enough to cement David's scholarly reputation. However, he also published six other books as an editor and numerous articles and chapters as well. Among the edited volumes, of particular importance is Peter Jackson's translation of *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253–1255*, which he co-edited with Jackson. Additionally, he co-edited with Anthony Reid *The New Cambridge History of Islam 3: The Eastern Islamic World, Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*. These two works demonstrate quite well the impressive breadth of his expertise.

This breadth of knowledge has also made him a desired author of introductions for new editions of translated primary sources, including John A. Boyle's translation of Juwayni and E. A. Wallis Budge's translation of the life of the Nestorian Catholicos Mar Yabballaha and of Bar Sawma's travels. David's research articles display his remarkable versatility and

interests, which ranged from administrative matters and historiography, to military history. In retirement, David remains active and is currently writing *The Mongol Impact on Iran*.

Again, his list of publications, which can be viewed in the included *vita*, is impressive and only bolsters his reputation as a scholar of the first class. For his proper intellectual legacy, and why he is truly the Padishah, one must look at his other academic efforts. At SOAS and Wisconsin, he mentored numerous students (many represented in this volume), convened a number of conferences and symposia, and served on the editorial boards of the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* and the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. In 1987, he became the editor of the *JRAS* and profoundly shaped the third series of that august journal, leaving the position only when he migrated to the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In 1991, he also became (and remains) the General Editor for Cambridge University Press' Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization. While the series published widely on Islamic history, David's influence is visible from the book list that includes several volumes related to the Mongols. His clear recognition of the Mongol impact on the Islamic world not only created an avenue for other scholars working on the Mongols to disseminate their research, but it also broadened the field of Islamic history from more traditional perspectives. Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization remains one of the most respected series for Islamic history, particularly due to the dynamic nature of the volumes. It has launched the career of many scholars, including several in this *festschrift*.

David's magnificent career has affected numerous scholars through his mentorship as dissertation advisor, teacher, editor, and of course as colleague. Not only has he left an indelible impression on the study of the Mongol Empire and Iran, but his kindness and genial disposition have made the academic world a better place in general (indeed, quite possibly the only person nicer than David is his beloved wife, Johanna). It is for this reason that so many scholars offered up tribute to David Morgan when the *festschrift* was planned. Many more expressed their regrets that they were unable to contribute, but passed along their regards for project. I must also thank Peter Jackson for assisting with the project. I must confess, it was an easy sell to convince Peter to join in. This work would be much poorer without his efforts. The Royal Asiatic Society fully supported the endeavour. Charlotte de Blois and Professor Sarah Ansari have my eternal gratitude for shepherding the manuscripts to publication. Finally, Dr Judith Kolbas must be acknowledged for suggesting the *JRAS* as a venue in the first place. In hindsight, it seems so obvious. It is in the spirit of David's amiable nature and unpretentious, yet erudite, mentorship that this volume is dedicated to his career, retirement, and continued success.

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