

The Mongols

David Morgan



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Preface

When I was asked at my Worcester College scholarship interview in 1963 whether I had any special historical interest, it presumably did not occur to James Campbell that he would be obliged to listen to my answer, off and on, for the next 20 years. If he has now had to read it as well, he has only himself to blame. I am grateful to him for his invitation to contribute to his and Professor Cunliffe's series, and for much else.

I have learned a great deal from many colleagues at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where there is usually someone who knows the answer to any Oriental question. My most considerable debts are to Professor A. K. S. Lambton, to whom I owe most of what I know and understand about the Islamic world in general and Persia in particular, and to my now (regrettably) former colleague Professor William Atwell, with whom I taught a London University history option on the Mongol Empire between 1980 and his return to the United States in 1984. A large part of my scant knowledge of China is derived from listening to his lectures and comments. He kindly cast a Sinological eye over a draft of chapter 5. I must also acknowledge the extent to which my ideas have in all sorts of ways been clarified by discussions with the intrepid students who chose to take our outlandish course.

I am grateful too to Dr Peter Jackson of Keele University for many Mongol conversations over a number of years. He could have written a better book than this one, but fortunately for me was not asked. Both he and Professor Lambton read and commented on the first draft of the book, and to them should be

attributed the better ideas rather than the remaining mistakes, for which I must shoulder the responsibility. Of historians not known to me personally, I have learned most from the writings of Dr Igor de Rachewiltz of the Australian National University. It is a real pleasure to record my debt to these scholars, as well as something of a relief that by so doing I may with luck have prevented at least some of them from being invited to review the book.

Like most married authors I could not have written, even at such modest length, without the support and tolerance of my wife. The forbearance of my daughters in not interrupting when they could hear the typewriter should also be noted with gratitude. As well as submitting a draft of the book to expert scrutiny I also persuaded both my wife and an old friend, Richard Frost, to read it from the standpoint of that perhaps fabulous personage, the general reader. Mr Frost turned out to be my severest critic, and I am very grateful to him for the trouble he took, even if I did not always appear to be so at the time.

Last of all I must mention my parents, although they are no longer here to read these words. They unquestioningly tolerated and to a considerable extent financed what must have seemed an interminable student career. Without their encouragement of interests very remote indeed from their own, I could not have begun the studies which have ultimately led to the writing of this book. I therefore dedicate it, gratefully and affectionately, to their memory.

January 1985

Postscript I have to thank Mr Reuven Amitai of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, for his kindness in reading and correcting a set of proofs.

'... a surprisingly comprehensive picture of the mediaeval Mongols, their types of administration, military affairs, religion, economic matters and so on. The facts are not new – how could they be? – but the judicious weighing up of them and the critical evaluation of the hypotheses of other historians is what gives this book its solid value, and allows one to recommend it honestly as a first-rate introduction to the study of a little known passage of history.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*

'Study of the Mongols has always proven difficult, and there are few useful survey works available, in spite of the importance of the Mongolian Empire in Eurasian history. Thus, the appearance of a new, well-done general history (twelfth through fourteenth century) is a welcome event. . . . The outcome is an excellent and readable account.' *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*

'... excellent work, the best that we have of its kind.' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*

'... this is a well-written, well-documented presentation, with an excellent – exceptionally accurate – bibliography. I know of no better book to give a general view of the "Great" epoch of Mongol history.' *The English Historical Review*

David Morgan is Reader in the History of the Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

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