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*The Return of the Mongols*

The standard book on the Mongols is and has been David Morgan’s classic work, *The Mongols*. After twenty years and many more reprintings, it has finally been replaced by itself in a second edition. First published in 1986 as part of Blackwell’s Peoples of Europe series, unlike the real Mongols it never migrated into a more appropriate location, such as the newer Peoples of Asia series, which did not exist when the book was first published.

On the whole, none of the original text has changed. This can be disconcerting when reading outdated bibliographic statements, such as that a biography of Qubilai Khan does not exist (p. 104), when Morris Rossabi published an excellent one, *Khubilai Khan, His Life and Times*, in 1988. It is equally bothersome to read statements that show their age, such as “the conquest of China, especially north China, had always been every steppe ruler’s dream, and Chingiz was no exception” (p. 13). As a former student of the good Professor Morgan, I know quite well that he takes considerable delight in informing his students that “the historian Morgan is just wrong on this.”

So why would a second edition be printed with such errors? Rather than trying to rework a second edition by correcting outdated information here and there, Morgan instead opted for adding an additional chapter (chapter 9) entitled “The Mongol Empire since 1985.” Here he discusses the new information concerning primary sources and secondary studies on the Mongols. Although it would have been nice to have corrected and updated individual chapters, in many ways this method is preferable. Correcting the original edition would have required a major overhaul, particularly in trying to add new literature in footnotes. Overall, since the first edition remains accurate for the big picture of the Mongol Empire, a reworking was not necessary. The additional chapter, written again in the effortless and accessible prose for which Morgan is known and which makes *The Mongols* perfect for the classroom, also serves as a vehicle in which Morgan corrects outdated views and information that has since been deemed incorrect. The chapter provides a discussion of some of the more important publications that appeared between the first and second editions. Furthermore, it demonstrates just how much a field can change over twenty years. This, in itself, more than justifies Morgan’s approach to the second edition.

In addition to the new chapter, Morgan includes a supplementary bibliography which incorporates publications that have appeared since 1985. Although not comprehensive, and Morgan does not claim that it is, it is as close as one can get with such a broad and wide-ranging field.

Although many of the studies Morgan discusses in chapter 9 are not directly related to the military, he includes numerous references that will provide a greater understanding of the Mongols’ mindset and ambitions. He offers a discussion of primary sources that are now available in English translation, such a Rashid al-Din’s *Compendium of Chronicles*, which in 1986 was available
in the original Persian and in Russian translation. One new work, published just months after the publication of the new edition of *The Mongols*, that Morgan did not include in his discussion of new studies or in the supplementary bibliography, is *The Mongol Art of War* by Timothy May.

In summary, the second edition of *The Mongols* remains the standard work on the Mongols. With the additional chapter and bibliography it is unlikely to be superseded in the near future and will be a useful reference to any scholar.

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