



## Denis Sinor

April 17, 1916 - January 12, 2011

Denis Sinor

January 12th 2011

Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University, Denis Sinor was born in Hungary on April 17, 1916 and educated in Hungary, Switzerland, and France. Between 1939 and 1948, he held various teaching and research assignments in France. During WWII he rendered modest services to the French Resistance; he joined the Free French Forces and was demobilized in November 1945.

From 1948 to 1962 he was on the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Cambridge University, U.K. In 1962 he moved to Indiana University where he created the Department of Uralic and Altaic Studies, now Department of Central Eurasian Studies, of which he was Chairman from 1963 to 1981. In 1967 he founded the Asian Studies Research Institute, later named Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, which he directed until 1981, and which was renamed in 2006 The Denis Sinor Institute for Inner Asian Studies. From 1963 to 1988 he was Director of the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center, the only one of its kind in the country.

A former president of the American Oriental Society, Sinor was active in various national and international scholarly societies in which he held positions of high international importance. He received two Guggenheim Fellowships, as well as grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the ACLS,

NEH, and IREX. He was a Corresponding Member of the French Académie des Inscriptions et belles-Lettres, an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and a Foreign Member of the Academia Europaea. Honors received include a doctorate honoris causa of the University of Szeged (1971), and Honorary Memberships of the Société Asiatique (Paris) and the Societas Uralo-Altaica (Hamburg). He was awarded the Arminius Vambery Medal (1983), the Gold Medal of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (1982, 1996), the Order of the Star of Hungary (1986), the Silver Avicenna Medal of UNESCO (1998), the Medal of Honor of the American Oriental Society (1999) and the Thomas Hart Benton Mural Medaillon of Indian University. In his honor, The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain created the Denis Sinor Medal for Inner Asian Studies. On the occasion of his 85th birthday the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences honored him with a Festschrift. In 2002 Denis Sinor was the recipient of a medal from the University of Szeged, which referenced "imperishable services rendered to the university." Also in 2002 he was elected honorary member of the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 2005 he was awarded an Honorary Professorship by the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; he was inducted into the Indiana University President's Circle by President Adam Herbert in September 2005. In the same year he received the UNESCO 60th Anniversary Medal, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the preparation of the History of the Civilizations of Central Asia. In 2006 he was awarded the John W. Ryan Award for distinguished contributions to international programs and studies at Indiana University. The University of Kazan, one of the major universities in the Russian Federation, awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in 2007. In September 2008 President Michael A. McRobbie honored him with the President's Medal, the highest honor that the President of Indiana University can bestow. By order of the President of the Republic of Hungary, as part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Hungarian Revolution, he received the

prestigious Commander's Cross Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary (2007) for his "highly respected and internationally renowned achievements in the field of sciences and for his outstanding leadership in promoting Hungarian science and culture in the United States."

Denis Sinor authored 8 books and more than 160 articles in Hungarian, French, English and German, and edited 14 books. Many of these were translated into other languages, including Russian and Chinese. He contributed to various encyclopedias, including the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He served as editor of the Journal of Asian History since its inception in 1967, and also for the Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series (over 174 volumes) and the Indiana University Oriental Series.

Sinor traveled extensively in Asia, including Afghanistan, Chinese Turkestan, Soviet Central Asia, Northern Pakistan, Siberia, Inner and Outer Mongolia. In 2004 at the age of 86 he traveled to the North Pole on a Russian icebreaker. Listed in Who's Who in the World, Who's Who in America, Who's Who in American Education and other reference works, Sinor was a member of the Cosmos Club (Washington, D.C.), of the Explorers Club (N.Y.C.), and of the United Oxford and Cambridge University Club (London).

Professor Sinor took a small program at Indiana University and transformed it into the leading center in the world for Inner Asian and Central Eurasian Studies. "Central Eurasian" is a term he defined for the academic world.

Denis Sinor is survived by a sister, Maria Pierre, a daughter, Sophie (Berman), three grandchildren, Edouard, Manuel, and Sarah, and four great-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made payable to the Indiana University

Foundation and sent to the “Jean and Denis Sinor Endowed Faculty Fellowship in Central Eurasian Studies Fund,” 1011 E. Third Street, Bloomington, IN 47405.

There will be no visitation. Allen Funeral Home 4155 South Old Highway 37 is arranging funeral services to be held Friday, January 21st at 2 p.m. at St. Charles Catholic Church, 2222 E. Third Street, Bloomington. Flowers may be sent directly to St. Charles Catholic Church for the funeral service.

# Tribute Wall

JE

“ I discover in these days of the death of the professor Sinor. I send a think of consolation, solace and sharing for his family. I'm a young student of doctorate in medieval history at Milan and I attend especially to history of Oriental Europe and Hungary (my maternal grandfather was hungarian). I've not know the professor personally, but he is often with me...  
He was a great historical.  
Redards!  
(Scuse me for my terrible English)

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**Jennifer Radulovic** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

TS

“ The Royal Asiatic Society would like to express its sincere condolences to the family of Professor Sinor. Professor Sinor had a long association with the Society and endowed a triennial medal in his name to be presented to those individuals who have excelled in the field of Central Asian Studies. The Society will hold a memorial lecture in the coming year in his honour to celebrate the work of this great scholar.

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**The Royal Asiatic Society** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

JS

“ I want to express my sincerest condolences in the great loss of such a reknowned scholar. I had the honor of working for Professor Sinor from 1970 to 1973 in the Department of Uralic and Altaic Studies and the Asian Studies Research Institute as the secretary.

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**Jane (Thatcher) Sipe** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

WA

“ *In my capacity as Secretary and on behalf of the Board of the German Oriental Society (DMG), I would like to express our sincere condolences and to convey the deepest sympathy of the Fellow Members of the Society in the great loss of such an outstanding scholar as was our esteemed member Denis Sinor.*

*Walter Slaje,  
Halle (Saale), Germany*

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**Walter Slaje** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

EM

“ *I am sorry to hear of this great scholar's passing and send my condolences to his family. I had the privilege of becoming acquainted with Professor Sinor when I studied at Indiana University. His many fine endeavors will live on and continue to be a tribute to him.*

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**Emilio Carril** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

VI

“ *As the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences on behalf of the members of the Institute and myself personally let me offer condolences to the family of Denis Sinor and his colleagues.*

*Professor Sinor was a good friend of Russian Orientalists, Mongolists and Turcologists first of all. He made a great contribution to developing American-Russian academic contacts. Thanks to him Russian scholars specializing in the field of Altaic studies had an opportunity to participate in prestigious international conferences and symposiums. Denis Sinor, who was an Honorary Professor of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the RAS, will remain in our memory for many years.*

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**Vitaly NAUMKIN** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

CH

“ I was extremely saddened and truly upset to hear of the death of my beloved and respected Professor, Professor Denis Sinor.

*His legacy will live on, especially among his students of whom I was one. It will live on among the members of his extended family, the PIAC, of which I was also one.*

*Sincerely,*

*Prof. Dr. Charles F. Carlson*

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**Charles Carlson** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM

JO

“ As US Ambassador to Mongolia, let me join with others from around the world in offering condolences to the family of Denis Sinor at this time. Let me also express my deep respect and personal appreciation for Professor Sinor's significant contributions to greater understanding in the United States and beyond about Mongolia and Central Eurasia more broadly. His students, his books and his enduring commitment in establishing Indiana University as a center for Mongolian studies in the United States will all be part of his continuing legacy for many years to come.

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**Jonathan Addleton** - October 26, 2015 at 04:27 PM