

## Denis Sinor, 1916-2011

January 19, 2011

To the Family of Denis Sinor:

The news of Denis' death caused us, like so many others, a great sense of sadness, as one of this generation's exceptional people left us, alone. Denis has been such a central part of the lives of his many academic and personal friends over the last half century or so that we do not really know how to move on.

Creative, witty, generous, scholarly, entrepreneurial, and politically astute, Denis created a field of study, provided it a beacon of academic productivity and excellence, and left us generations of students and faculty who knew, even if we could not always imitate, the skills, dedication, and quality that defined the Sinor way.

Those of us privileged to travel through parts of our academic existence in his company quickly learned that Denis' view of life required a determined focus on what might be accomplished rather than on obstacles or defeats. His intimidating energy came from the creation of new things, the support of initiatives, the careful management of the people and institutions that could sustain his vision of his cherished Uralic and Altaic studies. We who understood almost nothing about the field or its intricacies and who could barely follow the general pattern of his academic enthusiasms nonetheless knew we were in the presence of a master creator.

Many of us, having observed academic entrepreneurs manage the American university bureaucracy, stood in awe of his masterful persuasive ability. Denis could find an opportunity in every turn of events. Whether money was plentiful or scarce, whether the competition was clever or obtuse, Denis found a way to turn the flow of academic activity constantly in support of his center and programs. Although never shy about his own accomplishments, Denis used his distinction and his preeminence to build futures for other people, centers of excellence for institutions, and opportunities for the display of colleagues' talents.

His genial charm and sly smile reflected a genuine enthusiasm for people; especially those who could help bring his dreams into reality. Over the years, countless academic administrators, capable of resisting the blandishments of the most sophisticated faculty entrepreneurs, fell willing victims to Denis Sinor's charm and imagination. We bought into projects with a low initial starting investment, ignoring our understanding that the activity would require a much larger continuing payment. His persuasive gifts rested not only on his creativity and his skillful capture of our own ambitions, but also on our recognition that whatever Denis proposed would be done well at the highest level of quality and gain international recognition. We knew there were other institutional priorities of perhaps more central importance, but we also knew that to resist a Sinor campaign was hardly worth the effort. In the end, he translated the institution's investments into academic distinction at an exceptionally high level.

Denis Sinor was a phenomenon, unique and irreplaceable.

We who knew and loved him carry his inspiration always with us, even as we know we'll never again have such a remarkable friend.

John and Cathryn Lombardi

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