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**DAVID JAMES**  
**(1941—2012)**



Dr. David Lewis James, historian of Islamic art, died on 22 November 2012 at his home in Ronda in Spain, at the age of 71. He leaves a daughter and two sons.

A graduate in art from the University of Newcastle, his postgraduate studies at the University of Durham were, apart from Arabic language, entirely in the field of Islamic art, more especially miniature painting and calligraphy. In 1969 he was appointed Islamic curator at the Chester Beatty Library & Gallery of Oriental Art in Dublin, where he soon acquired a solid reputation in the field of Islamic manuscripts and related arts, supported by a number of significant scholarly publications, as well as some more popular articles, during the 1970s and 1980s. He later worked on secondment to the Nour Foundation in London, producing lavish scholarly catalogues of some of the finest MSS in the Khalili Collection. At both these institutions he acquired and demonstrated a particular expertise in the great Qurʾān MSS of the Mamlūk and Ilkhānid periods, which was enhanced by research in other important libraries and museums.

His career, however, came to an abrupt and disastrous halt in 1992, when he was convicted of the theft of items from the Chester Beatty Library, and served a jail sentence in Ireland. He confessed to the crime, acknowledging the justice of the verdict; to those who knew him best, this episode seemed to be a bout of uncharacteristic madness. But inevitably it cut him off from the rather narrow circle of scholars in his field, and from the institutions housing Islamic art and MSS.

After leaving Ireland he took up residence in a cottage at Ronda in Andalucia, and pursued a contented life there among local and visiting friends. He became an independent writer and scholar, turning increasingly to research on Arabic texts from early Islamic Spain: two of his scholarly studies and translations, from original MSS, have recently been published as monographs. He did not, however, lose interest in art: at his death his study of the illustrations in the *Maqāmāt* of Al-Ḥarīrī was in the press. His scholarly reputation is assured, despite the vicissitudes of his career.

*G. Roper*