Lambton, Ann Katharine Swynford [Nancy] (1912–2008), orientalist and Persianist, was born at Mesnil Warren, Bury Road, Enniskillen, county Fermanagh, on 8 February 1912, the elder daughter and second of the four children of George "Lambton (1860–1945), racehorse trainer, and his wife, Cecily Margaret, née Horner (1882–1973). She was the granddaughter of George Frederick D'Arcy Lambton, second earl of Durham, and of Sir John Francis Fortescue, second of Mells Park, Somerset. Her father was an outstanding racehorse trainer and manager from the 1890s to the 1920s. One of his middle names, Swynford, commemorated her father's 1910 St Leger winner and she won acclaim aged fourteen for skill in the saddle at Newmarket Heath. She roller-skated in her teens and, later, commuted by bicycle from Maida Vale to teach and teach various squash opponents at Russell Square.

A family friend, Sir Denison Ross, persuaded Lambton's parents to allow her to study Persian, initially as a student unregistered for a degree course, at the School of Oriental Studies, London, of which he was the founding director. On matriculation with a certificate in Persian in 1932, she began her Persian honours, with a subsidiary in classical Arabic, plus German, geology, and Latin studied at King's College. Her teachers were Ross, and professors Hamilton Gibb, Arthur Tritton, Vladimir Minorsky, and Hasan Taqizadeh. Confirmed the Osboué memorial scholarship in Persian In 1934, and her BA degree in 1935, along with the Aga Khan travelling scholarship, she commenced her doctorate in the latter year on Persian Seljuk administration and submitted it in 1939 despite spending thirteen months in Tehran and major provincial centres recording dialects (published as Three Persian Dialects, 1938, from the Furlong scholarship, Royal Asiatic Society; studying craft guilds as well as Persian and Arabic with local scholars; and teaching history in Persian in a girls' high school in Isfahan. She returned to Persia in July 1939 for further research and was there when the Second World War broke out. Appointed press attaché at the British legation, she made her mark interpreting at press conferences, summarizing local papers for a weekly digest, combating Axis propaganda, and preparing news commentaries on allied efforts. She was appointed OBE in 1943. Links with Persians across all classes, predicated on a solid philological training, afforded her an extraordinary insight into local life.

The Ministry of Information reluctantly released Lambton to accept Arthur Arberry's offer of a post at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, as the School of Oriental Studies had become in 1938). London University could not afford the proposed readership and Lambton came after VJ day as senior lecturer in October 1945. A readership, three years later, was swiftly followed by a professorship in 1953, a signal year when her landmark Landlord and Peasant in Persia: a Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration and Persian Grammar appeared, for which London University awarded her a D.Lit. Both rapidly became standard works, even in Persian editions. Subsequently she published Persian Vocabulary (1964) and The Persian Land Reform: 1962–66 (1969), which incisively analysed the mixed results of the shah's 1963 white revolution. Lambton's headship of the Near and Middle Eastern department at SOAS (1972–8) spoke for her ability even as articles and profoundly meticulous studies appeared in the Cambridge History of Islam (co-edited with another Gibb protégé, Bernard Lewis), The Cambridge History of Iran, Encyclopaedia of Islam, and Encyclopedia Iranica. Her Theory and Practice in Medieval Persian Government (1980) and State and Government in Medieval Islam (1981)—both published after her retirement from SOAS in 1979 (whereupon she became a professor emerita)—were indispensable for comprehending Muslim statecraft. Her Columbia University lectures, Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia: Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History, 11th–14th Century (1988) crowned her output.

Among the litany of failures enumerated by James Bill in The Eagle and the Lion, the Tragedy of American–Iranian Relations (1988) was that only 10 per cent of American diplomats posted to Iran spoke and read fluent Persian compared with almost 45 per cent of British diplomats. He attributed this to Lambton's 'stiff exams', describing her as one of 'the West's leading Iran specialists', and noting that all senior British diplomats had been her SOAS students (Bill, 392). She possessed 'remarkable first-hand knowledge of Persians & their mentality', Anthony Eden declared, as did Whitehall's mandarins, who routinely sought her counsel and scrutiny of bilingual documents. Lambton, unsurprisingly, in a Foreign Office brief during the 1951 oil crisis concluded that Americans 'lack our experience or the psychological insight' of Iran. She correctly concluded that it 'was impossible to do business with Mohammed Mossadegh's cabinet, which would renounce on any agreement—eastern errantness was a familiar bane to the British—and recommended toughing it out during the deadlock by co-opting equally alarmed reasonable Persians whose otherwise explicit denunciation of the stupidity, greed and lack of judgement of the ruling classes' would be sedulous. Lambton also boldly forewarned that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company 'had not hope to return in any shape' thanks to the 'tragedy that AIOC were making a psychological mess of the relations with Persia' (TNA PRO, FO 377/91669). Revisionists and sensationalists later seized upon her advice as the genesis of the 1953 coup, which led indirectly to the Islamic revolution. Nevertheless, as William Roger argued, Lambton's suggestions were misappropriated by London, whose diplomatic dénouement stemmed from the disastrous coup of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and particularly its belligerent chairman, Sir John Fraser.

More embarrassed than even the shah's Western friends were those experts watching Iran implode in 1979. Lambton nobody prognosticated in 1964 the tendency to look for the establishment of the
God upon earth ... if pressed to its conclusion is likely to lead either to political quietism or violent revolution' (Lambton, 'A reconsideration of the position of the Marja` al-`Itlidan and the religious institution', Studia Islamica, XX, 1964, 735). Published the very year Ruholah Khomeini was exiled to Turkey, its oracular import cannot be gainsaid. If such insights were revelatory they were only a bonus given Lambton's unrivalled breadth and stamp covering Persian grammar and dialectology; medieval and early modern Islamic political thought; Seljuk, Mongol, Safavi, Qajar, and Pahlavi administration; tribal and local history; and Iranian land tenure and agriculture.

Lambton received numerous honours: the Sir Percy Sykes memorial medal of the Royal Central Asian Society (1960); fellowship of the Royal Academy (1964); honorary doctorates from Durham (1971) and Cambridge (1973); and SOAS (1983); honorary life membership of the Middle East Studies Association of North America; and the triennial gold medal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1991). An annual A. K. S. Lambton honorary lecture series was established in 2001 at Durham University, which housed her library and papers. The British Institute of Persian Studies, of which she was an honorary vice-president, hosted her ninetieth birthday reception at Carlton House Terrace, in 2002. In 2004 she was awarded the British Society for Middle East Studies' outstanding service award and the Cross of St Augustine by Archbishop Rowan Williams. Both, in a sense, were the ultimate recognitions of her life's work. Lambton led morning prayer, preached on Sundays, and delivered Lent talks, even into her nineties, in the Newcastle diocese. In his laudatio the archbishop cited her voluntary work in Iran, assistance on inter-faith matters, and attempts to prevent the church's persecution after the Islamic revolution. He also commended her exceptional theological erudition, in comparison with churchmen, and particular devotion to Pope Gregory I, the nameakes of her residence, Gregory Cottage, in East Kirknewton, Wooler, Northumberland, where she died on 19 July 2003. She was unmarried.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lambton, Anthony Claudio Frederick, styled Lord Lambton (1922–2006), politician and writer, was born on 10 July 1922 at West Marden Hall, Emsworth, Sussex, the younger son of John Frederick Lambton, fifth earl of Durham (1884–1970), and his first wife, Diana Mary (1901–1924), only daughter of Granville Frederick Richard Farquhar, of Dalton Hall, Beverley, Yorkshire. After attending Harrow School, in 1941 Antony Lambton became heir to the family earldom in tragic circumstances, when his elder brother, John, shot himself. Lambton joined the Hampshire regiment in the same year, but was soon invalided out of the army due to eye trouble. (This affliction led him in later life always to wear sunglasses.) He went to work in a munitions factory, where he met the spirited Belinda Bridget (Bindy) Blew-Jones (1921–2003), daughter of Major Douglas Holden Blew-Jones, of Westward Hol, Devon. The couple married on 10 August 1942 and had five daughters followed by a son.

Lambton belonged to an illustrious political family. The first earl of Durham, John George Lambton, a radical whig MP, cabinet minister, ambassador to Russia, and governor-general of Canada, was famous for the Durham report of 1838, which led to self-government in the Canadian and subsequently other colonies. Several other ancestors had served as MPs, usually for their native co. Durham. Lambton's first cousin was Lord Dunclay, later Sir Alec Douglas-Home (prime minister in 1963–4). It was