Sam Borg was born in Cospicua, Malta, the son of a boilermaker at the docks. He came of age during the Depression and World War II, when Malta was heavily bombed because it was a key base for the British Royal Navy. At the time Malta was part of the British Empire, and his Maltese forename was recorded on his birth certificate as the English translation, “Saviour.” He preferred to be known as Sam. In school, Sam studied French, trained to become a secondary school teacher, and taught French for several years. He was also in the Maltese Labor Party which, at the time, was struggling for independence from the United Kingdom. Throughout his life, Sam’s political sympathies were on the left. He left Malta in 1953, in order to distance himself from the Catholic Church and the parochialism of life on a small island. That same year he arrived in the United States, joined the army, and was sent to Korea as a translator. His military service paved the way to U.S. citizenship.

After his discharge, he worked at a bank in Detroit, Michigan, and married his fiancé, Catherine Vella. He also enrolled at Wayne State University, earning a BA in French in 1958, and an MA in French in 1959. After his MA he moved to Berkeley, California, and enrolled in the graduate program in French at the University of California. He received his PhD in 1966. Professor Ronald N. Walpole was his dissertation adviser, and the dissertation, the *Aye d’Avignon*, is dedicated to him. Professor Walpole once said that Sam Borg was one of the few graduate students in medieval French studies who knew what he was doing. Indeed, the textual criticism Sam performed required extensive knowledge of languages (Latin and Old French), of medieval literary conventions, and of the socio-historical context of the period.

After his PhD, Sam accepted a job as Assistant Professor of French in the Department of French and Italian at the University of California, Riverside. He, his wife Catherine, and their two children, Maureen and Paul, moved to Riverside, California, in 1964. He became an Associate Professor in 1969, and taught courses in French and French Literature, as well as Italian language, until his retirement in 1991. He was an active member of the department, a congenial colleague, and an intelligent and witty conversationalist.

He and Catherine divorced and, in 1977, Sam married Helene Suzanne who was from Aix, France, and a graduate student in the department. Their son, George, was born in 1978. After retirement, Sam lived in Riverside and in Walnut Creek, California. Between 2000 and 2008 he spent half his time in Riverside and half in Malta. In 2008, due to declining health, he settled permanently in Malta and died in Msida, three years later. He is survived by his two ex-wives, his
three children, Maureen, Paul, and George, and four grandchildren, Brian, Victor, Sean, and Dana.

During his tenure at UC Riverside, Sam published one book, a critical edition of the *Aye d’Avignon: Chanson de geste anonyme* (Geneva: Droz, 1967). The book was widely reviewed in prestigious journals such as *Romance Philology*, *Speculum*, and *Vox Romanica*, in the United States and in Europe, in English, French, German, and Italian. The reviews, except for some reservations about methodology and interpretation, were highly favorable. In fact, several reviewers were so impressed by Professor Borg’s scholarship that they urged him to pursue further research on the subject in order to enhance the study of medieval texts.

The *Aye d’Avignon* consists of 4,132 Alexandrines, and dates from the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth. The work is preserved in one mediocre late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth-century manuscript, and complemented by three fragments too short to be of help in establishing the text; preserved also by Claude Fauchet’s sixteenth-century extracts from the manuscript—extracts that have since been lost. Robert Taylor praises Borg for the “careful, painstaking labor […] given to the preparation and study of the text,” a text first published in 1861 by F. Guessard and Paul Meyer. Almost all the reviewers welcomed Borg’s critical edition as long overdue, not only for its thoroughness but also for its introduction (168 pages) and interpretive insights.

Unlike most of the medieval French epics, the *Aye d’Avignon* has no historical basis and, unlike *La Chanson de Roland*, is not about a king, a country, or defending the faith. The story revolves around one woman, Aye, from Avignon, and yet it is not a romance, since love plays such a small role in the succession of episodes during which rivals compete for the lady’s possession or, more accurately, for the possession of her extensive property.

Frederic Koening, in *Romance Philology*, says that Borg’s “most impressive achievement is a cogent demonstration of the poem’s essential unity,” and he praises the American scholar for refuting Meyer and most other critics who allege that the poem was written by different poets. Larry S. Crist summarized majority opinion by stating that Borg’s *Aye d’Avignon* is “an excellent edition of an important text because it marks the confluence of the *chanson de geste* with the *roman d’aventures*.”

It is regrettable that Sam published only one book and one book review, and that he retired as an Associate Professor, because he had the makings of a brilliant medieval scholar. Instead, he chose to devote his talents to excellent teaching and to his students—highly laudable pursuits.

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