**Mark and the West**

My first real glimpse of Mark as a historian, rather than as a teacher, came not from first-year tutorials in General History I but, instead, at the inaugural St Peter's History reading group, in Norfolk in March 2004. I still think Henrietta, Mark and Lawrence decided to introduce this trip because they were genuinely afraid that the group of undergraduate historians they had hand-picked over three years ago would put in the worst set of results in finals they had seen for a quite some time (in the end we didn't, which I have no doubt was down to that extraordinary week). For me, two memories stand out. The first was visiting the priory refectory (now part of a private house) at the Norfolk village, Horsham St Faith. These contain some extraordinary mid-13th-century wall paintings, detailing the story of how the founders of Horsham Priory, Robert fitz Walter, and his wife Sybil were, on their return from a pilgrimage to Rome, set upon by robbers and only delivered by the miraculous interventions of St Faith. Wishing to show their gratitude, Robert and Sybil decided to found a monastery in honour of St Faith, which they did and, over a century later, their story was represented in picture on the walls of the priory refectory. It was my first experience of any medieval wall painting, and it was extraordinary. But i still don't know how we got permission to see them. We just were driven up by Mark, Lawrence and Henrietta, and went in to the house without any difficulty. In preparation for this talk, I tried to find out how difficult it would be to go and see them now. Answer: very. It seems almost impossible to see these paintings. I have to say I think Mark's well-known eloquence and enthusiasm would have gone quite some way to persuade the home-owners to let in a troupe of rather befuddled third-year undergraduates one rather damp weekday morning.

My second memory of the trip is equally Whittow-esque. I was the only student that year to take the Special Subject on the Norman Conquest. This was only a few years after Robert Liddiard had published his British Archaeological report stressing that social and residential considerations—rather than or as much as military ones—governed the choice of castle location. Mark, from the beginning, informed me - in particular - that we would go to Castle Acre and check this out. Could they really be social? He was very interested to know what I thought, given my expertise in the area. I froze. How could I know anything about what the function of a castle was (I was still very much in awe of Mark then, and also could barely remember who William of Poitiers was supposed to be, let alone put across coherent thoughts about castles). When we arrived at Castle Acre, I slightly reluctantly hung back, not realising that Mark waited for no man (or woman), and had immediately gone off across the field. I loped after him, and out of breath managed to catch up with him at the end of the field, before engaging in what was a frank if somewhat one-sided discussion about the remains of Castle Acre. I've since found out that Mark admired, as he puts it, those regional 'historians with muddy boots', and wanted to be one too. At the time, though, I didn't realise how literally he took it, and I wish I had, as I would have worn different footwear.

Mark never published anything on Norfolk, nor East Anglia, nor England, although you wouldn't know it to talk to him or be taught by him. As he would freely admit, he spent so much time teaching 'out-of-specialism'. The teaching section of his CV reads for me as a series of lecture courses I wish I had gone to—as now a historian of medieval Europe of the central middle ages. We would all like to know about Mark's take on 'Twelfth century France'; 'England and the Wider world, 1042-1330', a lecture course couched in the time frame of British History 2, but one which we all know would have been the most exciting and idiosyncratic tour around the central medieval west, with England as a frame through which to view European history, rather than the other way around. And I still haven't found anyone

who went to the series of 8 lectures he gave in 2006, 'from Louis the Fat to Kublai Khan, 1122-1273: themes and ideas'. What themes? What ideas? Did anyone here go? We must find out.

But my topic here is Mark and the West. By 'West', I mean, Western Europe, the peculiarities of its many still-nationally based historiographical obsessions, as well as that brand of 'Western European English history' taught for such a long time in Oxford. This is in some ways a difficult topic, as little of Mark's published work had as its main subject either comparisons with the West (although some did) or on the 'West' (or even a part of it). He gave papers on 'the West', including one wonderful one on Matilda of Canossa, and of course there was all the preparation, honed over decades of dedicated teaching, archaeological research, and a prodigious sense of the scholarly field, for the two books he was working on when he died - *Feudal revolution* and *the eleventh century*. So what I want to do in the time I have is to look at how he used 'the West' in his 1996 book, 'the making of orthodox Byzantium', and then think about how that work informed his two draft books both of which were centred around Western Europe, and put its historiographical inheritance centre stage - *Feudal Revolution: the transformations of Europe*, which would have been published by Yale, and then his volume 5—on the eleventh century—of the *Oxford History of Medieval Europe*, the exciting series edited by Henrietta Leyser and Jinty Nelson.

**mark and the west in the making of orthodox byzantium**

In the working manuscript of his *Feudal Transformations*, Mark describes explicitly how these great French regional histories—Duby's Mâconnais, Toubert's Lazio, Fossier's Picardy, Bonnassie's Catalonia, made him want to do the same for Byzantium, which was what sent him off on his doctoral thesis.

Mark wasn't the only person to do this in a broad-brush sort of way: the French historian Évelyne Patlagean in her *Un Moyen Âge grec: Byzance IX-XVe siècle* took Marc Bloch's *La société féodale* and applied it to Byzantium, with the aim of showing how Byzantium, particularly in the central middle ages, had many structural similarities with the west.

But that's not what Mark does in his *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*; in many ways, this book is wholly different. In some respects, it is a political history, based on a series of punchy questions. (Mark was always fond of framing major research questions in terms of undergraduate essays, without making them lose any of their subtlety and importance. He thought this method was still one of the best ways to show whether the historian—whether undergraduate, postgraduate, postdoctoral or professorial—was actually thinking seriously about long-term change - his review of John Freed's *Frederick Barbarossa* shows this technique at its most jovial height.) But anyway: the aim in *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* is to show how one political unit (the late Roman Empire) transformed into the polity (which still called itself the Roman empire) which had lost its dominance in the Near East but maintained its clear centre on Constantinople.

In *the Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, the west doesn't act as an overriding interpretative model, it acts to show how Byzantine history, in his view, cannot be told as western European early and central medieval history has been told - that is, primarily through texts. Texts survive, but not in the same number, nor in the same archival form. He was fond of saying you can't do what X has done for Burgundy or Galicia, or Normandy for Byzantium. Mark begins the book with what looks like—for him—a rather plodding way. 'as one would

expect', he writes, 'this book is written on the basis of a body of Byzantine sources written mostly in Greek between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, that includes chronicles, saints' lives, lawcodes, property documents, inscriptions, the acts of church councils, works of theology, sermons, homilies, letters panegyrics, and handbooks to diplomacy, warfare, court ceremony and protocol'. But he then goes on to say but, hold on a second, where does all this get us? We have very few documents surviving from a society that not only *used* documents but was *governed* by documents. And, he continues, this is in many ways the opposite of what we have from Western Europe, particularly late Merovingian Francia and the Carolingian empire, Anglo-Saxon England and Catalonia—societies which used documents (sometimes) and were (at least sometimes, although goodness *that*'s a scholarly debate) governed by documents—but whose archives managed, in places, to survive centuries of politics and priorities which could have seen their destruction. As Mark says 'Anglo-Saxon England has left a richer documentary inheritance than Byzantium' (and this isn't a compliment to Anglo-Saxon England, regardless of what one thinks about how far kings governed through written documents in the 9th and 10th centuries). In one of his drafts of his Feudal revolution book, he spoke of his always-tempting idea to produce a map of Europe and the Near east 'scaled according to the quantity of medieval evidence that survives'. Iceland would do well, thanks to its literature; Catalonia would be enormous, Northern Spain would 'loom large', and 'Anglo-Saxon England would be rather cut down to size'.

The result is, said Mark, is that we have to rely much, much more on material evidence, particularly archaeology if we are to understand the changing political, social and economic history of Byzantium. You simply can't write history through texts alone. As he wrote in his forthcoming paper for the *Past & Present* supplement *Global Middle Ages*: 'it would be hard to think of anybody who really thinks the past is only accessible through written sources' (well, one probably could, but perhaps one shouldn't). And his material evidence isn't just framed by precise archaeological digs (although it is that too), it is based on exactly the same Pevseneresque-fuelled knowledge of the landscape that took him speeding across the fields towards Castle Acre in 2004—he wanted to know the landscape, to have walked across it all, and to know, understand and feel what changes in the landscape meant for social and economic organisation.

**Mark and the west - 11th century, feudal transformations**

It's this combination: the evidence of the landscape, the deep love and respect for French regional history, the clear framing of the limits of *texts* which means that Mark was an obvious choice to write the book on *Feudal Revolution*, which was under contract with Yale, and which he seems to have been working particularly on between the late 2000s and early 2010s. For those of you who don't know, the 'feudal revolution' is a paradigm of change which, depending on your view point, affected either the whole of Western Europe or a small region in Burgundy—or absolutely nowhere at all— over a long eleventh century. This change, wherever it was, involved the break-up of central power structures, leaving more local knights and greater lords to intensively and competitively exploit the landscape. The localisation of political competition was witnessed by two major changes - first, the spread of castles across Western Europe, and, second, the depression of the status of the peasantry, as lords took more from those lower down the social scale to increase their own local power, with the effect of blurring the line between free and unfree peasants so significantly that the distinction lost, in practice, all meaning.

The feudal revolution received a lot of attention, particularly in Anglophone scholarship of the 1990s. Thomas Bisson published a wide-ranging study, focussing mainly on the behaviour of lords (rather than on the broader socio-economic change) and a debate in *Past & Present* followed, when Bisson was roundly critiqued by all other contributors apart from the man sitting to my right/left/behind me, Chris Wickham. The idea of a feudal revolution has continued to attract attention as it remains, for all its problems, one of the main ways to characterise politico-social and social-economic change over a long eleventh century.

Mark's position on this was perhaps unfashionable when he first started to develop it, for it was on the side of revolution. He wrote in a draft chapter that he had never 'got over the impact of first reading Toubert on Lazio. The idea that the landscape, in its fullest sense (so fields and woods, ditches and bridges, villages and castles, towers and churches) is a social artefact which properly read is likely to be our fullest source for any society, still seems to me a fundamental insight'. The norm of Western European society in a long eleventh century was, he wrote, 'of new castles and manorial sites, of new urban and rural churches ... it was a world of forest clearance and marsh drainage and of new nucleated villages, around which the agricultural landscape was coming to be polarised'. Was a similar sort of thing happening in Byzantium? Did there appear a landscape 'dotted with the marks of seigneurial power'? Yes ... but later in the eleventh century, and the evidence is difficult (and the Cappadocian estates perhaps more a high-rise for the up-and-coming when the state was still making law). For Mark then, it was the landscape that told us of a long revolution—feudal in a loose Marxist sense—which had profound consequences for Europe over the next six centuries.

Mark's feudal revolution, then, came out of thinking through maps of evidence, and how the landscape was our main source for social change. It is testament to the generosity and ambition of Mark's scholarship that his *Eleventh Century* volume was not a guide to the feudal revolution: he didn't —as he might have done—want to get two books out of one. Instead, the notes which survive for it (thanks to John Sabapathy, who is writing the 13th century volume, and preserved Mark's plan) show an ambitious work, taking in new research on climate change, broadening what we understand by Europe to properly encompass Eastern Europe, but also North Africa, the Near east and the Steppe world. If the landscape of the West motored Mark's approach to historical writing, teaching and research, his own view of it was constantly changing. It is not so much that this technique has informed my own research—Mark was too idiosyncratic, too much his own self to be emulated (and I find tweed uncomfortable)—rather, it was his capacity to *look at what you see*, to think about what you *see*—at what surrounds you at the grandest possible level—which was the enduring contribution of his scholarship, his teaching, his conversation.

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