

The first image that comes into my mind of Mark as teacher is that of an enormous wheel of Wensleydale cheese. It was the Byzantine master's students' last class before Christmas, 2010. With the frost still on our breath from the December cold, we filed into the drab, characterless, institutional room that had been assigned to us by the History faculty. Inside this uninspiring locale, however, we found Mark, beaming with warmth, presiding over the Wensleydale With an equally enormous knife, insisting that we all have thick wedges of Christmas cake topped with cheese. The topic of the day was 11th century monasticism, but the mood was anything but ascetic in Mark's class.

I remember him asking me, "This is from your part of the world, isn't it?", and it is true that cheese and fruitcake is a classic Yorkshire combination. Suddenly we had something in common, a shared taste, but I think that Mark could have found common ground with just about anyone. He had a penchant for the eccentric, a voracious appetite for discovering and sampling the curious and peculiar ways that different people ate or spoke or thought. It seemed to me that Mark had an endless supply of these little cultural morsels, deployed variously in conversation to delight, to shock, or to make you feel at home. It was always a joy never a chore, when Mark sidled up to you for a chat at some Byzantine event.

The other thing about this musing is that despite the fact that I was one of seventeen new masters' students, he knew where I was from. He took a genuine interest in his students full lives and experiences, within and without the academy. As a student he never treated you as an inferior but as a real person, and he insisted that you were good company, with fascinating things to say. You found yourself rising to the occasion, or at least it felt like that. This, I think set the tone for how his students' treated each other, in a humane, decent, interested manner. I think that this was one of the foundation stones of the remarkably active and warm Byzantine student community that I experienced in my time at Oxford. This community, many of them here today is one of his many stellar legacies.

Not only did he set this tone, however, he made spaces for his graduate students to come together and enjoy their time in Oxford, not least by throwing, along with Helen and the rest of the Whittow clan, the famous parties on Holywell Street. Lubricated with fizz, you could share a joke with your Greek instructor, or a luminary from another field, or whichever visiting scholar was dossing at Holywell Street. In another vein, I remember him handing out application forms so that all of his students could apply to use the All Souls library. These invitations let us into what felt like secret places in Oxford, they helped his students to feel special, to feel included rather than excluded by the grandeur and hidden doorways of Oxford.

Now the basic unit of DPhil supervision with Mark was a meeting in Beam Hall. Again, the memories are framed by the little indicators of the joie de vivre which enlivened every encounter with Mark. The sound of the electric coffee grinder whizzing the beans, the tinkling of crockery on a laden tray as Mark nimbly negotiated the winding staircase, the taste of whichever delicacy he had picked up from the bakery. These weren't only gastronomic encounters, of course. They were the series of conversations which helped me to organise and frame my research project. One of Mark's gifts was the big question that teased you out of the realms of detailed, technical analysis - the bedrock of any thesis - and invited you into wide-ranging conversations about models, comparanda, and broader Impiicacio11s. this wasn't just about teaching you to be a good dinner-companion, though it was that as well. These were the kind of questions that were going to interest funding bodies, book publishers, and hiring committees. Ever so gently, we were being given tools for the cut and thrust of the job market.

Another simple but important insight that Mark has was that graduate students need praise too. Graduate students have spent their previous lives being academically talented and being praised for it yet at graduate level it is easy for supervisors to focus exclusively on the negative, on what could be better, not least in some cases to prove to themselves how clever they are. Mark never did that. Though he was in fact a discerning judge of people's work and would provide suggestions and criticisms, the overwhelming outcome of a meeting was that you realised your work was rather more fascinating than you had possibly suspected. It was quite usual for me to go into a supervision in despair about work that I wasn't even sure I was interested in, let alone anyone else. Yet I would leave feeling like it was field-changing. The reality of course, was somewhere in between. But in a world full of negative voices about the conditions of graduate study and the academic job market. The value of the morale boost of a meeting with Mark was truly inestimable, and frequently kept me going in hard times.

I'll restrict myself to one last point: how effectively Mark advocated for his students within the otherwise impenetrable Oxford system. Though he might have looked like the stereotype of a conservative, he was eminently flexible in how his students pursued their projects: quite happy to rearrange the structure of the LABS master's for his students to take tutorials in another faculty, or to pick up a second language instead of the prescribed courses. Beyond this we were aware that much of Mark's work was striving along with other faculty in LABS, to carve out a place for Byzantine Studies in Oxford. A significant part of this, I am sure, revolved around winning funding for Byzantine graduate students: Mark knew how important funding was for attracting and supporting good research students and keeping the community alive, and I think that he saw that as part of his job as much as providing the intellectual space for them to thrive. For these pragmatic endeavours and for so much more, I feel we all owe him a debt of thanks.

I'll finish with the last time I saw Mark. We met in Brown's cafe. I was late but I found Mark beatifically presiding over two cups of tea, each paired with a Pastel de Nata, a little Portuguese custard tart. I didn't even know what a Pastel de Nata was at that time, but recently I seem to see them everywhere. I can't work out whether Mark was ahead of the trend, or if this was just another instance of Mark helping me to notice something delicious that had always been there.