

Mark on Landscape

When Max asked me to talk on the subject of Mark's approach to landscapes I knew that there was one landscape in particular that needed to be addressed. Mark spent a great deal of the eighties and nineties in the Maeander valley in southwestern Turkey, and I think that it is fair to say that the Maeander region was the laboratory in which many of Mark's approaches to landscape were shaped. Mark's most recent publication on this region came in 2016, but today I will principally be discussing the early work, and in particular Mark's DPhil thesis: "Social and Political Structures in the Maeander Region of Western Asia Minor on the Eve of the Turkish Invasion".

I will then hand over to Wiktor, who will consider the role of landscape in Mark's work more broadly.

Mark never published the thesis, but rather used it as a springboard from which to launch a series of archaeological surveys. However, when one retrieves a thesis from the Bodleian's closed stack, one is asked to sign a copyright declaration stapled to the inside cover. The form is therefore a record all of the individuals who have sat confined to the Bod and read through the work. That stapled to Mark's thesis reads as a veritable who's who of Byzantine archaeology.

The Maeander valley is also close to my heart. Over the past few years I have been putting together my own thesis on the medieval archaeology of a city in the region. But my work has been informed by a surge of archaeological and historical research on the medieval Maeander. Mark's interest in the area was decades ahead of the scholarly field. In the eighties, not only were there almost no archaeological projects explicitly targeting medieval sites in the valley, the very idea of the Maeander region as a heuristic historical category was largely unthought-of. Previous research had tended to adopt the regional demarcations of classical geography. Mark's was one of the first studies to define the Maeander in environmental and ecological terms, an approach that necessitated a more considered approach to the role of landscape in historical process.

The first chapter of the thesis is concerned with physical geography, down to underlying rocks and alluvial deposits. These are discussed in terms of their agricultural affordances, which may or may not be realised by the inhabitants of the valley at any given time. Geological accumulations might sound rather dry. The natural beauty of the Maeander has prompted evocative prose of scholars from Louis Robert through to Peter (Thonemann), and the young Mark was no exception. The modern settlement pattern, he says, "is particularly evident at dusk, when from any mountain side, several hundred feet above the plain, there is a ribbon of lights visible along the terrace but a general darkness over the mountains and the plain itself."

This brings us to a fundamental aspect of the Maeander's geography. Its geographical coherence lies in the consistent juxtaposition of very different types of space: flat alluvial plain, gentle foothills and rugged, rocky peaks. In summer the zones are may be distinguished chromatically, the green of the floodplain giving way to parched yellows and browns above. Historically, settlement has tended to occupy the foothills, with cereal cultivation in the plain and pastoralism on the mountainside. Social dynamics other than agriculture have also played out along geographic lines. Medieval hagiography provides a fascinating subplot in Mark's thesis, as the literary production of the valley pits the bishops of the towns against the ascetic monks of the hills.

The kind of summary that I have just given can often open the door to crude determinism. Mark's Maeander work sought to frame subsistence strategies as human choices, though made with the natural resources and social conditions imposed by a material world. This is particularly clear in the medieval castle publications, and **Wiktor is goint to continue this theme in a moment.**

Long before the widespread application of James Scott's anarchist historical geography, Mark recognised that some of those subsistence choices constituted a conscious rejection of economic complexity in favour of the perceived advantages of a life free from domination. In 1994 he suggested that the programme of imperial fortifications in the twelfth and thirteenth century Maeander might have been designed as much "to keep communities... inside the empire, as to keep the Turks out".

I would like to end by drawing attention to Mark's engagement with the people of the contemporary Maeander valley. Throughout these publications Mark frequently cites conversations with shepherds, farmers and potters, who are assumed to be the true authorities on practical matters in a manner that is neither patronising nor exoticising. In the acknowledgement paragraphs that accompany the survey articles, local hosts and guides are given equal status to donors and funding bodies. I think that shows a side of Mark with which we are all familiar.