Rome, Polybius and the East

Introduction

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JCQ and AE

The Derow Doctrine

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ESG [Erich Gruen]

Peter in Toronto

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TDB [Tim Barnes]

Oxford

When Peter Derow arrived back at Wadham College in autumn 1977 to take up the tutorial fellowship made vacant by George Forrest’s appointment to the Wykeham chair, he cannot have been well known in Oxford, outside a limited circle. He had, of course, spent two years there in the mid-1960s studying ancient history and philosophy for Greats, and been taught by, among others, George Forrest and Martin Frederiksen.¹ But Oxford undergraduates, unless they opted (as I did not) for ‘Roman I’, the Polybios period, were unlikely to have read his work. To some of us at Wadham the announcement in the Oxford University Gazette, in the first half of 1977, that an apparent outsider had been elected seemed surprising, particularly when rumours circulated that he had not been the first to be offered the post.

Surprise was redoubled when we met Peter. My tutorial partner remarked how clever it was of the College to have reappointed George, so closely did Peter share features of speech, bearing, and dress with his former tutor; not to mention that his room contained, like George’s, a billiard table (though half-size), that he was another smoker (though Gauloises, later Camel, rather than Player’s Navy Cut), and that he was equally generous with refreshments (though often Rioja and burgundy, not only Martini).

¹ Anglophone scholars tend to be less closely identified with the views of a single mentor than those from some more professorial academic environments; but it would be interesting to trace the influences of his teachers (undergraduate and postgraduate) upon Peter’s thought. If I have foregrounded George Forrest in this note, it is because I knew him best of Peter’s tutors, and never knew Martin Frederiksen personally. George’s (and thus Peter’s) debt to Peter Fraser would also repay inquiry (cf. Derow and Forrest 1982, 91 n. 126 ad fin.).
Given Peter’s precision about other things, however - a precision readily divined from his handwriting (fig. 1) - it seems possible that the shambling exterior was a deliberate style, perhaps a statement of principle, doubtless a pedagogical tactic. Rhetorically he was anything but imprecise. Within a studiedly colloquial register (quite different from George’s conscious vernacular), Peter could be fearsomely logical: the jocular murmur could hide a razor.

Despite his seeming 24-hour availability to students, one quickly learned that his life had a very private side. Although he moved into college permanently in 1978, he was invisible at times, which, one supposed, were for his family. In tutorials, his political views were to be inferred, rather than being stated directly in George’s manner. I do not believe I ever heard him spell out a party political opinion. There were (rare) condemnatory asides; more often, his undoubtedly strong convictions were conveyed by murmured evaluation of one’s own, no doubt inadequately theorized, opinions. One could confidently deduce an affinity for the Greek Left from, for example, his excited report of a Mikis Theodorakis concert, attended in London. Later he became publicly active in the Campaign for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles.

Extra-collegial teaching duties in the early years were limited to a minimum of 16 university lectures a year, plus periodic stints of Greats examining. Things became more complicated later, with the introduction of new Honour Schools, and a reduction in full-time staffing in Ancient History. He chose to lecture chiefly in ‘Roman I’. So-called lectures - on topics unlikely to attract a mass audience, but which drew a lively mix of advanced undergraduates, research students, and occasional faculty members - were as informal and intimate as possible, more like seminars. Often they centred upon a key epigraphic text, circulated to those present as a photocopy and scrutinized in detail - even down to restorations and disputed readings in the text - without ever losing sight of the big issues it might illuminate, especially with regard to Roman policy and Greek responses.

In the first year, at least, Peter’s tutorials, to students from Wadham and from other colleges, were usually for two students; later he preferred the one-to-one format, despite the consequence of a very full diary in term-time. Over the years he taught a wider historical range in tutorials than in lectures: chiefly ‘Greek I’ (archaic to the late fifth century) and of course ‘Roman I’; also ‘Roman II’ (Gracchi to Nero), rarely ‘Roman III’ (Principate); apparently never the second half of ‘Greek II’.  

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2 One thinks of the informality chosen - because it suited him - by another academic who is a native of the USA (Parini 2005, 69–81), as well as his emphasis on teaching as the adoption of a persona (3, 58–9) and as performance (112–13). His engaging book embodies some of the same pedagogic values as Peter’s; partly coincidence, but it is interesting to note that Parini has had extended encounters with classics teachers at St Andrews and Oxford.

3 Now Marbles Reunited.

4 ‘Greats’ is the colloquial term for the second part (terms 6 to 12) of the four-year classics degree, the Honour School of Literae Humaniores. Most permanent teaching staff in Humanities hold college ‘tutorial fellowships’ and see students from their own college (and from others by reciprocal arrangement) in ones or twos, for an hour weekly; they may also hold a university lecturership under which they give centrally timetabled lectures or classes which students from all colleges may attend.

5 Oxford maintains the admirable tradition that any member of the University may attend any University lecture (but not college teaching).

6 He taught it in his first year at Wadham, at least; though we didn’t get beyond Claudius.
century). The impact of his tutorials was inspiring, as they fostered open debate and confidence in discussion. They focused above all on the ancient evidence and avoided the intricacies of recent debate, while trying to unpick the often polarized ideological agendas (we did not yet call them that) of the high peaks of scholarship. Termly collections\footnote{Informal examinations after each vacation.} were gently annotated - but not graded - both translations and gobbet answers being sprinkled with precise citations of relevant ancient sources; essays embellished with detailed information in a tiny hand, summative comments gently pointing out shortcomings (‘Right. May be questioned, however, whether the answer is directly aimed at the constituent elements of the question as put’).

As with his own politics - hardly separable from his views on antiquity - one did not hear the kind of epigrammatic salvo that George would sometimes let off (once describing Augustus as ‘the biggest shit of all time’). Peter, by contrast, let you suggest an interpretation and then, almost without you knowing it, made you see what a deep pit you had dug yourself into (‘Try to be precise about Crassus if at all possible’). Yet at all times he was the most sympathetic and natural teacher, drawing on his extraordinary depth of learning yet conveying a sense of an exploration shared; listening carefully as well as explaining. Colleagues of the highest distinction describe him as far cleverer than they. Whether or not that is true, his brilliance was manifested most often in the kind of rhetorical strategies that were on display in tutorial teaching.

Support for students was also extended through legendary hospitality. The zither which fellow students in the 1960s remember had been replaced by a guitar for excursions into blue-grass. In the era of the video cassette, films such as 
\textit{Spartacus} and \textit{Z} were the focus of revision sessions. Radical and liberal in outlook as he was, he favoured a conservative approach to student assessment.\footnote{Unless a student chooses to write a dissertation, their degree is awarded and classified entirely on the basis of examination papers, set centrally for students from all colleges and marked by a single board, staff from different colleges taking it in turns to serve.} He reportedly disapproved, for example, of the use of computers in calculating degree classes, and was a devotee of the now-defunct \textit{viva} (from which he had benefited in 1967).\footnote{Vivas (\textit{viva voce} or oral examinations) were held, after the written papers were marked, for candidates in a borderline between classes, to determine whether they could be raised to the higher class.} As an examiner he is remembered as always knowing the latest scholarship, and as invariably looking for the positives in a student’s work. Despite his conservative approach to teaching, at least in terms of content, he was not hostile to curriculum innovation \textit{per se}. That Ancient History in ‘New Greats’ (from 1997) was not changed radically may have suited him, though he did venture into new areas: in that honour school, and in Ancient and Modern History, he undertook to teach Athenian Democracy with great success. Opinions are divided on whether he enjoyed sub-faculty administration; more nearly unanimous in praise of his contribution, both intellectual and social, as director of graduate studies in ancient history in the early 2000s. One task he took unusually seriously was the training of postgraduates to teach.

Peter was not as visible on the wider scholarly stage as one might have expected, and neither, apparently, did he serve on national committees, other than that of the Marbles campaign, though in this he was not unique among Oxford classicists of his era. He seems to have found it hard to imagine why anyone would voluntarily leave
Oxford for a post elsewhere. Although he assiduously attended Ancient History seminars, convened seminar series, and occasionally contributed papers,\textsuperscript{10} he did not usually go away for his sabbaticals. There was only a limited presence on the academic circuit, such as at conferences outside Oxford - the memorial event for George in Chios being one exception,\textsuperscript{11} a conference in Capri another. His paper on imperial space\textsuperscript{12} originated as a conference paper given under the auspices of the Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, not far from his beloved September haunt in the Pyrenees, the locality in which his ashes would one day be scattered. He did from time to time speak at other universities, giving papers at, for example, Edinburgh, Munich,\textsuperscript{13} and Dublin.\textsuperscript{14} Often this would be in response to an invitation from a former pupil. On one notable day in 1990 he brought several postgraduates to my own university for a day of papers on Roman warfare in the Leicester-Nottingham seminar series.\textsuperscript{15} He was in frequent contact with former pupils, as well as with colleagues elsewhere. Among these, hellenistic specialists loomed large; Erich Gruen, for example, was invited to give a revision class to Peter’s first cohort of finalists.

The world of Classics has long lamented, rightly or wrongly, that no monograph emerged from Peter’s typewriter, despite the sempiternal existence of an OUP contract for a book on his main interest, the Roman conquest of Greece. But it is not necessary to publish a book to have impact. Peter may have felt it was difficult to say new things in a monograph on subjects on which he had already produced perfectly crafted papers, whose impact was considerable. Books should not be produced purely to satisfy research assessment exercises; they should be written by people who have a burning desire to say something. If Peter chose to make his primary impact in other ways, that was - in those days -his own business. It is also the case that Peter made an immense impression on ancient history through those he taught and influenced; several dozen undergraduates and postgraduates who came under his wing, not only from Wadham, have gone on to academic careers around the world (often reaching professorial rank). Peter undoubtedly paid his dues to his subject.

Timothy Barnes has shown above how important to Peter’s future work were his Toronto years. In his subsequent ‘Oxford II’ period his research continued to yield some of that ‘richer store’. The highlights of the first decade back in Wadham were the JRS 1979 paper and the collection of Hellenistic documents, both already alluded to by Barnes and both prepared before 1977. There were also an appraisal of Polybios in a volume on Greek literary sources\textsuperscript{16} and the publication of a Chian inscription with George Forrest.\textsuperscript{17} We should also count the highly influential Cambridge Ancient History chapter on the Roman takeover of Greece, though not published until 1989, as a product of the earlier 1980s.\textsuperscript{18} The second decade offers a swathe of shorter writings and four substantive papers, including the splendid chapter on Polybios and historical

\textsuperscript{10} Notably Derow 1994 = ch. 5 below; also a paper on Sicily and S. Italy (unpublished).
\textsuperscript{11} See Derow 2006.
\textsuperscript{12} Derow 2007 = ch. 10 below.
\textsuperscript{13} See ch. . . . below, previously unpublished.
\textsuperscript{14} Derow 1995.
\textsuperscript{15} These were the papers of Rich, Richardson, and Ziolkowski, published in Rich and Shipley 1993.
\textsuperscript{16} Derow 1982.
\textsuperscript{17} Derow and Forrest 1982.
\textsuperscript{18} Derow 1989 = ch. 1 below. The preface to the volume notes that ‘Some contributions were received as early as 1980, and the majority by 1984, when there was an opportunity for revision’ (Astin and Walbank 1989, xiii).
The third decade saw significant new ventures, some of which will result in important publications. In these years, besides co-editing the Forrest memorial volume, Peter built on the work he had undertaken on Chios in 1979. His collaboration in the *Inscriptiones Graecae* project twice took him back to that island, and as well as preparing its Hellenistic corpus for publication he organized a symposium at Wadham on its epigraphy. One meticulous publication of a perplexing Chian inscription, seemingly of a unique kind, has already appeared in the Greek memorial volume to Forrest; and much else will follow.

Not only Toronto, but also his ‘Oxford I’ period and the Princeton years, created the ‘seed-bed’ (as Barnes puts it) for Peter’s penetrating work on Hellenistic politics. In ‘Oxford II’, as well, he did not stand still, and developed new areas of expertise. The seed-bed was being enriched; and in time it will bear new fruit.

DGJS

Why Ancient History?

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19 See n. 10 above.
20 See Derow and Forrest 1982 = ch. 13 below (date of visit at p. 79).
21 Derow 2006, not reprinted below.
22 Here I must acknowledge responsibility for the short-lived factoid in the Wikipedia entry on Peter, which asserted that Bradford Welles supervised Peter’s Ph.D. I inserted it on 10 Dec. 2006 while updating the article and did not remove it until 21 Feb. 2007, so that it unfortunately entered the public record in the three obituaries. It was a false memory encouraged by conversations with Peter about Welles, and probably by the reference by Bagnall and Derow 1981, xvi (repeated in Bagnall and Derow 2004, 00), to Welles as ‘our teacher’; the book is also dedicated to Welles’s memory.