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2. Introduction

In the spring of 2004, Dr Tim Greenwood argued, correctly, in his *Teaching Armenia* contribution to the Overnight Expert series, that medieval Armenia offers much scope for comparative history. He suggested that any colleagues teaching UK undergraduate introductory medieval history modules that did not include Armenia in their syllabi might consider incorporating it. He likewise suggested a number of themes, topics, questions and reading lists that might be used in such incorporation, stressing as advantages that Armenia will be new to undergraduate students and that comparative history involving medieval Armenia could be considered as being at the cutting edge of research.

The issues raised by *Teaching Armenia* are important for all who are involved in the teaching of history to undergraduates and will doubtless stimulate further reflection and discussion. *The Teaching of Comparative History and the example of Medieval Armenia*, drawing on six years' personal experience of teaching medieval Armenia both as part of an introductory medieval history module and as part of compulsory introductory World History, for undergraduates, at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, is intended as a contribution to such consideration.

First, there is the issue of breadth at an introductory level in the undergraduate history curriculum; this is a recurring theme in discussions of curriculum design, itself a perennial question in these days of rising student numbers, of changes in the school curriculum and of Teaching Quality Audits. Second is what might be considered as an aspect of this, namely the usefulness of comparative history, especially if it includes novel places and/or societies. Third is the particular appeal of medieval Armenian history as an element in such comparative history. The first two principles have animated the first-year History syllabus at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne since 1998-1999, and all three since 1999-2000. They have been successful, but that is not to say that there are no problems involved in implementing them.

3. The importance of breadth in the curriculum

The arguments for a 'from breadth to depth' progression in an undergraduate History curriculum, which, as noted at the LTSN Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology meeting on 27 February 2004, commonly occurs, are well known. They include providing background for specialised options, enabling students to make informed choices of such options at later stages, and being useful for students with little or

no historical knowledge. In recent years it has seemed that History students arrive at University having studied some aspects of the twentieth century, notably Hitler and Stalin, but with minimal awareness of other milestones in history or grasp of what might be termed basic historical vocabulary. Certainly when we have asked our new students here, *en masse*, as we have every year since 1998, whether we are wrong to suppose that immediately before they arrived they had studied the history of a hundred years or so of the history of Britain and a handful of mainland European countries, probably France and Germany, we have not been contradicted.

We cannot assume that our students will understand us if we refer, in passing, to what may seem to many of us aspects of common knowledge and basic reference points. Such references might include the following: Troy; Homer; Herodotus; the end of the Roman Empire; the appeal in a pre-Christian society of Christianity to women; Bede; Charlemagne; England (not Britain); the spread of literacy; the rise of printing; the Reformation; Milton; the Enlightenment; pre-industrial societies; hunter-gatherer societies; the Industrial Revolution; the development of racist thought; the rise of the individual; the impact or consequences of any of these. Nor can we assume that students will know for example the approximate geographical locations of the Byzantine and the Ottoman empires, or that the term Europe has a geographical and a cultural meaning as well as a political one or that there is a difference between feud (bloodfeud/vendetta) and feudalism. Colleagues will doubtless feel able to extend these lists.

Our students should certainly increase their geographical and their chronological range of knowledge, and also their conceptual range. We all now live in a global village and are involved in, and affected by, events in other parts of the world. Our undergraduates are likely to meet people from, and perhaps travel to, different places and cultures. Some awareness of their background may be helpful. Recognition of this is not of course either new or unique to History. It lies behind, for example, the *Global Perspectives in Higher Education* project currently (July 2005) being undertaken by The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and funded by the Department for International Development. This project will assess the current status of global perspectives within undergraduate programmes in different disciplines in the UK, gathering examples, and will explore ways in which they could be further embedded within Higher Education. The RGS (with IBG) plans to make its findings available online. (The Research Project Officer is Jenny Lunn, j.lunn@rgs.org).

Northwest Europe's history is typical neither of European history as a whole, nor of what has happened and happens in the world as a whole. The balance of power and of development between the different geographical regions of our planet has changed dramatically over the past two millennia. Twenty-first century Anglo-Saxon British norms are not the norms of most of the past of most of the planet. The assumption, for example, of most of our students that religion is a private matter, for individuals, involving primarily if not exclusively personal spirituality and sets of ideas that can be called beliefs and doctrines, and should be kept out of politics and social organisation would have seemed incomprehensible to the vast majority of our ancestors. For most of human history religion has been a highly public matter, a way of life, something that permeated economic organisation, social relations and political institutions and ideologies, in which spirituality and doctrine were minor parts. Very recently one newspaper columnist has suggested that one problem for the English in dealing with terrorism inspired by religion is their lack of understanding of religious fervour, due to England's being a post-religious society (Bruce Anderson, in *The Independent*, 18 July 2005, p. 27). Likewise the very importance of the individual, that our students take for granted, is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Those who study only the recent past will not properly understand either 'how we got to where we are now' or how secure or insecure our 'here and now' is. Nor will they be equipped to understand those present-day problems, and the rhetoric surrounding them, that have their roots in, and/or appeal to, the remote past. The issue of nations and nationalisms in present-day Europe is one example. Turkey's projected entry into the European Union is another case in point. How 'European' is her heritage and current culture? Should the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 be an issue that is taken into account? Can the Armenian Genocide be understood without any reference to that part of Armenian history wherein the Armenians were self-governing and constructed a literary culture and a glorious artistic and architectural legacy, that is the period from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries A.D.?

Breadth is therefore essential for our undergraduates, and it can be provided in various ways, through the combination of less broad modules to make a broad portfolio, by the provision of broad modules, through modules concentrating on particular themes, areas or periods. Comparative history is one method.

4. Teaching comparative history

This method has been used at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in the context of World History. World History has been a compulsory element for first-year Single Honours History undergraduates, constituting one third of their work, divided into two modules, one in each semester, since 1998-1999.

Comparative history has a great many advantages. Comparison helps to establish what is unique and special about individual problems and issues and what they have in common with the same ones elsewhere. This in turn facilitates understanding of particular phenomena and interpretation of sketchy sources. Nearly fifty years ago Michael Wallace-Hadrill, a future Chichele Professor of Medieval History in the University of Oxford, produced a seminal work on bloodfeud in Merovingian Gaul, using insights from anthropological study. It is now a commonplace for early medievalists to refer to the value of anthropological studies for their work, facilitating for example the understanding of bloodfeud, gift-exchange and deposition of gravegoods as practised by the early Anglo-Saxon elites. This approach, based on comparison between, on the one hand a single society as revealed in its historical and legal texts, poetry and archaeology and, on the other hand societies far distant in time and place as described by twentieth-century ethnographers, was pioneered in the case of Anglo-Saxon history by James Campbell, now one of the foremost living authorities on Anglo-Saxon England, some decades ago. Oxford's new Chichele Professor, Chris Wickham, has written about the usefulness and the difficulties of comparing early medieval western European rural societies and of the comparative perspective with regard to the development of rural communes in Italy. The usefulness of the comparative approach was explicitly and resoundingly demonstrated by Henry Mayr-Harting, subsequently Oxford's Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History, in 1993 in his study of two Christian conversions, the Anglo-Saxons' and the Bulgarians', in which he drew on Raymond Firth's studies of the twentieth-century Tikopians, a Polynesian society on the small south sea island of Tikopia, north of New Zealand, as well as on Bulgarian and Anglo-Saxon matter.

A further advantage of comparative history is that it can include, and therefore introduce students to, a wide range of times and places without necessarily having to cover particular times or places either broadly or deeply and without losing intellectual cohesion and intelligibility. Yet another advantage is that within this framework students can be introduced to the use of different kinds of evidence and methodological approaches and questions, for example the use of material remains of the past, art historical material and fictional poetry and prose. One might for instance use these three as well as other types of evidence in a comparative investigation of the role and status of women in different societies. Ideas, material and case studies for comparative historical teaching are to be found in a number of resources. The journal *Education about Asia* for example offers reviews of Curriculum Materials as well as essays and features and other reviews.

The Newcastle upon Tyne World History modules take history to be the study of the entire past, overriding both the traditional distinction between history and pre-history and also their exclusive focus on *homo sapiens*. These modules' scope and syllabus thus comprise the planet Earth from the Big Bang to the present day. Given the vastness of the subject, neither a geographical nor a chronological approach to the syllabus would be practical or intellectually satisfying. Instead each module is thematic and divided into four sub-units of four lectures each, each sub-unit taught by a different lecturer. Thus for example *Encounters in World History* has included Environmental Encounters, Economic Encounters, Religious Encounters and Border Encounters. *Identities in World History* has included Bodily and Personal Identities, Familial Identities, Religious Identities and National Identities.

Under such headings milestones in human (including Neanderthal) history can be identified, historical problems, issues and approaches discussed, themes and developments traced, continuities and changes established, using case studies, involving different types of evidence, from different times and places. In their choice of topics and of examples and evidence lecturers have scope, perhaps more than at any other stage of the curriculum except the third-year Special Subject, to offer students teaching that is based on their own research. Students are urged to read around the lectures, choosing, like their teachers, their own selection of case studies that, taken together, introduce them to different times (selected from prehistoric, ancient, medieval, early modern and modern) and different places (selected from Europe, Asia Minor, Asia, Africa, the Americas and Australasia), and using the reading lists provided by the lecturers.

Such an emphasis on themes and exercise of choice is more demanding for students than one that focuses on a particular place or time. As such it may be more effective in increasing students' historical understanding by encouraging them to think in terms of interpretations supported by facts and of weighing and evaluating facts rather than in terms of 'facts' alone. And confronting students with apparently strange and exotic places may, paradoxically, make it easier for them to get away from their common assumption that all places and cultures are much the same, only the details and the superficialities being different.

These are real intellectual merits. In addition, from the 'human resources' point of view such modules are economic as colleagues can slot in and out over the years, without destroying the identity, function and research dimension of the module.

Reading

John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 5-6

Education about Asia published thrice yearly by the Association for Asian Studies, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Henry Mayr-Harting, *Two conversions to Christianity: The Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons (The Stenton Lecture 1993)* (Reading: University of Reading, 1994)

J. Michael Wallace-Hadrill, 'The bloodfeud of the Franks', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 41 (1958-9), pp. 459-87.

Chris Wickham, 'Problems of Comparing Rural Societies in Early Medieval Western Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser. 2 (1992), pp. 221-46.

Chris Wickham, *Community and Clientele in Twelfth-Century Tuscany: The Origins of the Rural Commune in the Plain of Lucca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 1-10, 185-241.

5. Teaching Medieval Armenia in comparative history

Early medieval Armenia in World History

It is in the context of compulsory World History that Newcastle History undergraduates have been introduced to medieval Armenia. During the years 1999-2002, late antique and early medieval Armenia (ca. 300 - ca. 1000) was used as a source of examples in Religious Encounters, and since 2002 it has featured in the same capacity in Religious Identities. Armenian examples ca. 300 - ca. 1000 have illustrated, in lectures, the following world historical issues: the problems (intellectual, psychological, social, economic and political) involved in a society's conversion to Christianity; the phenomenon of the adaptation of Christianity to a new society and *vice versa*; the phenomenon of creation of a Christianity that is distinctive in its ideas, organisation, art and architecture; the problem of whether or not heresies are not only religious but other sorts of movements, such as socio-economic, in disguise; the relationship between Christianity and national identity; the phenomenon of the remote past being a living issue, a particular interpretation of the remote past being part of a current identity (an Armenian example being the expressions of disagreement aroused by western scholars affirming a re-dating of Moses of Khoren, Armenia's 'Father of History' to the eighth rather than to the fifth century A. D.). Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide have also been included, in the context of conflicts between world religions and of demonisations of minority groups.

Early medieval Armenia and early medieval Europe: suggested comparisons

The logic of comparative history is that a variety of comparative cases may be equally valuable; in a particular context ancient Afghanistan and modern Tikopia may be as useful as medieval Armenia. One would need to be equally well informed about all three to decide. But early medieval Armenia not only provides the World historian with comparative material. It also offers the medievalist a wealth of subjects about which interesting comparisons may be made with societies of early medieval western Europe, especially Britain, and, sometimes, parallels drawn. Such an exercise does not demand, either of lecturers or of students, an entirely independent judgement drawing on study of two completely separate bodies of material. Though there are no recent specialised, lengthy, comparative studies, recent scholarship does offer readers some explicit comparisons and a comparative perspective.

Many of the suggested comparisons involve Christianity and the Church; problems regarding conversion to Christianity; problems of ecclesiastical discipline, for example aristocratic encroachment on monasteries; the composition of historical works as sophisticated portraits of the past for particular purposes, often as works of legitimisation of regimes and of exhortation, rather than as accurate snapshots of the past; the belief that sin and heresy would attract divine punishment in this world; the dilemmas of faith and church, their reactions and interpretations when faced with Christians being successfully attacked or conquered by non-Christians; the religious dimension to war; the Armenian and Anglo-Saxon cults of the Virgin Mary and the Armenian and Anglo-Saxon (and other Europeans) cult of the Cross; the similarities between some early Irish and Anglo-Saxon art and sculpture, especially the free-standing crosses, and some Armenian crosses and sculpture.

Most notable is the role of Christianity and the Church in stimulating and preserving a sense of 'national identity'. Here there is a striking parallel with Anglo-Saxon England. Well before the Norman Conquest of 1066 England had developed a sense of 'English' identity to compare with Armenian identity - though unlike Armenia eleventh-century England can be considered to have become a nation-state and has been described as such by James Campbell - and like Armenia enjoyed a vernacular Christian literary culture.

Adrian Hastings has argued that despite its universal and by implication non-national character, Christianity nevertheless has aspects that are highly stimulating to a sense of national identity. They include the political

role model presented in the Old Testament, that of Israel, which is a model of nationhood; the New Testament's miracle of Pentecost which sanctions translation into the vernacular, indirectly encouraging the development of separate literary cultures which themselves have the power to stimulate national identity; the fact that the New Testament contains many references to the world as one of 'peoples' and 'nations'; the fact of the Christian Church's organisational structure into units and sub-units. In the routine activities of its sub-units, for example, holding councils, it creates political communities of 'national' churches. Liturgy too offers scope for building a sense of political and/or national community, in the action of praying as a community and in the content of its prayers, for example for the community's king.

'Own language' Christianity may therefore be a powerful ingredient in the development of senses of nationhood. And since such Christianity was part of the life of people below the level of the aristocratic and clerical elites, it may even be, as Hastings argues, that villagers and peasants shared in such a sense. Other scholars of course have argued, and it is still sometimes assumed, that such senses were confined to those who were the patrons, subjects and intended audiences of the historical works that we have. If the reason for some scholars' denying the existence of senses of national identity before the modern period is a belief that such senses as are discernible were limited by class, and were therefore not national, then Hastings' argument is of major importance.

One could also incorporate Armenian case studies with western examples when considering art and architecture as expressions of concepts of kingship, the personal involvement of royalty and aristocracy in learning, their role as patrons of historical texts and monuments. Monarchs who might fruitfully be compared are the emperor Charlemagne (emperor 800-814), his palace chapel at Aachen, his biography, by Einhard, and the Carolingian Renaissance; Alfred of Wessex (871-899), the Alfred Jewel, Asser's biography of Alfred and Alfred's educational and translation programme; Alfred's almost contemporary, the Armenian King Gagik Artsruni of Vaspurakan in southern Armenia (908-943), his palace church on the island of Aghtamar on Lake Van and the account of his deeds in the Artsruni *History* and its continuation; Gagik's contemporary, the ex-monk and tsar Symeon of Bulgaria (893-927) and the flowering of Slavonic literature.

With regard to more purely social phenomena, the minstrel tradition, bloodfeud and the aristocratic retinue or warband have been identified as elements common to Armenia and England. Tim Greenwood has additionally suggested a number of topics where comparison between Armenia and Ireland might be valuable, the fusion of historical and epic styles, competition of elite families for resources, the concentration of power in one house and pressures within such kin-groups at times of succession. To these one might add that both pre-Viking Irish society and early medieval Armenian society were essentially non-urban, a factor which had effects on the organisational structure of their churches, and that their territories were urbanised by incoming outsiders (Vikings in Ireland, Greeks, Romans and Arabs in Armenia).

Early medievalists should be interested in the recent English translation and study of the late-twelfth-century Armenian lawcode that covers both secular and ecclesiastical subjects. This offers an opportunity to consider comparatively both approaches to law and also rules about sex and marriage, violence, theft, commerce, inheritance and other matters. The surviving body of Armenian literary evidence includes inscriptions and a number of donation texts, some with witness lists, beginning in the mid-ninth century, that are preserved in the late-thirteenth-century Stephen Orbelean's *History of Siwnik'*, some of which are explicitly stated to be inscriptions. All these texts together offer the western historian an opportunity to study, comparatively, ecclesiastical wealth and aristocratic donation to the church, the role of writing in, and other aspects of, the resolution and recording of disputes, even very particular ones, and also the accident of the survival of records. The information of the 867 inscription at Aruch, translated by Tim Greenwood, regarding the end of a dispute between two religious communities about water rights, may be compared with information from a carefully restored papyrus from Petra, in Jordan, of 544 A. D., about the resolution of a dispute over using and conducting water.

All of these topics might reward comparative discussion and all of them should be of interest to students, though not all may be suitable for future research. The same applies where it is difference rather than similarity that is immediately discernible; for example the apparent lack, in Armenia, of the Anglo-Saxon phenomena of significant female monastic communities and of powerful abbesses, and also to other respects in which early medieval Armenia was historically important. One of the latter is of course its role as a theatre and stimulus of conflict between great powers. Another is the fact that it was a frontier zone and a region of Christian-Islamic contact and cultural transmission, in which regard it might be compared to Arab Spain. As an area of cultural interaction and focus of rivalry between different empires it might also be compared to ninth-century Bulgaria and Moravia, which were important to both the Byzantines and the Carolingians, and to ninth- and tenth-century Italy, which was important to the Byzantines and the Carolingians and to their successors as western Roman emperors, the Ottonians. In the period in which Armenians lived and ruled in Cilicia (late eleventh-late fourteenth centuries; Armenian Cilicia became a kingdom in 1198) Armenians were involved in the Crusades. For these reasons, from 1999 until 2003 (when the module was discontinued) first-year Newcastle students were given a chance to encounter medieval

Armenia for a second time, when it featured in an optional module *The Origins of Europe: Empires and Barbarians 400 – 800*. In this module, Armenia took up two out of 24 lectures and briefly appeared in general issues, such as east-west contacts, monasticism and the purposes of early medieval historical writing.

Reading

- Karapet J. Basmadjian (Karapet Y. Basmajejan), *Les inscriptions arméniennes d'Ani, de Bagnair et de Marmachên* (Paris, 1931). Translations first published in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 3rd ser. 2 (vol. 22) (1920-1), pp. 337-62, 3 (vol. 23) (1922-3), pp. 47-81, 314-44.
- Marie-Félicité Brosset (trans.), *Histoire de la Siounie par Stephannos Orbélian*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1864).
- Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-c.850* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), pp. 39-49, 61-96, 241-42.
- John G. Davies, *Medieval Armenian Art and Architecture: The Church of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar* (London: Pindar, 1991).
- Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), esp. 'Conclusion', pp. 207-40, and p. 207 for Armenia.
- Lucy Der Manuelian, 'Armenian Sculptural Images Part II: Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries', in Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone (eds.) *Medieval Armenian Culture* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 96-119.
- Nina G. Garsoïan, 'The Early Mediaeval Armenian City: An Alien Element?', *Ancient Studies in Memory of Elias J. Bickerman. Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society XVI-XVII* (1984-1985 [1987]), pp. 67-83.
- Tim W. Greenwood, *Teaching Armenia* at <http://tinyurl.com/79cr3>, 2004.
- Tim W. Greenwood, *Armenian Epigraphy* at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Eorie0442/>, 2003.
- Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 1-43, 185-209.
- Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), pp. 89- 95.
- Maarit Kaimio, 'P.Petra inv. 83: A Settlement of Dispute', in *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Firenze 1998*, 2 vols. (Florence: Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli", 2001), vol. 2, pp. 719- 24.
- Douglas MacLean, 'Iona, Armenia and Italy in the Early Medieval Period', in *Atti del Quinto Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena* ed. Boghos L. Zekiyan (San Lazzaro, Venice: Casa editrice armena, 1992), pp. 559-73.
- Michael McCormick, 'The Liturgy of War in the Early Middle Ages: Crisis, Litanies, and the Carolingian Monarchy', *Viator* 15 (1984), pp. 1-23.
- Michael McCormick 'The Imperial Edge: Italo-Byzantine Identity, Movement and Integration, A.D. 650-950', in Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (eds.), *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), pp. 17- 52, esp. 'Static Integration', pp. 45-51.
- Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), pp. 1-6, 20-41, 239-53.
- Anne E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 119-32 for the conversion to Christianity, pp. 202- 7, 213-15, 220 for King Gagik Artsruni, pp. 241- 49 for Armenia and western Europe, pp. 249-54 for early medieval Armenian identity.
- Anne E. Redgate, 'Morale, cohesion and power in the first centuries of Amatuni Hamshên', in Hovann Simonian (ed.), *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
- Anne E. Redgate, 'The Foundation of Hamshên and Armenian Descent Myths: Parallels and Interconnections', in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Communities of the Black Sea – Pontus Region* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, forthcoming)
- Timothy Reuter (ed.), *Alfred the Great. Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences* (Aldershot and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003), section 4 for Alfred and contemporary rulership (Wendy Davies for the British Isles, Janet Nelson for the Carolingian Empire, Anton Scharer for Carinthia and Jonathan Shepard for Byzantium and Bulgaria).
- Hilary Richardson, 'The Concept of the High Cross', in Próinséas N. Chatáin and Michael Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), pp. 127-34.
- Hilary Richardson, 'Observations on Christian Art in early Ireland, Georgia and Armenia', in Michael Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art A.D. 500-1200* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1987), pp. 129-37.
- Hilary Richardson, 'Christian Iconography in Early Irish and Armenian Art', in *Atti del Quinto Simposio Internazionale di Arte Armena* ed. Boghos L. Zekiyan (San Lazzaro, Venice: Casa editrice armena, 1992), pp. 575-93.
- Hilary Richardson, 'The Jewelled Cross and its Canopy', in Cormac Bourke (ed.) *From the Isles of the North: Early Medieval Art in Ireland and Britain* (Belfast: HMSO, 1995), pp. 177-86.

Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni, History of the House of the Artsrunik^c. Translation and Commentary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), pp. 291-92, 295-98, 301-2, 306-8, 313-20, 332-64.

Robert W. Thomson, *The Lawcode [Datastanagirk'] of Mxit'ar Goš. Translated with Commentary and Indices* (Dutch Studies in Armenian Language and Literature 6) (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2000)

6. Problems in teaching comparative history

Students do seem to be receptive to their introduction to societies that might be considered novel. One Newcastle student, answering the question on the medieval history questionnaire that asked which class s/he best remembered and/or had most enjoyed, wrote 'Armenia because I had never heard of it before'. In a batch of 32 World History examination scripts that I marked in June 2005, 7 (nearly 25%) contained reference to Armenia, though none referred to Tikopia. Some students have made a point of expressing appreciation of high quality World History lectures and of the lecturers' work that has gone into them. Over the years a number of student (module) questionnaires have been very positive. Anecdotal evidence suggests that our third-year students see the point of our World History and that some of our applicants apply because this emphasis in our curriculum appeals to them. Nevertheless, teaching comparative history using novel societies does have its own challenges.

Reading Resources

One difficulty is a relative lack of reading material, in volume, in English, in libraries and in print. This is not a serious matter with regard to preparing teaching; colleagues will read at least one language other than English and will be assiduous and patient using Inter Library Loan. It is a different matter for first-year undergraduates. The situation may differ significantly between universities, but I suspect that history undergraduates are very rarely able and willing to read non-English material and that they may not be allowed to make ILL requests at their university libraries before they reach Dissertation level. Admittedly, our students do very commonly disappoint us by failing to read around their subject in private study and they are disappointingly over reliant on lecture notes. They should nevertheless still be exhorted and expected to read.

The composition of a reading list, for undergraduate use, regarding a 'novel' society will pose challenges very different from those offered by, say, Anglo-Saxon England or the Carolingian Empire, as is clear from a consideration of my own chosen two, (modern) Tikopia and (early medieval) Armenia. With regard to Tikopia, for example, a COPAC search in July 2005 revealed some 16 titles, mostly by Raymond Firth, 6 of which are held here at Newcastle. Not all are suitable as recommendations in a very broad course for students new not only to Tikopia but also to undergraduate study. There are advantages and disadvantages to students using the web as opposed to more traditional types of publication, but there may be reliable material within the body of the 20,300 hits that a Google search produced.

With regard to early medieval Armenia, the major Armenian historical works written between the fifth and tenth centuries, and others, are now available in English translation with scholarly commentary. Tim Greenwood's forthcoming work on the late-tenth-century *Universal History* of Stephen of Taron will be a welcome addition to that corpus. His projected translations of Armenian inscriptions and manuscript colophons between 850 and 1204, and his provision on the world-wide-web of those that he has currently provisionally completed (52 inscriptions, 867-1059 and 46 colophons, 862-1099) are also very valuable. They supplement the existing French translations of Stephen Orbelean's work and of some Armenian inscriptions and the English translation of colophons 1301-1480. Their electronic publication is also an immensely useful teaching resource. These texts are important sources to add to the historical works. There is unfortunately currently little chronological overlap with the early medieval historical works, though much more with Orbelean's land grants. Of Tim Greenwood's 52 translated inscriptions, three are ninth-century, three from the first four decades of the tenth century and fourteen from between 971 and 1000, the remainder being from the eleventh century; of his 46 translated colophons, nine are ninth-century, fifteen tenth-century and twenty-two eleventh-century.

As for introductory works, it was the lack of a comprehensive work, in English, on the entire span of Armenian history that lay behind the excellent multi-author two-volume history edited by Richard Hovannisian that first appeared in 1997 and is now available in paperback. This has since been joined by my own book, though its coverage is comprehensive only up to 1071 A. D.; it is skimpy regarding the period of the Crusades and Cilician Armenia. This, in the Blackwell *The Peoples of Europe* series, is likewise available in paperback, and was recommended as an overview by the *Exhibition Guide* to The British Library's 2001 exhibition *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art*. The exhibition's fully illustrated catalogue, by Vrej Nersessian, offers both a good introduction to Armenia's Christianity and Church and an enticing survey of her art, though for architecture one must turn to earlier works. Robert Hewsen's monumental historical atlas is indispensable, but its expense, weight, unwieldiness and fragile binding (our

Newcastle copy has recently had to be rebound) make it a work for reference rather than student borrowing. Finally there is the series of paperback volumes, edited by Richard Hovannisian and the majority not yet published, which are the proceedings of the University of California at Los Angeles twice yearly *Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces* conferences, held in the last decade. Each multi-author volume embraces the totality of the Armenian history of the particular place.

COPAC searches neither cover the entire Higher Education sector nor provide infallible results, but the crude survey that I undertook in July 2005 does suggest that few institutions outside the golden triangle of Cambridge, London and Oxford could accommodate a student with this Armenian reading list without further purchases. Robert Thomson's English translations, with commentary, of the three 'classics' of Armenian historiography, the works of Agathangelos, Moses of Khoren and Eghishe, are held at, respectively, 9, 6 and 10 of the 34 locations listed by COPAC as participating institutions (including Trinity College, Dublin, outside the UK). Of these, 4, 3 and 5 are outside the triangle. Richard Hovannisian's edited textbook appears at just under half of COPAC's locations (14), 8 being outside the triangle, my own book at one-third (11), 5 being outside the triangle. Vrej Nersessian's catalogue appears at 16 locations, 8 of them being outside the triangle, Robert Hewsen's atlas at 12, of which 7 are outside the triangle. The UCLA conference proceedings ought to appear in more library catalogues than they do. Of the four volumes listed, all four were reported as held by Newcastle, volumes 1-3 by the British Library, three (1, 2 and 4) at Edinburgh, and one (volume 1) each at Cambridge, Manchester and Oxford (the Oriental Institute).

Tikopia's scores were significantly higher. Five of Raymond Firth's volumes appear respectively in 20, 21, 21, 22 and 22 locations, their 'outside the triangle' figures being 13, 14, 15, 13 and 15. However, a student seeking any one of the five titles about Tikopia listed as written by someone other than Raymond Firth will find that only two universities outside the golden triangle hold two such works. Three other such locations each hold one.

Reading

- Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978)
- Jean-Michel Thierry and Patrick Donabédian, *Armenian Art* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989)
- Tim W. Greenwood, *Armenian Colophons and Armenian Epigraphy* at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~%7Eorie0442/>, 2003.
- Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia. A Historical Atlas* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Baghesh/Bitlis and Taron/Mush* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Karin/Erzerum* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2003)
- Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Sebastia/Sivas and Lesser Armenia* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004)
- Vrej Nersessian, *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art* (London: The British Library, 2001)
- Anne E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- Robert W. Thomson, *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians. Translation and Commentary* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1976).
- Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i. History of the Armenians. Translation and Commentary on the Literary Sources* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1978).
- Robert W. Thomson, *Elishē. History of Vardan and the Armenian War. Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Teaching Methods

The extent to which a lack of existing library holdings and of items to order, and their cost, is a problem will depend upon the number of one's students. So too will the balance of lectures, seminars and tutorials. Decades ago, the University of Oxford's system for teaching its non-specialised History Honours courses involved students attending, normally in pairs though sometimes individually, eight or twelve hour-long essay tutorials, reading for each tutorial and writing for a minimum of half. Such a system would be advantageous for our first-year undergraduates both in general terms and particularly with regard to novel subjects like comparative and World history and novel topics within them, like Tikopia and Armenia.

Students' Difficulties

Many students have difficulties adjusting from A-level, or its equivalent, study to University study. Common problems include the following. There is their difficulty of time management, leaving reading until very, and

often impracticably, close to a deadline. There is a desire for 'the right answer' to a very clearly identified and circumscribed set of questions, and for a 'right' set of illustrations/evidence to use. There is a related problem of difficulties in reading and note-taking (from reading and from lectures) with an emphasis on understanding and recording, fully, accurately and intelligibly, the author's argument with selected illustration; the approach of some students is rather to collect quotations to serve up to an examiner at a later date like a microwaved ready-meal. There is an unfamiliarity and consequent disinclination to engage with journal articles. The more unfamiliar the subject, the more unsettled some students may be. This is why some Newcastle World History students, offered the whole of time and the whole planet as the parameters within which they must choose and investigate a small number of case studies, given lengthy and extensive reading lists and also advised about how to find further reading independently, may say that there is nothing in the Library to meet their needs.

There is commonly a desire, on the part of students, for lectures to contain all that is needed for the module, that is, that private reading should be scarcely necessary, and a perception that a lecture is useful only if it relates directly, and provides an answer to, a particular assessment exercise. There is the related habit of classifying subjects into rigid pigeonholes, not seeing connections or the transferability of learning between them. There is also the opposite tendency, a difficulty in appreciating differences between different subjects and an inclination towards a minimal knowledge base that is then applied as case studies and parallels in a series of modules.

A weekly small-group meeting would offer a chance to advise and reassure students and to keep them up to the mark, supporting them in effective private study, as well as to provide advice and teaching about the subject matter itself. In an introductory medieval module for instance, one could devote one session to Armenia and another to explicitly comparative questions, using, for example, the questions and the documentary extract exercises that Tim Greenwood suggests.

Student Numbers

But such a system is practicable only where there are low student numbers and/or a very favourable staff-student ratio and library provision. Some dozen students simultaneously chasing a handful of volumes, some or all of which are held in (a few) multiple copies by a library that offers plenty of desk space for reading, is a perfectly acceptable situation. Some 275 - the approximate number on Newcastle's World History 2004-2005 - doing so in an institution whose library was not designed for its current numbers is not. Oxford Tutorial Fellows in History have heavy teaching loads, presumably because of the continued use of the tutorial, according to the May 2005 issue (Issue 3) of *Oxford Historian: A newsletter of the Faculty of Modern History for Oxford Historians*, as 'the prime pedagogic technique' (p. 2). This *Oxford Historian* suggests (p. 3) that Oxford currently has about 1,000 History undergraduates, which according to a colleague is about the same number that he remembers as an undergraduate in the early 1960s (about 300 in each year). Undergraduate History numbers at University College, London, have, I am informed, approximately doubled since the middle of the 1950s.

Most other institutions have experienced a far more dramatic rise. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the University of Newcastle's is an extreme case, but here our Single Honours History admissions quota was about 28 in 1978, we had about 76 first-year Single Honours historians in 1998-1999, and our current quota is 180. Given that students on other degree programmes may take History modules, these History Honours figures translate into 107 students taking our Semester 2 World History in 1998-1999 and some 275 students taking it in 2004-2005. As elsewhere, rising student numbers have not been matched by a proportionate rise in numbers of academic staff. In 1978-1979 Newcastle had 13 full-time lecturers in History, whereas in 2004-2005 it had 15.5 and in 2005-2006 will have 18.

Challenges and Solutions?

In such circumstances teaching and learning methods have to be adapted. At Newcastle we have had drastically to change those originally deployed in our World History. The modules are still team-taught by four lecturers. In 1998-1999 students were offered, besides lectures (which have for years been our major teaching method and whose purpose is to outline core knowledge and knowledge that students are expected to acquire), five fortnightly seminars in a group of about fourteen, and two pieces of (assessed) written work. These pieces were submitted and marked sequentially, with one one-to-one 20-minute tutorial on the first piece, before the end-of-module assessment. By contrast, in 2004-2005 students had only one piece of mid-module assessed work, to be collected, when marked, from the School Office. One additional lecture slot devoted to questions and answers about preparing for the written work, with the lecturers 'working the room', replaced the five seminars.

The teaching challenges that such conditions produce are real, but they are still approachable. Module Handbooks have become more detailed and will doubtless continue to do so, as in each issue they incorporate and try to avoid the previous year's student queries and misunderstandings. The sophistication

of University data systems has increased, as has email traffic; the two together provide a good way of dealing with student queries and issuing generic advice and reminders to a class as a whole. Electronic quizzes, completed in the students' own time, may be offered, whether as purely formative exercises or as part of the assessment of a module. Some Arts subjects are experimenting with computer-marked multiple-choice assessment exercises. Some reports suggest that these can be used successfully, that is without dumbing down or significantly changing our subject matter, the demands it makes on our students and the Intended Learning Outcomes of our modules. Thus for example, rather than being offered simple questions with a choice of simple, perhaps one-word answers, students might be given a choice of extended answers in continuous prose regarding a question testing comprehension of an unseen document or previously seen set text. A question bank of questions and possible answers could be set up so that setting new examination papers does not entail formulating new questions and answers. But of course the development of such a resource would make very heavy demands of time and effort.

Another approach might be to teach a whole module very closely around a textbook or small number of titles - that is, if there are any suitable ones available - that students can purchase, individually or in small groups, while offering a wide range of own choice reading and/or topics that are to be related to the core syllabus. With such an approach both broad and more particular issues can be meaningfully discussed in a mass lecture by splitting students into small groups. Thus in a module on Anglo-Saxon England, for instance, for a session on evidence and its difficulties of interpretation, students might be asked to choose reading (in translation) from one of a list of categories. This list might include, for example, short vernacular secular poems, *Beowulf*, law codes, charters, penitentials, and letters. Students could consider how their chosen text(s) support(s) the relevant interpretations (for example regarding the growth of royal government) offered in their textbook. Unfortunately this method is bedevilled by the vagaries of certain publishers and is at the mercy of the bookshops. Failure by a publisher to deliver a textbook to the bookshop, as promised, in good time for the beginning of term, rescheduling at short notice and more than once the date of the reprint, and failure to deliver it until late in the module, will greatly undermine the viability of one's syllabus and teaching plan. Inefficiency on the part of the bookshops in acting upon the requests made by lecturers regarding stocking particular titles in particular numbers may have the same effect. This danger might be avoided by using USA-style coursepacks, but these would take time to put together and would be expensive. Another possibility would be to arrange for selected texts to be available to students online, but such provision is very expensive.

Expertise

For the sake of our students, and for our Quality Audit reports and inspections, it is a *desideratum* to claim, correctly, that lecturers' teaching is informed by their own research. The broadest courses thus need to be team-taught. At Newcastle each World History module team originally comprised four historians, though the individuals would vary; after the restructuring of the University, in 2002, the composition of a team changed to two historians, one ancient historian and one archaeologist, the individuals varying. (At the same time World History became compulsory for Single Honours Ancient History and Single Honours Archaeology, as for Single Honours History students.) This change has widened the range of our portfolio of case studies and illustrations, and themes. Since restructuring has been a widespread phenomenon in the University sector, colleagues elsewhere will probably also be able to form teaching teams broader than was possible a few years ago.

But it is not common, still less routine, for many of a particular group of colleagues to work on unusual societies or to engage in any comparative history. Some engagement with comparative history seems to be normal, perhaps even expected, of colleagues whose specialisation lies in non-mainstream fields, for example (in the UK) Armenia or China. But the more mainstream the field, the less common such engagement is. The Oxford historian John Blair, offering in his recent study of the Anglo-Saxon church, some comparisons involving Tibet, China and Mexico, anticipates that 'some readers may be disconcerted' by them. British, European and North American specialisms, often post-1500, tend to dominate UK University History staffing. Teaching comparative history and introducing students to people and places that the students have scarcely considered or even heard of before will be very burdensome, if done properly, for colleagues who are new to these challenges, perhaps as new to them as the students are. Even for those who are not, the 'start-up' costs of time and energy, composing the mass-audience lectures and reading lists, with no books available that can serve as 'course textbooks', are very great, far outweighing what is required for one's more routine, narrower modules.

There is a danger that some colleagues, specialising in a mainstream field, and asked to participate in teaching comparative history, might be reluctant to move beyond their familiar ground and even to feel that this ground is more important than anything else and is all that the students need to know. If such colleagues do teach comparative history they may well not fully embrace the challenge. The resulting comparative history will be less effective as a result. Where the students are even more uncertain than usual they need to

see both enthusiasm and commitment in their teachers and to observe the successful practice of what they, the students, are being exhorted to undertake.

A different danger is that the teaching of comparative history may come to fall routinely on a few colleagues who seem especially suitable for it, most obviously those whose expertise lies outside mainstream Europe and America, thereby limiting these colleagues' other activities. If the students' other first-year modules are more specialised and/or optional, such a situation might well be disadvantageous to these scholars, for a lecturer's particular association with first-year introductory and/or compulsory modules may be perceived as a 'badge' designating lack of importance and prestige. And ideally students should not only find that their introductory modules provide background and a foundation for understanding all further modules better, but should also be given the opportunity to continue, at Honours level, the study of comparative history and/or of a new society/societies that they have been introduced to.

A.E. Redgate is Lecturer in History at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, where she currently teaches modules in World history, Anglo-Saxon and early British history, and genocide. She is the author of The Armenians (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and currently working on Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, 800-1066 for Pearsons. Her research focuses on the early medieval period, and especially on comparative history and issues of identity

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*Ms A.E. Redgate
School of Historical Studies
University of Newcastle upon Tyne*