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ВОСПОМИНАНИЯ

Notes on A. P. Kazhdan: the first years at Dumbarton Oaks

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Abstract: Alexander Petrovich Kazhdan became an iconic figure in both Soviet (and later Russian) Byzantine studies, and in the world, especially in Anglo-American Byzantine studies. His work at Dumbarton Oaks on the "Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium", the publication of books with English-speaking co-authors, and numerous articles on a wide variety of topics have placed him among the leading Byzantine scholars of our time. The regularity and style of his work (from the legendary card catalogues to his reading and writing techniques), his encyclopaedic erudition as a mentor and a polemicist, allow us to say that A. P. Kazhdan was a model of how one should be a scholar and how one should live as a scholar. The author overviews his personal experience of co-working and communication with A. P. Kazhdan: his first lecture in Oxford, their co-working during the author's being a Junior Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, and later on the *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* and the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

Key words: Alexander Kazhdan, Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Studies, Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, Soviet Byzantine Studies

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Заметки о А. П. Каждане: первые годы в Дамбартон Оукс

Аннотация: Александр Петрович Каждан стал знаковой фигурой и в советской, позже – в российской, и в мировой, прежде всего, англо-американской византинистике. Его работа в Дамбартон Оукс над «Оксфордским византийским словарем», публикация книг вместе с англоговорящими соавторами и многочисленные статьи на самые разные темы вывели его в ряд ведущих исследователей Византии современности. Регулярность и стиль работы (начиная от легендарной картотеки и заканчивая приемами чтения и письма), энциклопедическая эрудиция наставника и полемиста позволяют

сказать, что А. П. Каждан был образцом того, как нужно быть ученым и как нужно жить, будучи ученым. Автор описывает свой опыт сотрудничества и общения с А. П. Кажданом: его первую лекцию в Оксфорде в 1979 г., их сотрудничество в период стажировки автора в Дамбартон Оукс в 1979–1980 гг., в ходе работы над монографией «Исследования по византийской литературе XI и XII веков» и, наконец, над многочисленными статьями для «Оксфордского византийского словаря».

Ключевые слова: А. П. Каждан, Дамбартон Оукс, византинистика, Оксфордский византийский словарь, византинистика в СССР

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V. I. Dal' was an obsessive compiler of card indexes. His four-volume dictionary of the Russian language (first published 1863–1866) was based on his accumulated files of tens of thousands of index cards. Six boxes of the cards are still preserved in the manuscript section of the Russian State Library (Safran 2022. P. 93–97; РГБ. Ф. 473. Картон 2. Ед. хр. 5–10). In Dal's day there were no pre-cut, standard-sized index cards. Vladimir Ivanovich cut each one individually to the required dimensions. Scholarship began with the physical labour of crafting its tools, like an astronomer cutting and polishing the mirrors for an optical telescope. However, Dal' stands out not only for his assiduousness as a systematic collector of words, but for the way in which he used what he had collected. While of necessity bound by the alphabetical principle, he also fought against its restrictions. He was not satisfied with a mere list of isolated lexical units in sequence. He wanted also to highlight the semantic resonances generated in clusters of cognate words. Thus he invented "nests" (the term is still used in lexicography): a primitive form of hyperlink, which (in analogue form) could be created by the physical arrangement of his index cards, before being converted into a dictionary article.

At the risk of sounding both anachronistic and excessively reductive: in some respects it seemed to me that Aleksandr Petrovich Kazhdan (AP) was a kind of spiritual descendant of Dal'. AP's own card index was legendary. Like Dal's it was self-created, each slip of paper cut in accordance with AP's notoriously minuscule format. The continuation of AP's scholarly career abroad was to a significant extent made possible by the fact that his card index, too, managed to make the journey to Paris. Such dependence on antiquated technology is barely incomprehensible to a modern generation: why

couldn't AP just take his data on a flash drive? The card index could be understood on many levels: as a product of diligent and methodical research; as a research tool, a database; and as a metaphor for its creator's mind and methods. Its compilation, over the decades, was a labour of great devotion, focus and skill. However, like Dal', AP was interested in more than just the accumulation of units of information in sequence. The card index was a kind of living, personal encyclopaedia; but, like the *encyclopédistes* themselves, AP's vision was more subtly interpretative. What mattered were the connections, the patterns that he could extract. From the cards, from the mass of information that constituted the index, he created, in a sense, his versions of Dal's "nests". He made the database, and from it emerged history, culture, social views, even individual subjectivities. He was an almost obsessively precise craftsman; but, ultimately, the purpose of craft was art.

My first encounters with AP followed a sequence of three stages of increasing proximity: first on the page, then on the podium, and finally in person. As a graduate student in Oxford in the late 1970s I had very little idea of the full range of AP's writings. Most frequently I read his reviews. Indeed, they were so numerous that I half-imagined that AP might be a full-time reviewer for *Vizantiiskii vremennik*. How could he find time for anything else? His reviews seemed to follow a characteristic, almost formulaic structure. A typical AP review might consist mainly of a list of a book's errors and imprecisions, before concluding with the assertion that, notwithstanding the above defects, the book made a useful/important/significant/valuable contribution to its subject. As for his own research: I worked on Byzantine chronicles and on their translations and textual traditions in Slavonic, so I found most directly relevant his article on the chronicle of Simeon the Logothete. Beyond that, my impression of AP, at a distance, was hazy. He was a senior Byzantine historian, I was a very junior Byzantino-Slav philologist. We were worlds apart geographically and generationally, and there was (so it seemed to me at first) little obvious overlap in our areas of interest.

I heard a bit more about AP in the early winter of 1978–79, when I spent a couple of months in Leningrad on the Anglo-Soviet cultural exchange for graduate students. I was attached to the Philological faculty of LGU, although in practice most of my contacts were with the Early Rus Literature section of the Institute of Russian Literature. Western graduate students were still a rarity in mid-Brezhnev-era Leningrad, and – armed with letters of recommendation from my supervisor, Dimitry Obolensky – I was treated with undeserved seriousness and hospitality by scholars who were already high in my pantheon: D. S. Likhachev, O. V. Tvorogov, N. A. Meshcherskii. There also, at the defence of his dissertation, I first met the young D. M. Bulanin. Moscow Byzantinists seemed quite a long way off –

except in the person of one of Bulanin's opponents, I. P. Medvedev. But here Kazhdan was a name, at any rate in private conversation. Indeed, *only* in private conversation, for the main thing I learned about him at that time was that he had become unmentionable in public. As I entered his former world, so he crossed over into mine, as a result of which he officially ceased to exist.

And there, back in my world, very soon after my return from Leningrad, our paths crossed for the first time, when I attended a lecture that AP gave in Oxford in February (I think) 1979. If a British graduate student in Leningrad had been scarce, still more exotic was the sight of live lecture by a real Soviet Byzantinist in Oxford. In the 1970s, by sharp contrast with the post-Soviet waves of immigration, Russians in England were in any case very few in number. Unlike, say, Paris, London was not among the traditional centres for émigré communities. When my wife, Natasha, whom I had met as a *stazher* at the University of Voronezh, arrived in England in 1976, in her first few months she met just two other Russians: Prince Obolensky and Prince Golitsyn. We could talk Russian on the streets in the secure knowledge that nobody would understand. The list of Russians who had visited Oxford was brief but distinguished: Turgenev, Akhmatova… The news of AP's lecture created a buzz of anticipation.

I would like to say that I vividly remember AP's words that day; but I do not. I recall neither the title of the lecture nor any particular phrase that he uttered. And yet it made a profound impression on me. So far as I could tell, AP spoke without text, without notes, yet apparently in fluent and correct (though heavily accented) English. His lecture was structured, balanced, professionally timed. I recall the general astonishment at his performance, more than its substance. Perhaps this focus on form meant that I missed an opportunity to gain new insights about Byzantium, but it nevertheless served a useful purpose both for the speaker and for his audience. For colleagues in Oxford the occasion was ritual of welcome and collegiality; for AP it was a clear and impressive announcement of his arrival. With the introductions over, the real work could then begin.

And the real work began in Dumbarton Oaks.

"Dumbarton Oaks" is a phrase of significance for Byzantinists, but, for those who have not visited there, or worked there, the mere phrase might convey only a weak impression of the uniqueness of the place in reality. The plain institutional explanation is that Dumbarton Oaks is a research institute. This statement is true, yet at the same time utterly inadequate. Dumbarton Oaks is an urban mansion, with its own spectacularly landscaped park, at the top of Georgetown, in the most exclusive part of most exclusive residential district of Washington, D.C. Simply its location and its scale announces privilege. But that is far from all. Dumbarton Oaks is an American

story. The house and park were owned by Robert and Mildred Bliss, who made their fortune in laxatives. The Blisses were also serious collectors of Byzantine and Pre-Columbian art. Their collections became museums, the books for their study became a library. Mrs Bliss believed that true scholarship flourishes in beautiful surroundings, so she consulted garden designers and landscape architects, accumulated more books on the subject, gathered more scholars, and created the extraordinary, multi-space, steeply contoured park. Eventually the Blisses donated the house and park, with the museum collections and the library, plus a very substantial capital endowment, to Harvard University, under whose distanced rule it became home for scholars in its three illogically linked but organically coexisting disciplines: Landscape Architecture, Pre-Columbian Art, and Byzantine Studies.

For residents of Washington, and for a wider audience of those interested in its founders' collecting passions, Dumbarton Oaks was an adornment to the city and to the subjects. The park and museum were open to the public, the house had long hosted concerts that figure on the Washington cultural scene. Dumbarton Oaks developed links with local universities, and held public events and conferences. Yet this was all on the outside. The most distinctive and in some ways the most vibrant and resonant activities of Dumbarton Oaks – its secret soul – was invisible to the wider public that enjoyed its facilities. The heart of Dumbarton Oaks was its residential community of scholars, its Fellows. Most of the Fellows were temporary residents, able to enjoy the surroundings, the research infrastructure, and the collegial company, for a year or a semester. Some came for briefer periods, enduring the hot and humid Washington summer. An elite few were taken on long-term contracts. I don't know the intention or expectation when AP arrived, but for him Dumbarton Oaks was more than a workplace: it became his home for the rest of his life.

The level of privilege was extraordinary. At the time it was rumoured that the annual budget for the Byzantine Studies Library at Dumbarton Oaks was larger than for the Harvard Law School. If the phenomenal Dumbarton Oaks library was in any way deficient, then even a Junior Fellow (as I myself became, for the academic year 1979–80) could sit at their allocated desk in the reading room and order books to be delivered direct from the Library of Congress. It was (and, for me, still is) hard to comprehend such luxurious and exclusive service in a scholarly institution in the Humanities. And then there was the physical infrastructure. It felt as if the entire estate was the private domain of the Fellows, who graciously allowed the public to enjoy it for limited periods. The park was open to all during the day, but in the evenings it was reserved for Fellows; including its swimming pool – where, in

the spring and early summer months, AP would swim every day, and where we would meet and talk; and where, nearly two decades later, he died.

Not all Fellows were equally privileged. AP and Musya were at the very top of the scale. They lived in a house that was part of the estate. The park, with its swimming pool, was like their garden. But Dumbarton Oaks, like Washington in general in those days, was not well equipped to deal with children. Natasha and I, with our six-month-old son, were allocated an apartment in the other side of town, on the other side of the river: technically not even in Washington D.C. but in Arlington, Virginia. The apartment block was infested with cockroaches. This trained us in good habits of kitchen hygiene. The apartment was also, somewhat surreally, right next to a U.S. military shrine, the Arlington National Cemetery, at whose entrance, just a few metres away, at the start of Natasha's daily walk with the baby in his buggy, was the famous Iwo Jima Memorial to the U.S. Marines. It was an odd environment for Natasha – born in Kurgan, brought up in Khabarovsk and Tambov, daughter of an officer in the provincial KGB.

Our first contacts with AP were social rather than academic. Natasha and I were (I think) the only other family at Dumbarton Oaks whose everyday domestic language was Russian. Musya Kazhdan, in particular, seemed to appreciate the company. We could learn about the strange place and its inhabitants together. In all other respects, however, we were at opposite ends of a spectrum. Arriving in Washington in September 1979, I had not yet completed my D.Phil. (as a PhD is termed at Oxford) dissertation, I had no publications apart from some translations of Russian poetry – but they did not count in a scholarly environment. Indeed, some wise voices warned me that literary translation might be seen as frivolous for a graduate student at the start of his scholarly journey; a distraction from serious research, an indication of a distorted sense of priorities. AP had seen none of my work and had not heard me give any seminar papers. He had no evidence on which to base any opinions or conclusion about the direction of my research; and AP rarely reached any conclusion without evidence. So: for the first weeks he was polite and correct; not overtly sceptical, but also not actively curious. Why should I expect anything more? If I wanted his attention on a scholarly level, then it was up to me to take the initiative.

The relationship changed after my first seminar paper, on semantic patterns in the translation and transmission of chronicles. AP was, of course, critical; but for me that in itself was the most valuable outcome and a source of further motivation: if AP had decided that my efforts were at least worth criticising, then I had to try to meet his critical standards. My official supervisor was back in Oxford, but AP become my mentor. It started quietly, tactfully. He would suggest that we walk and discuss work in the Dumbarton

Oaks park. On these walks I began to appreciate more clearly some of his exceptional qualities of mind. The precision of his memory was both flattering and frightening. I sometimes had the impression that he remembered my source material better than I remembered it myself. He was also a living lesson in what would now be called interdisciplinarity. Restrictive disciplinary self-definitions such as "historian" or "philologist" were irrelevant: a problem was a problem, a text was a text. I was in awe of the fact that AP seemed equally comfortable whether analysing societal structures as an historian or "close reading" a text like a philologist. His remarks were always precise, always factual; but not *only* factual. AP was constantly making connections, seeing patterns, allowing the evidence to take him beyond the obvious. He was both encyclopaedic and conceptual. In terms of the animalistic typology of Isiah Berlin's famous essay on Tolstoy, AP was both hedgehog and fox. But perhaps the most important lesson of AP's mentorship was in scholarly ethics. This was not through any form of didacticism or overt instruction, but by example. He criticised, but was happy to be criticised. He was usually right (far more often than me, of course), but he was entirely comfortable if shown to be wrong. His conclusions could be forcefully argued, but self-advocacy was never the purpose. The commitment was to truer understanding, not to personal opinion. Such principles are, of course, obvious. Few would argue otherwise. Nevertheless, it is rare to find a scholar who combines, on the one hand, such a strong and justified sense of his own professional worth, and, on the other hand, such a lack of personal vanity.

A paradox of AP in 1979–80 was that, although a mature scholar, he was also, in a sense, only at the start of a new career. Arriving in America, he was both well known and almost unknown. That is to say: Byzantinists knew, in principle, that he was already a major, innovative and phenomenally productive scholar; by the end of 1978 he was the author of over 700 published works (see Курышева 2003. С. 540–569); but in practice most of his work was accessible only to those who could read Russian. In terms of the numbers of pages, probably his most extensive published works in a west European language were his surveys of Soviet Byzantine Studies, which had appeared regularly in the journal *Byzantion* for the previous decade. For a wider world of medievalists, AP existed in name only, if at all. He was acutely aware of the gap between his actual achievements and the awareness of them in his new environment. If he was to be a Byzantinist in the West, rather than an object of curiosity and sympathy as an émigré, then he needed to establish a presence in print, in English. This was not just about recognition and dignity (though they were important): it was about dialogue and community and contribution. He accepted without apparent indignation the asymmetry of scholarly linguistic competence: those who wrote only in Russian affected

the discipline mainly in Russia; those who wrote in English had a better chance of embedding their vision into the discipline worldwide. So, quite systematically, he applied himself to the task of becoming an integral – an essential – part of anglophone scholarship. This he did on three levels: (i) by publishing articles and reviews in English in a wide range of journals; (ii) by undertaking collaborations for the production of books in English based on and developing his earlier research; and (iii) through his central role as initiator, editor and major author of the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

All three of AP's collaborative English-language monographs emerged out of the earliest phase of his career at Dumbarton Oaks. I saw the seeds being planted. They were, in sequence of publication: *People and Power in Byzantium*), written with the Director of Dumbarton Oaks itself, Giles Constable, and published by Dumbarton Oaks (Kazhdan, Constable 1982); *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Kazhdan with Franklin 2004), in collaboration with myself; and *Change in Byzantine Culture of in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, with Ann Wharton Epstein (Kazhdan, Epstein 1985). AP's three anglophone collaborators were at very different stages in their careers. Constable, though British, had been at Harvard for two decades and was a highly distinguished medievalist and historian of monasticism. Epstein was an art historian, still at a relatively early stage in her career. I was still finishing my dissertation. The differences are reflected in the types of project that AP proposed. The books with Constable and Epstein were on "big" themes: *People and Power*; *Change in Byzantine Culture*. They were designed to invite, and to be accessible to, students and colleagues both in Byzantine Studies and beyond. They were serious academic books, but outward-looking, with aspirations to be popular. By extreme contrast, there was nothing "popular" in my own collaboration with AP. Apart from a brief initial chapter on approaches to the history of Byzantine civilisation, it consisted almost entirely of very close, very detailed readings of Byzantine texts that few outside a select circle of specialists would have read themselves, and almost nobody with such obsessive detail. Nor was there any pretence that the book was freshly composed in English: in origin it was a collection of adapted translations of articles by AP that had appeared in *Vizantiiskii vremennik*. There was no compromise, no pretence at broader reach. *Change in Byzantine Culture* has over 50 illustrations, and no Greek. *Studies on Byzantine Literature* has no illustrations, and fragments of Greek are strewn liberally across its pages. Yet *Studies on Byzantine Literature* was still a necessary component in AP's construction of his scholarly persona for the anglophone world. For specialists, these articles are among his most innovative and characteristic works. They appeared to be – and were – ultra-detailed exercises in conventional microscopic philological exegesis; yet they had the

(then) radical aim of demonstrating that Byzantine literature was not just an agglomeration of impenetrable clichés, but that - if we look closely and carefully enough, if we can get inside the verbal code – it can be a flexible tool for individual expression.

AP picked his collaborators carefully. In my case the prime reason was obvious: I was convenient for the very simple reason that, in AP's immediate circle, I was probably the only person who could (i) translate an academic article on Byzantine Studies from Russian into readable English, and (ii) follow in detail the argument in relation to the Greek texts. But there was another reason. AP was also aware that the work may be useful to me as a stage in my induction into the subject. Translation is itself a form of close reading; and sustained close reading of Kazhdan's close reading of Byzantine texts was part of my education.

As it happens, at the time I was also engaged in close textual reading as a means of identifying specific semantic patterns. I was looking at several stages of transmission: interlingual from Greek into Slavonic, and intralingual in subsequent copying, editing and excerption. Working on the book with AP helped me in developing my own modes of reading and interpretation. And it affected, in practical ways, my methods of working: before AP, I had relied on my notes and my memory; after AP, I, too, worked by constructing my own constantly growing card indexes.

AP had invited Constable and Wharton to be his co-authors. I do not know their methods of joint authorship. I am sure that in each case the eventual text was the result of productive dialogue; although each was also, clearly, based initially on AP's own work. AP suggested the same to me: that the book should be labelled a co-authorship, by Kazhdan *and* Franklin. The suggestion may have been momentarily tempting, but it felt improper and too blatantly dishonest. The real work was entirely AP's, not mine. I was the translator. However, AP strongly discouraged me from being "only" the translator. He wanted feedback, questions, argument. If I felt something was imprecise or unclear, he insisted that I rethink and re-write it in my own way. In places I suggested some quite major re-structuring of his texts. In all cases he accepted. So we compromised on the title: instead of "by Kazhdan and Franklin", or "Kazhdan, translated by Franklin", we agreed on "Kazhdan, in collaboration with Franklin". It was his way of incentivising a young scholar – in addition to the obvious attraction in having my name together with his on the cover of a book from Cambridge University Press. To reiterate: when we started work on the book, I did not yet have *any* scholarly publications, while he had over 700. I was flattered that he trusted me, or that he gave the impression that he trusted me. In the course of work on the book, he managed to maintain the fiction of dialogue and genuine partnership. I

had and have no idea whether AP truly thought that my contributions were in any way significant, but he generously acknowledged them in the book's introduction (Kazhdan with Franklin 1982. P. ix).

Then there was the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Kazhdan 1991). If there had been any doubt that AP's mind worked differently from the minds of most others, this was the clearest proof. When I agreed to participate, AP sent me a list of titles of around fifty articles. Some were on Byzantino-Rus topics, such as Ilarion, Kirik of Novgorod, Boris and Gleb, Vladimir Monomakh, or metropolitan Kiprian. But the list included subjects which, in my mind, were a long way beyond my own competence: Poland, Polish literature, Czech literature, Lithuania, Vikings; even Glagolitic (I did not reckon myself a linguist). I imagined that this was a list of possible topics from which I was being invited to select those which, in my view, I was adequately competent to write. Not a bit of it: AP made it very clear that this list was not a menu but an allocation. At first I was puzzled: was AP naïve in imagining me to be more erudite that I actually was? Soon, like everyone else who collaborated on the *Dictionary*, I realised that the truth was both simpler and more complicated. On the one hand, as a spiritual descendant of Dal', AP was an entirely self-contained accumulator of encyclopaedic knowledge. Like Dal', he could have written the entire *Dictionary* himself. Indeed, he did write an extraordinary proportion of it: he was sole or joint author of around 1900 entries; a staggering number, on a staggering variety of topics (Курышева 2003. С. 576–614, № 857–2749). On the other hand, both his own academic background and his present context demanded that major reference projects should be collective. AP needed the widest possible circle of contributors. As editor of the *Dictionary*, just as previously as co-author or collaborator of the joint monographs, he was generously inclusive. But generous inclusivity was not the same as unmodified liberalism. AP expected – demanded – that his contributors match his standards. If they felt their knowledge was insufficient – well, they should go and improve their knowledge. And if *he* felt that their knowledge was insufficient – he would tell them so, directly. As editor, he was no diplomat. Drafts would be returned to contributors, sprinkled with plain-speaking marginalia: "no", "wrong", even "rubbish". Not everybody perceived this as friendly, but for AP it was not personal, not a sign of arrogance or disrespect; it was professional honesty, like the lists of errors in his book reviews. Besides some bruised academic egos, one consequence of his editorial rigour was that he created significantly more work for himself. By no means all his "co-authored" articles were planned or commissioned as such. In many cases he became co-author not by design but (in his view) by necessity, as a result of his own editorial additions and interventions.

For a few years after my stay in Dumbarton Oaks, AP and I were in regular correspondence, first in the context of *Studies on Byzantine Literature*, then (to a lesser extent) in connection with the *Dictionary*. There were no electronic media, of course. Typescripts (produced on old-fashioned typewriters) made their way by normal postage across the Atlantic and back again with hand-written annotations. We never telephoned. Everything was in writing, and almost all the written communication was focussed on the work. Through the 1980s I occasionally sent AP drafts of my articles, sometimes with questions. His replies were as critical and constructive as always, but the intensity and spontaneity of the period of his mentorship in 1979-80 could not be repeated. There were no more walks in the park or evenings by the swimming pool. We generally met in large crowds: especially the Byzantine Congresses in Vienna (1981), Washington (1986), and his extraordinary homecoming at the Moscow Congress in 1991.

The genre of "recollections of a scholar" ought to be, in part, anecdotal. The story may include serious reflections, but should be spiced with significant episodes, memorable sayings, conversations, examples of idiosyncratic behaviour, word-pictures. But my memories of AP are not really like that. To be sure, some episodic fragments remain in the mind: in the sitting room at Dumbarton Oaks with Musya; relaxing by the swimming pool; in conversation with Fellows in the dining room. And the walks. I can see AP's way of walking, his way of sitting; and, perhaps clearest of all, his way of reading, which, increasingly, gave graphic physicality to the phrase "close" reading. Yet I cannot adapt my retrospective vision of AP to fit a generic ideal by picking out the vividly meaningful moments. Others will have differently coloured recollections, but that is not the way in which the AP-shaped memory cells have configured themselves in my mind. And perhaps, in his case, this is appropriate. For me, AP lives as phenomenon more organic than episodic; as a kind of essence more than as a set of narratives. Despite his kindness to me, I am not sure that I have a right to call him a friend. Above all, he was – is – an exemplar of how to be a scholar; of how to *be*, as a scholar.

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