

Feudalism Revisited: a Tribute to S. N. Mukherjee

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In this tribute to the stimulus of Soumyen Mukherjee as a teaching colleague, I am going to beg the reader's indulgence. Although I propose to make some comments on the continuing utility of the concept of 'feudalism' for the teacher of history, by way of comments on the reception and 'after-life' of the volume Soumyen, I and Edmund Leach edited together in 1984–85¹, and on the teaching venture in our department that accompanied it, I intend to be fuller and plainer in my references to an esteemed colleague than is, perhaps, usual in a Festschrift. I think all who know Soumyen will realise that this is the only appropriate way to go on this occasion.

In all my teaching career at the University of Sydney, I have had, by Australian standards, an excellent team of colleagues in the area of my expertise, medieval European history. I have also had fine colleagues in adjoining areas—ancient history and 'early modern' history. These latter are the natural areas from which it would seem appropriate to derive colleagues in joint 'inter-area' teaching ventures. And, indeed, I have from time to time, participated in such ventures. Why then would I choose to cooperate with an 'Asian area' colleague, someone of vastly different background from my own, in a teaching venture—*Feudalism, Comparative Studies*—that would seem fraught with obstacles, a teaching venture which, in fact, took an extraordinary amount of effort actually to launch, and which was, in some senses, ill-starred from the beginning? The answer to this question, I suppose, is part of my tribute to Soumyen Mukherjee. Somehow I found in him that spark of the heroic, that element of quest, the feeling that, for Soumyen, historical questions were always part of a life-long personal mission, the answers to which were difficult and even unpalatable. Somehow I sensed a

personal commitment to the basic issues and lessons of historical experience that I did not readily find elsewhere, an unwillingness or an inability to let the smooth polish of middle-class western manners brush away the ragged edges of concern for the unsolved problems of the past, and their implications for the present and future. I do not recall now exactly what drew Soumyen and me together—though I will go into this a little in what follows—but in all our joint ventures, I have been continually reminded of the epic struggles of humanity, and of the importance of an informed knowledge of these struggles for any responsible attitude towards present and future problems. The very titles of our joint ventures—‘Peasant Societies in Revolution: the Role of Millenarian Cults’, ‘Revolutions’,² ‘Feudalism in History’, ‘Marxism in History’³—contrast interestingly with the titles of my normal teaching assignments: ‘Medieval History I’, ‘Heresy and Inquisition’, ‘Florence and the Age of Dante’, ‘The Rise and Fall of the First Reich: Germany and its Neighbours 919–1272 A.D.’, ‘Meaning in History-writing’, ‘Medieval Thought and Learning in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance’, and the like. For the fact that he kept those epic currents before me, and for his eternally persuasive manner, and for his persistence in breaching the protective barrier that, over the years, I came to erect around my activities in the department, I will remain forever in debt to Soumyen. This paper is not an attempt to repay that debt (one can never repay debts of this sort). I will be content if I have at least outlined the debt.

First, however, a diversion. Perhaps the high point of the exotic world that Soumyen’s pressures introduced me to was the lecture which he arranged with his friend Barun De for me to give to the Calcutta Centre for Studies in Social Science (of which Barun De was then Director and Professor of History), 4 February 1986. My competition was severe as it was the very day and hour at which the Pope was to address the crowds, not far off. The lecture itself was no high point (I present some of it below), and I have to record that the Pope got the lion’s share of the potential audience on the day, but the experience of getting and being there was an absolute high point in my life, and possibly too no mean moment in the lives of the four ladies who formed my party for the month-long rail voyage around northern India.

Friends and students had long been urging me, a confirmed Europeanist, to make the acquaintance of India, where they argued,

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moments of medieval splendour could be experienced that would far outrun anything to be had among the carefully manicured and lifeless medieval monuments of Europe. Among these was someone to whom I will always owe a special debt among the many students whose reading, thinking and attitudes towards life have much influenced my own: Chris Kenna. The arrangement was that I, my wife Gail, my two teenage daughters Tara and Katie, and a lifelong colleague and friend Sharon Davidson, would rendezvous with a mutual special friend of us all, Devleena Ghosh (Berwick) amidst the spectacular ruins of the Black Pagoda in Konarak,⁴ and then proceed to Calcutta, where I would vie with the Pope for an audience. Habituated to travel in Europe, I amassed a collection of rail time-tables and began to plan with the usual attention to split-second timing and unmissable connections that has long characterised my approach to European touring. The result was as spectacular a piece of work in its own way as were the ruins at Konarak. In one month we were to deplane at Bombay and visit in quick succession Aurangabad (and nearby monuments), Hyderabad (and nearby monuments), Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konarak, Calcutta, Darjeeling, Agra, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, and Ahmedabad. Such an itinerary did not permit loitering, and we deplaned at Bombay 4.31 a.m. local time, to board almost immediately the Nagpur Express train No.39, which departed Dadar Central Terminus at 12.35 p.m. My notes record that the Nagpur Express 'feels like a Queensland Mail train, hot, dry, ancient, but much more crowded!' We passed through the stench, squalor and dereliction of outer Bombay, the mountainous terrain around Kasara, splendid vistas above dry river beds and some fine agricultural scenes, with gaily coloured sari-clad women, neat mud-brick houses and tidy, varied crops, arriving at Manmad, a straggling town of mud streets and hovels, sprawling away from a large station complex full of food stalls, Hindi signs and people, at sunset. An impressive metre-gauge steam-locomotive hauled the Ajanta Express into the station and we got a space to ourselves in the single first-class car, with the usual two upper and two lower berths which acted as seats for six or eight people by day. Arrival at Aurangabad, for the Daulatabad fort, Ellora and Ajanta caves and sundry related monuments, completed probably the most extraordinary day of touring that I had so far encountered in my life. True, Hong Kong, Venice and Mont St Michel were experiences impossible to shelve, but for sheer ragged colour and

seething sparkle, 26 January 1986 and the days that followed it were unbeatable.

I had, true to form, made a careful collection of tiny xeroxed articles and book chapters which I was attempting to digest for my Calcutta lecture. Never was tranquil contemplation of the past via the fossilised memoranda of scholarly print carried out in such a competitive environment. My travelling companions, bemused as they were by the day's encounters, accepted my preoccupations and attended competently to the logistics of getting us around the railway network and the string of unrelenting medieval sights that we passed through in Hyderabad, the Golconda fort, Bhubaneswar and Puri. The latter point we reached via the 4 p.m. WP class steam-locomotive-hauled Puri passenger, a massively crowded train (packed with non-paying passengers and all manner of merchandise, dead and alive), that trundled through paddy fields, jungle villages, teeming markets and palm trees, all etched against the setting sun. Due (if that is the word for occasions so replete with the never-before-seen and the unexpected) inspections of the Black and White Pagodas at Puri and Konarak mingled with experiences of religious pilgrimage that evoked the middle ages in a spectacular manner, before a night train brought us punctually to that sight of sights, Howrah railway station Calcutta and the nearby towering bridge of that name over the Hooghly River, with its unending procession of human rickshaws, human freight wagons and carriers, three-wheeler trucks, jam-packed buses, beaten-up scare-crow trams clanking over the worst track I have ever seen, and soldiers duly policing the bridge against tourists such as myself determined to try and capture some of the impressions they encountered on film. Confronted by one such soldier, I ended up dropping a lens, a camera and a selection of film onto the roadway in a series of manoeuvres that, although initially fraught with imagined potential disaster, in fact proved an essential diversionary tactic that enabled me to get away without surrendering the offending film. The idea that my efforts might endanger the security of the Indian nation was an odd addition to the unimaginable array of stalls, tables, shops, cottage industries, crumbling lacy Victorian apartment blocks, earthen footpaths, sewer outflows and repair teams, street barbers, human rickshaw depots, clunking trams, bulging buses, and jogging human freighters that formed my first taste of Calcutta.

The days that followed brought us all by indescribable struggling

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narrow-gauge steam railway to Tibetan order and soul-stopping Himalayan splendour at Darjeeling (where I recall a heated argument about the hiring of a blanket for a hotel room that cost, I think, each of us \$1 for the night). After a day or two taking in the Tibetan New Year, we made our descent through stupendous vistas of terraced slopes, tea plantations and hillside towns and the tremendous touchable clutter of the numerous villages through which the train passed, to arrive at New Jalpaiguri late in the day. There we were to await the arrival of No.155 Tinsukia Mail, departing N. J. a little after 10.30 p.m. and arriving at Tundla, the junction station for Agra Fort Station, at 4.02 a.m. two days later.

This epic trip was to break our team. We had so far had spectacular good luck with the Indian Railways' Byzantine booking systems and had made timings that our friends back in Sydney assured us we would not be able to keep to. Our aim was to see Agra, Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur and Ahmedabad, before taking a plane on to Italy on 21 February 1986. The twenty-eight- or nine-hour trip on the Tinsukia Mail, sparing us the long ordeal of going again via Calcutta was a crucial time-saving cross-country effort actually to make up time on our already advanced schedule. I outlined to my companions what I had heard at the Darjeeling booking station, that Bihar State was full of well-organised bandits who did deals with the train drivers and diverted trains onto sidings during the night, from which vantage points they raped the women, cut the throats of all resisters and stole everything that was portable.⁵ I reasoned that these stories were probably exaggerated and the risk of encountering them was not worth the additional time that the rail trip via Calcutta would require. In other words, the requirements of an advanced schedule was worth more than the possible risk to our property, our throats and the modesty of the female contingent. My wife and daughters, inured to this approach, made little protest, but Sharon, with a more sophisticated knowledge of the country, began to distribute her not inconsiderable volume of banknotes in various European currencies, around the pages of the books she was carrying, on the grounds, she said, that bandits would not bother to take books away, especially not 'Teach-Yourself-German' books and the like. The threat to her morals was something, I suppose, she could not prepare against, but something could at least be done about the banknotes.

Thus prepared, we duly boarded the Mail at N. J. in a compartment we were told we could occupy only until Patna (1300 hours the next day) when a top-level Indian parliamentary delegation would board and throw us onto the platform. We took this option because the only alternative was not to take the Mail at all at that point. Thoughts of banditry could not have been too compelling because we all fell asleep and awoke in the heart of hot and polluted Bihar State at Sahibganj station, a veritable cacophony and paradise of food wallahs and their wares. The extraordinary variety and availability of food at this station contrasted oddly with the solemn warning I had received at the Darjeeling tourist booking office, that Bihar State 'lacked food for travellers'.

Neither food, nor banditry, it turned out, nor even parliamentary delegations (ours never showed) were the problem on this trip. Physical stamina, however, was. As we awaited our connecting train for Agra in the confused cold of the early morning at Tundla, both Sharon and Gail began to manifest considerable signs of illness. Sharon ended up vomiting out the doors of the crowded third class carriage in which we eventually rode on to Agra, and Gail became pained and glassy-eyed, having obvious difficulty in breathing. The itinerary ground relentlessly on. Location of a \$1-per-night-per-person hotel near Agra Fort station was followed by a punishing schedule of visits to all major sights, culminating in a sunset inspection of Shah Jahan's fabulous Taj Mahal. By this time Sharon was beginning to improve, but Gail became so distressed that we returned her to the hotel, finishing our itinerary without her, and making some compulsory carpet and mosaic factory-viewings on our way back. It turned out that she had contracted pneumonia, which required a few days hospitalisation (the entire cost of which, with ambulances here and there, and a bed for Tara to stay with her, came to the at-the-time massive sum of \$200). Our schedule was properly broken, and Jaisalmer had to go. The compensation was that Fatehpur Sikri received a series of very careful inspections indeed, by the non-hospitalised members of the party, travelling by unpredictably-scheduled and very crowded steam-hauled third-class passenger trains which were nevertheless infinitely superior to the impossibly rough buses that most tourists used, and which, in view of the location of our hotel, were not very handy. We simply asked the railway staff to notify us when the train arrived, since this could vary

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by up to six hours. My disappointment at the failure of my carefully nurtured railway schedule was thought, by my companions, to have been uncharitable, in view of the suffering the same schedule brought to Gail (and to a lesser extent to Sharon). They have a point, indeed, but to this day I have not had a chance to make up for that lost opportunity of taking a metre-gauge steam-hauled night express to the fabled city of Jaisalmer, and, with advancing age, failing health, the ongoing dieselisation of the Indian Railways and recent disasters to Jaisalmer itself, I doubt that I ever will....

The point of this diversion is simply my way of saying that never before or since have I encountered travel and sights on this scale, and I owe the experience to Soumyen Mukherjee (and his students), without whom it would never have occurred. It demonstrates, I suppose, in a graphic way, the kind of lift that Soumyen gave to one's historical studies. This lift, however, must be described in a more comprehensive way, and the rest of this paper will be devoted to that aim. I propose to describe the origins of my joint teaching ventures with Soumyen, then to look at the most elaborate of these ventures, and finally to consider the aftermath of the volume that was associated with this venture⁶ and which was, for myself, a notable historiographical experience. In connection with this last, I would like to offer some further thoughts on the meaning of feudalism in a Western context.

In one of the many unsorted files that contain the relics of my almost thirty years of teaching medieval history at Sydney University, I find a copy of a 'proposal for a "cross-cultural" seminar in History IV' that bears the names of 'J. O. Ward and S. N. Mukherjee' and is dated 2 May 1973. It was apparently written in connection with page 5 of a 'Response from the Professors of History to the Recommendations from the Departmental Advisory Planning Committee of 12 March 1973'. It is nice, in retrospect, to remind oneself that the present mania for teaching-impeding bureaucratia has its parallel in the remote past. The 'Proposal' goes on to state that the 'Professors of History' claim that they are 'sympathetically open' to proposals for a 'cross-cultural seminar (in Fourth Year), cutting across periods in pursuit of some common theme such as revolutions and which might form a relatively stable part of the furnishings of History IV'. The authors of the 'Proposal' (J. O. Ward and S. N. Mukherjee) ventured a course entitled PEASANT SOCIETIES IN REVOLUTION:

THE ROLE OF MILLENARIAN CULTS, which, they claimed, 'could arise out of the existing interests of a number of members of the Department ... and could help meet the needs of students who would like to pursue an historical/cultural topic of considerable contemporary relevance, into its proper full-length context in time'. The provisional description of the course was as follows:

Term I: European peasant revolutions and millennial cults. An introductory seminar or seminars could establish the theoretical, thematic continuity of the course, and thereafter, topics could be selected in accordance with staff interest/availability and student preference, from the fourteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-nineteenth centuries.

Term II: India, the revolution of 1857, related context and problems.

Term III: a selection of analysis points, widely spread, of relevance in the contemporary context. Perhaps: New Guinea and the Cargo Cults, the Mau-Mau, Latin America, South-East Asia. Here the enlistment of specialist help from outside the Department might be necessary, or at least advisable, although the emphasis would be on the student's own exploration of the area. A concluding seminar or seminars might draw together the course enquiry as a whole.

The remainder of the 'Proposal' indicated that 'Sybil Jack, who has interests in the English Civil War and Millennial cults, and Ian Jack, who has interests in agrarian life generally and English peasant revolts, have both offered to' assist with staffing the course. The 'Proposal' contained nothing particularly threatening, and nothing inappropriate to a senior historian with wide connections throughout the university, and a junior colleague keen to take part in what looked like a stimulating adventure. To explain the undercurrents which, in the end, engulfed this 'Proposal', however, it is necessary to allude to two of those historical truths that never find official record.⁷ The first, a series of personality clashes that divided the 'Asian Area', formed an ongoing thread in the life of the Sydney history department, and the second, the jealously guarded professorial right to mount or at least to sanction the mounting of the senior seminar courses in Fourth Year, can only be alluded to here. Suffice it to say, that History IV at the time was made up of 'Seminar Courses' (major options, later called 'List A options' and in the early stages mounted by the professors or their favoured sons

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according to their whims), 'Special Options' (later called 'List B options', smaller-scale courses that could be mounted by any member of staff and were often quite narrow in their stated aims), and a 15,000 word thesis. This system had replaced an earlier triumvirate, of 'Historical Method' seminars (usually organised by J. M. Ward), 'Seminars on Prescribed Subjects' (the precursors of the later 'Seminar Courses'), and a thesis. I forget now the exact course of the tortuous negotiations that inaugurated Soumyen's and my first attempt to work together, but there is in my possession a carbon copy of a letter dated 7 July 1973, addressed to 'Dr S. N. Mukherjee', with copies to Professor J. M. Ward and myself. It is unsigned, but was written by Marjorie Jacobs, Professor of History at the time. It runs:

I feel the need to resolve a misunderstanding between us (and also involving John O. Ward) which was revealed at this morning's departmental meeting. When I conveyed to the meeting the list of options so far proposed by members of the department, there was no intention on my part to suppress mention of a special option proposed by yourself and John Ward. On the other hand it is my impression that you misquoted me when you suggested to the meeting that I had advised you and John to think no more of the proposed course on peasant revolts and millenarian movements as a possible special option. My memory of our discussion of these matters is that at every point I advised against pressing these proposals on the Department in the form of a seminar but that I equally encouraged you to propose a special option for 1974 along whatever lines you might think fit. I could not consider that the proposal remained before us without alteration in the light of this advice. I assumed that some adaptation of your proposals would be necessary, and that John Ward's continued association with the project could not be taken for granted. Since I had heard nothing more about the matter I could only assume that it had lapsed, or that it might still be looked for. In either case it was no more appropriate for me to mention this proposal to the meeting than other possibilities which I have heard of, but which have not yet reached me in writing, and which may or may not eventuate. I am sorry for the misunderstanding and should be seriously concerned if anything beyond simple misunderstanding were involved. I repeat what I said at the meeting: that I am sure that the Department will welcome any proposal which you may have to make of a special option to be offered in History IV in 1974.

Needless to say, perhaps, the course was not proceeded with, or was not allowed to proceed in the form in which it had been conceived. Similar courses were appropriate at other universities (for example, UNSW), but not at Sydney. The next record of joint proposals between myself and Soumyen in my possession is a memorandum from Professor Jacobs, to Soumyen, dated 23/7/1979, in which she stated that 'in the absence of information about "Feudalism in History" the [departmental] meeting decided to accept it as an option which may be available in 1980'. Soumyen provided the information requested in a memorandum, undated, as follows:

History IV 1980. FEUDALISM IN HISTORY. This will be a seminar on the origin and development of the idea and institution of feudalism in Europe and India. I think we should have 24 seminars during the year. The first six seminars will be on the development of the idea of feudalism from the philosophers of the Enlightenment to the twentieth century Marxists. Then we shall turn our attention to India and historians like Kosambi, Sharma, L. Gopal, Habib, Moreland, Thapar and Athar Ali. I shall be responsible for the first half of the seminars. There should be one essay, one tutorial paper and one two-hour examination. I would like John O. Ward to be responsible for the second half of the year with European development, comparing and contrasting it with the development elsewhere.

Written below my copy of this memorandum is a note from Marjorie Jacobs, saying, in part, that Soumyen 'also expresses regret that the above was included in the B options and not in the seminars. I was under the impression from my brief discussion with you that you contemplated a B option'. Yet, attached to the same memorandum, is a note from John Pryor saying 'I think you should press for it ['Feudalism in History'] as a List A seminar.... Two of my students have already expressed disappointment that there is no List A seminar outside the field of 19th–20th century European and Anglo-Saxon history and the Method seminars ... are really in the same field'. In the official list of History IV seminars for 1980 to which these notes are attached, 'Feudalism in History' is, in fact, listed as a 'List B' seminar. At that time the 'List A' options were in the hands of Ken Cable, Tony Cahill, Neville Meaney, Alastair Maclachlan, and M. D. Stephen. They dealt with 'Church, State and Society', 'Nationalism in Europe, America and

Australia', 'History Method' and 'History and Circumstance: the Role of Social and Individual Attitudes in the Writing of History'. A fairly safe bill of fare for tomorrow's statespersons....

In my records is a letter from myself to Marjorie Jacobs, dated 25/7/1979. In it I stated that, having had some experience of other 'List A' thematic courses ('Power Structures', 'Law and Society')

I am happy to cooperate in 'Feudalism in History' in 1980, either as a List A or B, in accordance with the preferences of the Department, the students and Soumyen, with whom the idea originated.... I feel that in scope it is a valid 'List A' seminar (at least in comparison with such chestnuts as 'nationalism' or—worse—topics 'to be announced'!!).... I am not yet convinced that pursuit of the wraith of 'feudalism' cannot perform a useful didactic service, and am encouraged by the fact that at the 14th congress of Medievalists at Kalamazoo, Michigan, which I attended this last May (along with some 1399 other medievalists!), the largest audience and the best speakers were drawn to a 'forum' on 'whether feudalism' was a relevant conceptual tool for the study of medieval history'.... My portion of the year would concentrate on three approaches:

(A) an examination of what leading modern historians and theorists take 'feudalism' to imply in a medieval context (E. A. Bloch, and R. A. Brown, Fourquin, Duby, Lyon, Strayer, D. H. Green, Perry Anderson, perhaps Marx).

(B) an examination of what contemporaries understood by feudal relations and values, with particular reference to the structure of power in selected localities AND an examination of what detailed modern research into land-holding patterns, power and family relations, in particular areas reveals regarding the relevance of continued concentration on 'feudal institutions'. Areas to be selected from here would include: northern French / Flemish aristocratic society c.1000–1125 (Janet Martindale, Van Luyn, Duby, Guibert de Nogent, Galbert of Bruges); Germany (Leyser, Thompson, Hill, Gillingham and documents); Spain (Lourie, McKay); Southern France (Lewis, Bisson); Outremer; Norman England; France and England in the later middle ages ('Bastard Feudalism').

(C) an examination of the place and role of 'feudal institutions' in Russia, Islam, Byzantium, Japan, China (Mark Elvin). Term III should leave space for concluding, comparative discussions.

In my outline I suggested that guest lecturers could be invited to enrich the envisaged coverage and half-day, day or even weekend symposia could be held in conjunction with the course, and that the ramifications of the subject extended into such areas as 'modern sociological research into the nature and functioning of elites, the development of rival (?) elites (bourgeoisie, 'capitalism'), nineteenth-century Neo-feudalism (see S. J. Tonsor, 'Feudalism, Revolution and Neo-feudalism: a Review Article' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21 (1979): 131-38).

In her note of reply, of the same date, Marjorie wrote that 'I am under the impression that I did not yesterday consult you about the location of the unit 'Feudalism in History' in the History IV programme. I did that some time ago during Soumyen Mukherjee's absence from Sydney at the time of our early discussions of History IV 1980, and at that time had the impression that you favoured a B option'. Attached to Marjorie's note is a note in Soumyen's hand, dated 29/7 ['87]/1979, asserting that 'whatever [Marjorie Jacobs⁸] might have said about feudalism, you will see the literature on it is extensive and important. Please read Kosambi chapters 9 and 10 [etc.].... I am extremely angry—not with you though'.

Somehow, nothing eventuated from these exchanges, and I have no record of any course being mounted by Soumyen and me before 1987, when, at long last, 'Feudalism: Comparative Studies' was put on, for about 15 students, with even an honours course (for two students, later one). It was mounted as a second-year 'Thematic Unit' ('T 15'). 'Thematic units' were, at the time, storm-in-a-teacup attempts by the department to display a certain up-market toney curriculum flexibility, but they usually degenerated into re-labelled conventional 'area' units, and, as such, were subject to periodical revivals. Ours was genuinely, indeed formidably, thematic, but I cannot say it attracted any very distinguished students. We arranged a nice 'Indian night' (at my place) and we invited a guest lecturer or two (for example, Jeremy Beckett on 'feudalism' in the Philippines, and Ken Macnab on Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station*).

Much the same course was advertised in the 1988 Departmental Handbook as Course 237.2, but I do not recall whether it went on or not. I recall wondering why such an apparently exciting course was so unattractive to students, and I had certainly not, in the past, had

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difficulty attracting enough numbers to keep courses going. In 1989, therefore, I decided to change the name to 'Marxism in History: the idea and reality of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production'. I think this was the time the course attracted only 4 or 5 students and ran for a week or two before I closed it down, since mounting it involved at least that many staff. Soumyen was, I think, on leave at the time, and had suggested some replacement tutors. In 1992 I ran the course again, in its changed form (Soumyen was on sick-leave and provided a couple of guest lectures), and this time I got 30 or 40 students and some of these were the best I have ever had (Elisabeth Bos, Armin Wittfoth, Geraldine O'Hara), while others were equally memorable in their own way (Toby Eccles, Emma Rawling, James Mugambi, Emma-Kate Symons [whose father was at that time in adventure with Graham Richardson], and Michael Petersen [son of the former Director of the *Sydney University News*]). Battle-scarred students from this course still occasionally stop and say how much they got out of it. Because of Soumyen's suddenly announced sick leave, I called upon my colleagues to contribute lectures in their areas of expertise, in order to make up for the reduction of emphasis upon India, and their contributions were both willing and excellent. John Pryor came along to lecture on Marx's ideas about medieval feudalism, and became so involved that he scheduled for himself another appearance the week following; Iain Cameron lectured lucidly on 'Feudalism and the French Revolution', Ian Jack on 'Bastard Feudalism', and John Berwick on 'The Asiatic Mode of Production'. Mark Elvin came up from Canberra, lectured attractively on China, dined with the students and stayed with me for an interesting couple of days, and Rikki Kersten, in what in some ways was the 'pièce de resistance', delivered an inspiring talk on 'Feudalism' in modern Japanese political and historical thinking. It was a teaching experience I am glad to have had, even though one intelligent student (whom I was pleased to service somewhat later with my 'Heresy and Inquisition' course) abandoned the course because, as she claimed over the phone when I rang her up to find out why she had 'dropped', 'I wanted the facts of history, not theories about it'. I, however, enjoyed tackling head-on the notion that history was what you urgently or passionately needed it to be, and my only regret was that Soumyen could not have been more fully part of what was, in hindsight, the finest hour for his and my joint teaching ventures.

Soumyen and I decided to have one more go at jointly teaching this course, a kind of swan-song, as Soumyen's retirement was imminent. We therefore advertised it for second semester in 1994 (as 'T 15.2'), but in a strangely ironic manner, a secretarial slip on the part of the compiler of the Handbook for the year, killed it: the printed description attached to the title of our course, as it turned out when the Handbook appeared from the printer's hands, was not the one I had submitted, but the description of Iain Cameron's course 'Crime and Deviance: 1500 to the present' ('T 16.2'), even though that very description appeared, correctly, beneath the title for Iain's course and directly below the notice of our own course. Only 15 students were curious enough to enrol, and one wonders what they hoped to find. In the corridor one day late in semester one of that year, I encountered the departmental administrative assistant, who said 'Oh well, you'll have a light load next semester!' I, used to his bantering, said, 'Indeed! Why in particular?', to which he replied 'The Departmental Meeting has just decided to cancel your 'Feudalism' course because there weren't enough takers'. That was the way things were done then (and are still). So ended Soumyen and my joint teaching ventures. I do not think I will attempt to revive the course, because (a) students find the multiplicity of 'areas' too difficult, (b) Soumyen has retired, (c) who knows whether my colleagues would be so generous again with their fine contributions, and (d) I do not know how many more years I can count on in the department, and I have some unexpended energies for the courses which I am more professionally qualified to teach.

Behind our joint-teaching venture on Feudalism lay the volume in the Sydney Association for Studies in Society & Culture (SASSC) series that recorded the proceedings of a conference on the subject at St Andrew's College (University of Sydney) in March 1984,⁹ and behind that lay the 'preliminary' workshop held in Terrey Hills some couple of years earlier. Soumyen was, of course, the animating spirit behind both, and I still have an amusing set of slides taken at the Terrey Hills site showing all of us in jolly and inebriated state, 'enjoying' feudalism, as it were. There was a camaraderie that was very much part of Soumyen himself (though he would not, in the end, accept our invitation to 'sleep with us' on some sort of vast communal mattress in the centre of the hall where the workshop was held!): it is hard to imagine our more straight-laced colleagues inspiring that sort of

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mayhem. The published volume evoked an interesting set of reactions, some of them unpublished,¹⁰ and by no less a figure than R. W. Southern, who had been praised by Elizabeth R. A. Brown for not using the word 'feudalism' in his *Making of the Middle Ages* (1953)—'the purest'¹¹ book on the subject—and other publications.¹² Southern wrote, in reference to my chapter in the *Sydney Feudalism: Comparative Studies* volume:¹³

As for your contribution to Feudalism, I thought it a very clearly articulated and well organised study of the various things 'it' has been taken by historians to be. And I agree with your conclusion that it is a valuable concept so long as historians both *are* clear and make clear to *others* what they mean by it. If these conditions are met (and they virtually never are), then you are quite right to call it stimulating and an incentive to organised study. Curiously enough, however, I don't remember that anyone before you has even tried so systematically to distinguish the types and sub-types of feudalism. And this may be because none of your foci has been (or perhaps ever can be) the exclusive focus of any prolonged study. Indeed, it is clear that one cannot have, say, focus V without I and II plus some elements of all the others. So, valuable though your analysis is as a retrospective study (as it might be [used] by a consultant examining the phases and symptoms of the disease), they [the foci] cannot in practice be kept separate, and it is not very clear in what ways later studies should or can be influenced by writers who may now be aware that they are slipping from Focus V to I or II and back again to V, perhaps in the space [?] of a single page, but can do nothing to stop it happening.

In principle, as you mention, I have seldom (I should like to think never) used the word or concept,

(a) because I don't know what I would mean by it, and

(b) [because] whatever I meant by it would be alien to the thought and experience of the relevant period in the past.

So I hope I shall never use the word in the future. Anyhow, I found your discussion interesting and enlightening.

This would have pleased Elizabeth Brown, who complained¹⁴ in her review of our volume, that nowhere did the contributors define what they meant by the term 'feudalism'. She complained that fewer papers

dealt with non-European societies than the title led her to expect, that most of the non-European authors said little to recommend the use of the term 'feudalism' as a tool of comparative analysis, while at least one (Jeffcott) actually questioned the whole procedure. Two essays were praised for providing 'important insights into the ways in which the term 'feudalism' has served political ends' (Kenna, Reynolds), and two others were singled out as 'particularly valuable' (Mukherjee's 'novel remarks on the genesis and development of the construct in the West', and my own 'comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the many meanings ... that have been associated with "feudalism"'). Brown was puzzled that, despite my analysis, I could still see some utility for the term and she concluded by repeating her view that she herself could not.

A wide-ranging and trenchantly critical discussion of our volume, together with that of T. J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia, *Feudalism and Non-European Societies*,¹⁵ from the pen of Susan Reynolds, a noted opponent of the term 'feudalism', appeared in *Peasant Studies* for 1987.¹⁶ Reynolds at least admitted that the issue discussed in the two volumes was 'intrinsically important', but that, aside from the problem of the link between feudalism and capitalism in non-European societies (contrasted with Europe), the debates about the meaning of the term 'feudalism' in European history were heuristically of little value: Reynolds claimed that I was afraid of my own conclusions and of Brown, whom (she wrote) Mukherjee did not fully understand. Marxist adherents of the heuristic value of the term 'feudalism', argued Reynolds, should not allow their views to be cluttered by petty debates about fiefs and vassals; she observed that it was difficult to see how the Norman Conquest, cropping up in both volumes, 'could have introduced feudalism to England in any Marxist sense'.¹⁷ Like other critics, Reynolds noted how Leach in his introduction to our volume, rather torpedoed its own project,¹⁸ but had an occasional good word for some of the contributions: my own chapter, though providing 'an acute and thought-provoking analysis', nevertheless, concluded timidly; Wright was 'interesting', Bennett drew some 'neatly described' contrasts between English and French historiographical traditions on feudalism, and Jeffcott's happy phrase 'the Cinderella slipper strategy' comes in (again) for notice.

In the rest of her valuable critique, Reynolds displays her (English)

preoccupation with the need for an 'exact fit' between the labours of the historian and the past. 'The concept of the fief is post-medieval' (a theme to which Reynolds returns in her subsequent, sledge-hammer, book on the subject),¹⁹ the aspect of personal freedom and unfreedom in 'feudal' societies, needs 'more rigorous study', the Marxist mode-of-production line of thought must be cleansed of fiefs and vassals, and possibly also of distinctions between labour-rent, money-rent, and rent in kind; if its emphasis upon structural change is to be adhered to, 'one must surely stick to some consistent hypothesis about what can or cannot bring about' this kind of change.

Reynolds concludes by suggesting that 'feudalism' as a tool of comparative social analysis is productive of more confusion than clarity, and that within Europe all aspects of the debate require harder confrontation with 'real empirical evidence, if not at first hand then at least as it is presented in serious and critical monographs'.²⁰ In the close-focus tradition of mature Anglo-American historiography, this is no doubt true. Building stones for the Master Builder, as Huizinga once argued,²¹ must be properly hewn. Nevertheless, the notion of 'feudalism' does draw many things into debate that might otherwise moulder respectably on library shelves or here and there, in discrete and uncontroversial ways, in monograph/journal pages and conference sessions. History is more, perhaps, the well-arranged scholarly study in the English-speaking world, or the right sort of discourse in well-respected classes and symposia. Even if we closed the book on feudalism now, historians of thought and historiography would still have much to contend with.²² Besides, as some remarks below are intended to suggest, many do not appear to be listening to Reynolds or 'Peggy Brown', to whom, in an irony of ironies, Reynolds declares 'homage and fidelity' on the dedication page of her *Fiefs and Vassals*.

It is difficult to predict at this stage the reaction of the scholarly world to Susan Reynolds' 500-page *Fiefs and Vassals*, but its brief seems a gloomy one: it is 'meaningless' to try and decide whether feudo-vassalic relations or institutions were less important than has up to now been thought, or to inquire into their origin,²³ or to say where they appeared, or to judge which part of Europe 'was most truly feudal'.²⁴ One wonders what Fulbert of Chartres²⁵ would have said in reply to Reynolds' assertion that the concept of vassalage is 'comparatively vacuous'.²⁶

Perhaps, all in all, he might have agreed, but Duke William of Aquitaine wanted to know about it, so he had to make something up. Readers will be pleased to learn that Reynolds' 500 pages do not pretend to offer a 'comprehensive' survey of her topic—'the relation between the modern concepts of the fief and of vassalage on the one hand and the evidence of property law and of social and political relations that I find in medieval sources on the other'.²⁷ She has 'deliberately omitted ... the whole subject of feudalism in its Marxist sense ... [and] large areas of Europe'.²⁸ These latter include Spain and Jerusalem and 'a mass of local variations'. Hard confessions for a hardened empiricist, but there are already signs that the empiricist is at least in part fascinated by the discourse ('the different national traditions of writing about feudalism'). Reynolds' conclusion²⁹ suggests that she hasn't entirely given away an interest in feudal origins, but the respectful reference to 'modern knowledge' (about feudalism, and which sustains the mainly 'negative' conclusions of the book) is alarming in a postmodern age. Duby and Dockès,³⁰ it seems, were in error in supposing that their period was one in which unruly barons and knights made war upon each other and tyrannised over hapless peasants, because Reynolds tells us that no medieval historians now see 'the period' ('the whole middle ages') in that way. Are we banned from seeing a certain pattern in one part of the middle ages, because 'modern knowledge' bans it for 'the whole middle ages'? Let the reader judge.

It is also consoling to learn that when Reynolds comes to her 'more positive conclusions',³¹ she fits comfortably enough into my focus Vb.³² Nevertheless, the legacy of her book is the inutility of models, 'as a substitute for comparison of the evidence of actual phenomena'.³³ The historian must just bumble around, knocking into 'sources', 'evidence', bits and pieces and bric-a-brac left behind by past ages—'plodding through the uncertain evidence' is Reynolds' phrase³⁴—in quest of limited enlightenment. That limited enlightenment at times runs the risk of bumping into another of our energising historiographical concepts—the so-called 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance',³⁵ and one is indeed led to wonder whether Reynolds would ever have been stimulated to write her massive *Fiefs and Vassals* had it not been for all those not-so-careful historians who bumbled around their sources with the additional impediment of a large travel-sack labelled 'Feudalism'.

It is possible that the concept 'feudalism' will survive Reynolds' armoured panzer attack.³⁶ Much recent literature, indeed, seems to have confirmed the emphasis, and the concepts 'feudalism'/'feudal relations' are strengthening their position in Western historical discourse, even if the utility of the feudal model is fading in the latest research into Japanese history.³⁷ A few comments on recent books may be permitted here, in approximate chronological order.

Georges Duby, himself, despite the praise awarded him by E. A. R. Brown for his (1953) work on the Mâconnais,³⁸ has been of late less than chaste. Abandoning his earlier close-focus 'research'-oriented inquiry, so obviously acceptable to the Anglo-American tradition represented by Brown and Reynolds, Duby has lately allowed his fancy to run free—at least as far as his English translators are concerned. Even these latter are not entirely to blame, as the original 1981 French of his *Le Chevalier, La Femme et la Prêtre* is quite happy to talk about 'the society we call feudal' and sets as the historian's task the comprehending of 'la féodalité'.³⁹ So too Duby entitled an article published in *La Pensée* for 1984⁴⁰ 'Les femmes et la révolution féodale', thoughts inspired by a course he had commenced on the condition of women in the 'society called feudal'. *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*⁴¹ sins heavily in entitling an entire chapter 'The Age of Feudalism',⁴² whilst the English edition of *The Three Orders*⁴³ has a chapter entitled 'The Feudal Revolution'⁴⁴ and amply indexes 'Feudalism' at the end of the book. The most recent of Duby's imports, as far as I have noted, is his *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*,⁴⁵ where we find 'Feudalism' nicely indexed (including the extraordinary 'feudalism—and attitudes to pain 168-71'!), and even defined (p.66: 'Feudalism is the parcelling out of power').⁴⁶ Just behind the latter is Duby's *France in the Middle Ages 987-1460* (English 1991, French 1987),⁴⁷ where, although not indexed, 'la féodalité' is alive and well,⁴⁸ and the important 'homage recital' of Galbert of Bruges⁴⁹ is taken to imply a moment when 'standard feudal practice crystallized in northern France'.⁵⁰

It is time to wonder, indeed, whether the French and the English are parting company in regard to the continued usage of terms like 'feudalism' and 'feudal' (adherence to the latter always exposes one to the risk of slipping in the former). Robert Bartlett, in his *The Making*

of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350,⁵¹ indexes 'feudalism, fiefs' amply, and is happy enough to announce that 'Along with fiefs came the language of feudalism' (p.54). Rodney Hilton published in 1990 a revision of his 1985 essays *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History*,⁵² and in 1992 there appeared his *English and French Towns in Feudal Society* (Cambridge University Press). This was reprinted in 1995, and in the same year Michael Hicks' *Bastard Feudalism* was published by Longman. Malcolm Barber, however, in his recent textbook adopts a more chaste mode: 'For the "nominalist" historian, "feudalism" possesses no external reality whatsoever, and since it often misleads, its value as a "term of convenience" might also be regarded as highly doubtful'.⁵³ So too, Dominique Barthélemy's *L'Ordre Seigneurial, XIe–XIIIe siècle*⁵⁴ sees 'feudalism' as the key word for 'l'ancienne histoire de France', a period which included the fifty years of French scholarship that followed the researches of Marc Bloch. It is now time, he argues, to replace the phrase 'feudal anarchy' for the period he is talking of, with the phrase 'seigneurial order'; in fact, the latest (French) orthodoxy seems to be that the word 'seigneurialism', though in some ways no more fortunate than the word 'feudalism', at least accords better with the facts: the seignury becomes an essential stage in the history of European societies, reaching its apogee c.1050–75 and declining by 1250–75. In the 'seigneurial age', a warrior, ecclesiastic, family or community, has seized—or received by default—the powers which provide the authority from which to 'maintain the peace' within the little cell called 'the (private) domain'. Nevertheless, Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel in their *The Feudal Transformation 900–1200*,⁵⁵ remark that

Feudalism, in the strict sense of the word, can perhaps be seen as an essential stage in the development of an ideology of service, of an education in submission. Whatever the case, it is, whether we like it or not, the lasting foundation in Western Europe of a solid and complete political hierarchy. The state, which repudiates intermediary bodies the better to make use of them, can now despise or pretend to despise the submission of one man to another, a ritual fiction of an all-powerful paternity. But can one be so sure that even today it could survive without it[?] The state versus feudalism? Let us say, rather the state through feudalism.⁵⁶

Consultation of the index ('Feudalism/Feudal hierarchy') will indicate how thoroughly permeated this discussion is by the notion of 'feudalism'. Indeed, 'Feudalism as an institution is the point of departure of this study'.⁵⁷ The French public, too, seem inured to the appearance of books, new or reprinted, with the theme 'feudal'.⁵⁸ Perhaps that is why, in a recent translation of *The Vézelay Chronicle*, my colleague and I felt bound to index 'Feudalism'.⁵⁹

As we move away from the notion that the past can be reconstructed in all its detailed objectivity by correct application of the principles of *quellenforschung* and philology, we are in the West becoming happier with the polemical or generalising terms of earlier ages, when truth had to be fought for and over. Indeed, there is every justification today for a new and improved edition of Soumyen's *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, and, with luck, we may be able to coax this from him.

Since the completion of the volume, I have myself had occasion to think further on the past as opened up by the notion of 'feudalism'. At the time of my own contribution, I was conscious of omitting a number of specialised works on the subject,⁶⁰ but if I were to write my chapter again today, I suppose that I would stress further my tenth focus,⁶¹ as I did—to end this paper where I began it—in my remarks to Barun De's seminar, on that fine but foully polluted day in February 1986. 'Feudalism' in this reading becomes a set of practices and attitudes characteristic of the transitional, personalised power-vacuum between—or beneath/beyond, in the case of mafioso structures—relatively stable, institutionalised, ideologically guaranteed state structures: oaths, gangs, retinues, loyalty to a man or leader, homage and a code of 'chivalry', pledges, gages, gifts, favours, fiefs and a variety of other informal mechanisms for building power come to the fore in these contexts (which is why, I imagine, Galbert of Bruges had occasion to describe homage gestures, as if they were 'new'). One might speak of 'half-[centralised] power' situations, in which lords and sub-lords will contract with each other and with the strongmen upon whom each depends. The techniques and procedures of control and dominance in such situations will be personal and traditions of martial prowess (*chevalerie*) will develop to dignify the profession of those who hold the cards, the strongmen.

Admittedly, we are not to imagine a picture of uniform anarchy in the medieval West: even the rankest periods of anarchy no doubt left

many groups and areas in relative peace. The point really is that 'feudalism' might well be seen as a kind of hegemonic political behaviour in certain definable circumstances, political behaviour that gradually evolved from and continued to conform in broadest detail to the vocabulary and apparatus of power bargaining in Europe prior to about the year 900 A.D. This 'discourse' of power, this set of ethical and ritual norms set the terms for political reality and political thinking until well into the era of the state (the thirteenth century perhaps). We may suppose that power in twelfth-century Flanders meant homage, enfeoffment, service (in broad terms) not because no other forms were economically or technically possible, but simply because people were habituated by the long, prior, struggles for power in the earlier middle ages, to thinking and acting that way. They would not cast off the habit of 'feudal' thinking until the power of the state showed them it was neither necessary nor feasible to retain such modes of thought and action. Even beyond that moment, of course, the long shadow of 'feudal' modes of power remained—and remain—dominant wherever people competed for hegemony.

'Feudalism', then, might best be viewed as a word for particular swings of the pendulum of power in any period, area or society: when the pendulum swings towards stable, structured 'formal' modes of controlling the resources and personnel of an area, we can less profitably use the term 'feudalism'; when the pendulum swings towards 'anarchy', then the informal, personalised modes of 'control' that are used by the most effective players in the game of survival, may well be termed 'feudalism'. This is why Nick Wright's paper in our volume was so interesting. It is also why Gurevich was right to look for the origins of feudalism in 'the contact of the barbarian peoples with the conquered populations of the Empire'.⁶²

Two points, however, should be noted. First, the 'feudal' modes of power *do* provide initial ingredients for the construction of more lasting states than the 'pillage-areas' prevalent under 'feudalism', but these modes are transitional, and lead either to a new collapse or to the erection of permanent state structures. Even within the era of permanent state structures, unusual events can precipitate a relapse into 'feudal' conditions, as, for example, occurred in post World War II Germany.

Secondly, a perspective such as I have outlined, encourages us to look for the factors that enabled permanent state structures to

be erected at all. Both bureaucratic statism (and its supportive, sustaining ideologies), *and* informal systems of clientage, dependence and bondage, exist in most societies and have their own histories. There are times when one is apparently dominant and the other is in comparative recess; it is useful to look at the mechanisms that determine this apparent dominance and recession, and to write history in terms of the oscillation, provided that we operate in a sensitive and not too schematic or jigsaw-like manner, and provided also that we recognise 'feudal' as the term historically appropriate only to the medieval West, and used outside that area solely as a sort of short-hand or tool for reasoning by analogy or model.

Essential to the construction/endurance of a successful, civilised, large-scale centralised bureaucratic state (once some exceptionally charismatic leader has set one up) are:

- a high social priority for letters and learning;
- a 'script' or literate culture of written documents;
- a powerful class whose access to social eminence is through mastery of script;
- an appropriate and rich administrative and ideological tradition accessible through script and through the script-conserving class;
- appropriate cultural institutions (schools) for replication and internalising of the values of script and its conserver class.

It was not for nothing that Charlemagne concerned himself so carefully with the provision of educational mechanisms by way of the cathedral schools of his day.⁶³ Through script mechanisms a hegemonic group can organise military, judicial and fiscal/extractive structures in such a way as to secure centralised predominance. In western Europe script governments rose and fell, until there came a time when they just went on rising, and are, of course, not only still with us, but are the dominant form of socio-political environment today. The 'Twelfth-Century Renaissance' marks—in western Europe—the great divide between the ephemeral script governments, and the permanent ones.

What has this to do with feudalism? Perhaps it may be as follows. 'Feudalism' is a name given for historical, rather than strictly etymological or functional reasons, to periods of history or types of society in which the five features I have just enumerated are marginally,

minimally or not at all evident or present. Because all societies have passed through or experienced such phases in their history, feudalism is what Coulborn calls a 'uniformity' or a world evolutionary stage, but not a fixed or arbitrary one in its occurrence or its causation or termination. Nor, because of the relative absence of the five features just noted, can it be called a 'system'. 'System' is characteristic only of script culture and government. Societies in which one may speak of 'feudal law' in a written sense, are societies passing from feudal to a script phase; they are transitional rather than purely feudal.

However, because the absence or minimal presence of my five features does not necessarily indicate anarchy, we must further define feudalism as that phase, beyond anarchy, and different from tribalism, in which informal, oral customs and habits have grown up among diverse groups ensuring some measure of social cohesion and stability in a necessarily unstable and possibly always transitional phase in a society's history. Thus 'tribal' may imply fixed, long-term, and 'feudal' a period of transition between times of internally or externally induced disorder, or else between oscillations towards/from anarchy and script government.⁶⁴

The links between these lines of thought and the Marxist 'feudal mode of production' are not necessary ones. The village routines that produce the earth's goods are there to be 'managed', and Wickam has indicated the range of possible extractive modes here. The participants in the productive process must be distinguished from those who, by exercise of arms, and because they are not participants, end up as 'managers' or 'expropriators'⁶⁷ of the surplus fruits of the production structures (manors, villages, farms and the like).

These thoughts are presented more in deference to the spirit that produced the original SASSC *Feudalism: Comparative Studies* volume, than in any belief that they will satisfy those who wish their interpretive structures to lie much closer to the sources and the endless variety of past life as it must have been. My own research, on which a long string of applications for leave and grants has been based, does not relate to the issues raised in the present paper. Nor is it accurate to say that 'teaching feudalism' takes up any great portion of my teaching time. Nevertheless, if I were asked to name the one thread in my life at Sydney University that forced me more than any other to confront the reality of history-making and the nature of societies in the past, while

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at the same time forcing me to take into account the endlessly varied and intriguing world beyond the European West, I would have to point to the area of my teaching that one way or another had to do with Soumyen Mukherjee. That is why I am paying tribute to him in the present collection.

Notes

- 1 *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, eds Edmund Leach, S. N. Mukherjee, John Ward, *Sydney Studies in Society and Culture* 2 (1985).
- 2 See *Revolution as History*, eds S. N. Mukherjee and J. O. Ward, *Sydney Studies in Society and Culture* 5 (1989).
- 3 I will comment further on these titles below.
- 4 I picked up a good guide to this in India: Debala Mitra's *Konarak*, Archaeological Survey of India, 1968.
- 5 That these stories were not entirely imagined is suggested by a fascinating few pages in John Westwood's *Railways of India*, Newton Abbot, 1974, pp.75–9. This book occupies an odd place in another episode which brought Soumyen and me together: the assessment of the doctoral thesis by Leighton Appleby 'Social Change and the Railways in North India c.1845–1914', 1990, but I must say nothing about that in the present context.
- 6 See above n.1.
- 7 Least of all in *History at Sydney, 1891–1991: Centenary Reflections*, ed. B. Caine and others, Sydney, 1992. Soumyen and I often contemplated a 'Secret History' of the department, on the Procopian model, to accompany the above 'official venture', but, alas, we never wrote it. This portion of my paper at least honours that one-time intention.
- 8 Soumyen's words here are unfortunately not printable.
- 9 'Feudalism: a Comparative Study in Social and Political Structures of Pre-industrial Societies', a conference held at St Andrew's College, 16–18 March, 1984. See above n.1.
- 10 Thomas Bisson said in a letter to me dated 2 August 1986 that our volume had made 'a stimulating contribution' to an NEH seminar for college teachers on the subject of 'Medieval European Feudalism', and David Nicholas, in a letter dated 29 October 1987, wrote that the volume contained 'a lot of material of considerable interest' and would have been better if 'your paper had been the first and ... other contributors had tried to place their articles within the various foci that you suggest'. He indicated that in the introductory analysis to a 'projected book of articles on feudalism' for which at the time he and Bryce Lyon were trying to find a publisher, 'the Sydney collection, and your article in particular, will find its place'.
- 11 E. A. R. Brown 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe' *American Historical Review* 79 (1974): 1080.
- 12 This is not strictly accurate: see Leach, Mukherjee, Ward, eds, *Feudalism*:

- Comparative Studies*, pp.50 and 65, n.80. In his revision of *St Anselm and His Biographer (Saint Anselm: a Portrait in a Landscape*, Cambridge, 1990), Southern has a section entitled 'Feudal Imagery and Universal Order' (Part III, Chapter 9, §vi). Here the word 'feudal' is commonplace, and even 'feudalism' secures a mention, if a guarded one (p.221).
- 13 In a letter to me dated 31 December 1985.
 - 14 *Speculum* 62.4 (1987): 1030–2.
 - 15 *Library of Peasant Studies*, No.8, London and New Jersey, 1985.
 - 16 *Peasant Studies* 14.4 (1987): 250–9, 'More about Feudalism'.
 - 17 'More about Feudalism', p.252.
 - 18 This was also noted by Robert Stern in his review in *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* 10.3 (1987): 163–4. Stern pointed out that our volume was 'a collection of separate essays in each of which 'feudalism' has its separate meaning or virtually none at all'. Nevertheless, he felt there was much to be 'mined' in the volume, that my paper was 'stunning', John Pryor's 'wonderfully succinct and readable, Pearson's 'lucid and succinct', and Michael Bennett's 'good ... however blunt'!
 - 19 *Fiefs and Vassals: the Medieval Evidence Re-interpreted*, Oxford, 1994.
 - 20 'More about Feudalism', p.258.
 - 21 'The Task of Cultural History', in *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance: Essays by Johan Huizinga*, trans. J. S. Holmes and Hans van Marle, New York, 1970, p.20. Huizinga, of course, did not believe scholarship should even try and produce perfectly finished building stones for the ultimate 'master builder'. Indeed, he asks, 'is the labor expended by the machinery of scholarship not a hopeless waste of energy?' I hope Susan Reynolds has her answer to this question ready, should she ever meet Huizinga in 'another place' ... !
 - 22 Compare Stern's conclusion, in his review of our volume, *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* 10.3 (1987): 164: 'One of the lessons I take from the collection is that medievalists cannot, of course, banish the term 'feudalism' from the world's words but only from their own scholarly concerns. If they do that, they lose one of academia's most abused words, and abandon the field to our sloganeers and jargoneers'.
 - 23 Am I thus to throw away my copy of Aron Gurevich's (Russian) 'Origins of Feudalism', carefully purchased in an Italian translation (*Le Origini del Feudalismo*, trans. Michele Sampaolo, Bari, 1990) from a Venetian bookshop and hassled through flight lounges and airport customs desks to the quiet of my lecture room?
 - 24 *Fiefs and Vassals* p.14. Reynolds' adoption of the scientific mode of chapter subdivision underlines her apparent belief that 'history' is a scientific process, in which 'correct attention' will arrive at the 'right answer'.
 - 25 His reply on the subject to Duke William of Aquitaine is translated in *The History of Feudalism*, ed. D. Herlihy, New Jersey and Sussex, 1979, pp.96–7. See also G. Duby *France in the Middle Ages 987–1460, from Hugh Capet to Joan of Arc*, trans. Julia Vale, Oxford, 1991, pp.78–9.

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- 26 *Fiefs and Vassals*, p.15. . 27 *Ibid.*, p.14. 28 *Ibid.*, p.15.
- 29 *Ibid.*, Chapter 10, pp.475 ff.
- 30 G. Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago, 1982 (esp. p.154 'The knights were oppression incarnate') and P. Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago, 1982.
- 31 *Fiefs and Vassals*, p.477 ff.
- 32 Leach, Mukherjee, Ward (eds) *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, p.45; Reynolds *Fiefs and Vassals*, p.479. 33 *Ibid.*, p.480.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.481. Note the 'limited enlightenment' projects mentioned on pp.480–81.
- 35 Cf. *Ibid.*, p.482 'a very long twelfth century.... Why did all these kinds of change happen some time around the twelfth century, and how were they connected?' I must stress to the reader that my remarks on *Fiefs and Vassals* are not meant to add up to a 'review' of it. The relationship between the arrival of the volume in our library and the deadline for the present contribution prevented anything like a 'review'. I simply ornament my points with some initial oblique references to the book. In his review in the *Times Literary Supplement* (10 March 1995, p.12), Patrick Wormald claims that 'Reynolds' central thesis, in sum, is that "feudalism" was conceived as an "ism" by the twelfth-century Italian lawyers who drafted the *libri feudorum*', thus further stressing the importance of that period in Western history.
- 36 Wormald's review, cited above n.35, suggests that the battle may be a short one. Historians, he suggests, will simply outflank Reynolds: rather than contesting her command of her own field, they will shift the focus to pre- or extra-legal zones (such as the pre-twelfth-century, 'pre-literate' period, or the world of the *chansons de geste*, with their rich evocation of a fief- and service-based 'feudal order') and point to the stimulus the 'wraith of "feudalism"' has supplied for ongoing historical inquiry. For a German review see *Der Spiegel* 48 (1994): 188, 191. On the *chansons de geste*, 'the very high point of feudalism', see p.159 of H.-J. Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. L. G. Cochrane, Chicago and London, 1994.
- 37 See, however, Catharina Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan*, Sandgate, 1994.
- 38 E. A. R. Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe' *American Historical Review* 79 (1974): 1081, and for the full title of Duby's book, p.1073 n.36.
- 39 Leach, Mukherjee, Ward, eds, *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, pp.54–5, 66 n.97.
- 40 238 (March–April): 5–15.
- 41 French edition, Paris, 1973, English translation H. B. Clarke 1974.
- 42 English edition ch.6, pp.157–180.
- 43 1980, the original French being published in 1978.
- 44 Taken apart by Brian G. H. Ditcham in 'The Feudal Millenium? Social Change

- in Rural France circa 1000 in Recent French Historiography', *Medieval History* 3 (1993): 86–99: 'It is at least arguable that "feudalism" in its purest form only existed in the pages of lawbooks and that patterns of power and domination were always much more complex and diverse than the pioneering work of a Marc Bloch would suggest.... It is perhaps time to look more closely at the practical realities of the exercise of local power in the period around 1000 without the blinkers imposed by presuppositions concerning a "feudal revolution", even if the result is to strip some of the remaining glamour and drama away from the millenium'. Ditcham, oddly, though much concerned with the 'Dubyan model' does not cite Duby's own *L'an Mil*, Paris, 1980.
- 45 Trans. Jane Dunnett, Cambridge, 1994, from the French of 1988.
 - 46 We also have the two words *curtis* and *curia* combining to give a 'fairly accurate picture of feudalism, rooted in rural lordship and in the military system' (p.66), and 'feudal courts' and 'feudal states' pp.74, 76.
 - 47 The English edition, sadly, lacks the magnificent presentation of the French: see my review forthcoming in *Parergon*.
 - 48 French p.111, English p.79.
 - 49 Herlihy, *History of Feudalism* I, p.98; Duby, *France*, English edn p.149, French p.184.
 - 50 French: 'Un droit naissant. Féodal'. See also on Beaumanoir and 'the feudal ladder', the English edn, p.263.
 - 51 Harmondsworth, 1993.
 - 52 London, 1990. This volume joins Hilton's 'Feudalism in Europe: Problems for Historical Materialists' in the *New Left Review* 147 (1984, not represented in the collection) in dealing with 'the social and political crises of the late medieval feudal order'. Note also B. S. Bachrach's attempt to extend Chris Wickam's analysis, *Past and Present* 103 (1984): 3–36 in his paper 'The Angevin Economy, 960–1060: Ancient or Feudal?' reprinted in his *State-Building in Medieval France*, 1995. Wickam himself has commented on these matters recently in 'Systactic Structures: Social Theory for Historians' *Past and Present* 132 (1991): 188–203.
 - 53 *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050–1320*, London and New York, 1992, p.444.
 - 54 *Nouvelle histoire de la France médiévale*, 1990, pp.7–8.
 - 55 Trans. Caroline Higgitt (Europe Past and Present Series), New York and London, 1991, from the French of 1980.
 - 56 *Transformation*, p. 357.
 - 57 *Ibid.*, p.3. See too P. Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South West Europe*, trans. J. Birrell, Cambridge, 1991.
 - 58 I cite, randomly: André Scobeltzine *L'Art féodale et son enjeu social*, Paris, 1973, 1988; J.-F. Lemarignier, *La France Médiévale: institutions et société*, Paris, 1970, reissued June 1994, with pp.109 ff 'Les Temps féodaux', III 'Féodalité et autorité publique' (9th/10th centuries onwards) and pp.231 ff 'De la féodalité aux institutions monarchiques (milieu XIIe–fin XVe siècles)'; Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnam: une longue histoire*, Hanoi, 1993, ch.III 'L'état

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féodal centralisé—Les dynasties Ly et Tran (XIe–XIVe siècles)', ch.IV 'Une nouvelle étape de la monarchie féodale (La dynastie des Le, XVe–XVIe siècles)'; O. Guillot *et al.*, *Pouvoirs et Institutions dans la France Médiévale, I Des origines à l'époque féodale, II Des temps féodaux aux temps de l'État*, Paris, 1994.

- 59 With John Scott: *Hugh of Poitiers, The Vézelay Chronicle and other documents from MS. Auxerre 227 and elsewhere, translated into English with notes, introduction, and accompanying material, and with supplementary essays and notes by Eugene Cox*, Binghamton, N.Y., 1992.
- 60 See, for example, the collection reviewed and the review itself by Paolo Cammarosano, 'Le strutture feudali nell'evoluzione dell'Occidente mediterraneo: note su un Colloquio internazionale', *Studi Medievali* s3, v22, 1 (1981): 837–69; G. Tabacco 'Fief et seigneurie dans l'Italie communale: L'évolution d'un thème historiographique', *Le Moyen Age*, 75, s4 v24 (1969): 5–37 (with sequel; his recently translated (by Rosalind Brown Jensen) *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy: Structures of Political Rule*, Cambridge, 1989, amply indexes 'feudalism'); G. Bois *The Transformation of the Year 1000: the Village of Lourmand from Antiquity to Feudalism*, trans. J. Birrell, pref. G. Duby, Manchester, 1992; T. K. Keefe, *Feudal Assessments and the Political Community under Henry II and his Sons*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1983. Cf. also the sourcebook by Antonio Carile and Gina Fasoli, *Documenti di Storia Feudale*, Bologna, 1974. See now, too, Wally Seccombe, *A Millenium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe*, London and New York, 1992.
- 61 See *Feudalism: Comparative Studies*, pp.40–8 for my original ten 'foci'.
- 62 *Le Origini del Feudalismo*, p.202. The whole 'conclusione' pp.201 ff is fascinating.
- 63 See H.-J. Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, p.127.
- 64 See Partha Chatterjee, 'More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry', *Subaltern Studies* 2 (1983): 311–49, ed. Ranajit Guha.
- 65 The distinction is clear in Akira Kurosawa's epic film *The Seven Samurai*.

