Afterword, Peregrine Horden

I never thought I might be called upon to Mediterraneanize the British Isles. Yet that is what these concluding reflections on connectivity must in a sense amount to. It may not be possible to respond fully to Jonathan Hsy's call for a 'peregrine' mode of reading and to achieve any of those 'moments of wondrous estrangement from conventional disciplinary frameworks' that ideally accompanies it (Hsy 2013, 205, cited from Smith). What I can do, because several preceding essays deploy the concept, is set out my understanding of 'connectivity', show how Nicholas Purcell and I came to it in our collaboration, and suggest some ways in which it could be illuminating when applied to the British Isles.

'Routes et villes, villes et routes.' That was Lucien Febvre's response to reading Braudel's chapter on the Mediterranean as a human unit, and Braudel returned the compliment by making those words the chapter title. 'The Mediterranean,' he, Braudel, wrote, 'has no unity but that created by the movements of men … the whole Mediterranean consists of movement in space' (1972: 276-7). That was movement above all along fairly well-defined routes linking ports, towns and cities – points and lines on the map.

Within Mediterranean studies, 'connectivity' has become a way of characterising the ease of communications between one place and another in a much broader sense. As a term of art in the field, it seems to have been given currency by Purcell and myself in *The Corrupting Sea* (2000). Some reviewers of that book pointed to the political overtones that the word had gained during the 1990s when the *Corrupting Sea* was being written, and a range of other meanings have since been adduced, not least in information technology and neuroscience. Yet, so far as either of us can recall, we borrowed the term from locational analysis in human geography, inspired by the way it had already been taken up by some archaeologists. Ultimately the term originated (by around 1960) in mathematical graph theory. Its initial geographical application was apparently to the analysis of regional road networks, with the measure of connectivity being the ratio between the number of edges (lines) and the number of vertices (nodes) in the network. Thus, any space that can be modelled by one line joining two nodes is – trivially – connective. The degree zero of connectivity would be an utter singularity. From that definition, it is only a short step to Febvre's and Braudel's 'routes et villes'.

Purcell and I used connectivity, however, in a way that involved much more than 'joining up the dots'; and we tended to treat it as shorthand for quite intense connectivity, well above

that absolute zero. Connectivity became a crucial ingredient in our view of the Mediterranean environment and the way humanity has interacted with it. As we saw it, the Mediterranean has been overall a zone of intense topographical fragmentation, overlaid by a kaleidoscope of human 'micro-ecologies', which are in turn densely interconnected. Connectivity describes the way micro-regions cohere, both internally and one with another. Throughout much of Mediterranean history, this coherence has been more than a matter of fixed routes, whether these reflect planners' pointed defiance of nature (as with Roman roads) or are prompted by geography or property rights. Indeed, the point of bringing a then relatively unusual term into the discussion of the Mediterranean past was, in the first place, to get away from the idea that communications are, like graph theory, only a matter of nodes and straight lines, or that they are, in some deterministic way, the product of geography or climate. Stable routes there of course have been, over water and land. Roads, tracks, mountain paths, shipping lanes, and river channels should, however, at least according to *The Corrupting Sea*, be envisaged as particular instances of a much broader phenomenon – the *potentially* all-round, sometimes *nearly* frictionless communication between Mediterranean micro-regions. Sea travel has not, in pre-modern times, been as constrained by wind, current, and season as has often been made out – nor as uniformly fearful and hazardous. There was much confident *hors piste* sailing – and in winter too. Nor must we overstate the difficulties of transport over land, even over mountain ranges in severe weather. Indeed, an additional advantage of thinking in terms of connectivity may be to help us avoid the unthinking privileging of certain forms of communication. To put it another way, the determining capacity of the environment was weak. In many cases, one could not predict the choice of lines or corridors of communication simply by studying a physical map.

Mediterranean micro-regions 'connect' in many kinds of ways. They connect in the movements of peoples and goods and information – the last two, apart from the occasional use of carrier pigeons as message bearers, epiphenomenal to the first. Some of these movements will of course have involved well-trodden tracks and their nautical equivalents. Others will have been more variable; hence the poor predictive power of maps. Yet micro-ecologies connect by mutual visibility and audibility as well. So we must reckon with lines of sight and lines of sound as well as shifting terrestrial or maritime networks. Connectivities may thus be genuinely all-round.

They may also be far-reaching. Thanks to seaborne contacts – not to be emphasised unduly but still of course vital to Mediterranean peoples – a given micro-region may connect more intensely to another a hundred miles away than to its geographical neighbour. The high

levels of connectivity characteristic of much of the region's history help define the Mediterranean. If we could only plot all the connections, we would find that the Mediterranean region possesses unity and distinctiveness, partly in virtue of being an area of *net* introversion. That is, connectivity between micro-regions has generally been more intense around and across the sea's coastlands than between those coastlands and their continental neighbours. The first development of such intense connectivity in prehistory thus makes the beginning of Mediterranean history, just as the very different configurations of connectivity across Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries may, in that sense, mark its end (although the 'end of the Mediterranean' remains highly debated).

Clearly, there are many meanings that can be attached to the term 'connectivity' and correspondingly many ways of studying it historically within a given geographical area. But, *if* it is to be studied in a way that takes *Corrupting Sea* as its starting point, then (to attempt a crisp summary)

- it is essentially to do with the geography of the movement of people and of communication
- that communication might be visual or auditory; it might have to do with the transmission of culture; but the movement of people is usually fundamental
- the geography of movement may be far more than a matter of routes and their nodes
- it is terrestrial as well as riverine or maritime: that the concept was used in a study of the Mediterranean should not be taken to imply that it must primarily be to do with seaborne motion
- connectivity means on the whole high connectivity, high levels of human communication and contact; part of the point of the exercise of studying it should be to arrive at a differential geography and chronology – addressing the question of which areas and periods have been more joined up in this way than others.

Some of my current work involves comparing regimes or types of connectivity, as just defined, on the grand scale, asking how Mediterranean connectivity might differ from that of its continental neighbours. This was part of a continuing project to explore the ways, and the chronological periods, in which the Mediterranean may have been a distinctive region. The particular incitement was the way in which historians and ethnographers of the Sahara were using the term connectivity as a way of characterizing the desert space as more than a transit

zone, empty of all interesting human phenomena apart from long-distance caravans (McDougall and Scheele 2012; Scheele 2012). Comparison between Mediterranean and Sahara led to further transcontinental forays, Asian and European (Horden 2016). The attempt to get at least something of the measure of European connectivity (with the eventual aim of seeing if any differences between Mediterranean and northern Europe might be detectible) brings me to the British Isles.

Except that, in terms of historical investigation, I was already there. In an edited volume *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages* (Horden 2007) a number of approaches were made to the question of British connectivity under a different, but clearly related, heading. For instance, what excuses did litigants or their attorneys produce retrospectively for 'default', failure to appear before a court on the appointed day? These were cases where unexplained absence would lead to the loss of the land that was the subject of the suit (for what follows see Brand 2007). The excuses had to be, if not true, then at least plausible. It is therefore of considerable interest that the surviving evidence from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries suggests that three main types of excuse were regularly proffered for default: flood, imprisonment, and capture by thieves. Of these both flood and capture tell us something about the circumstances of journeying in the England of the period, but perhaps flood is the more pertinent.

As Brand shows (2007, 218), in one of the earliest cases of purported flood known, we find an attorney for a Kentish litigant citing the flooding of the Thames as having prevented him from crossing it between Eton and Windsor (whether by bridge, ford or boat) on two successive days (18 and 19 January 1256) while on his way to Winchester, where he was supposed to have appeared on 20 January, and claiming that he had then gone up to London to find somewhere he could successfully cross. In a second case, a man was apparently on his way from his home county of Essex to the court at Winchester, where he had been scheduled to appear on 14 January. He cited, as his reason for failing to appear at Winchester before 17 January, the flooding of the River Hart at Hartford Bridge on the main road from London to Basingstoke on 15 January, and his consequent inability to cross it either by horse or on foot until the flood had subsided. In a third case, a man who was being sued for land in Cornwall along with his wife asserted at the 1285 Oxfordshire eyre that his default at Reading in the Berkshire eyre on the morrow of All Souls (3 November) 1284 had been caused by the fact that, as he was on his way to the court from Wales, he had come to the River Tean between Farley and 'Borewell' in Staffordshire, which he had found could not be crossed without danger, on the eve of All Souls (1 November). In the fourth case, when an attorney appeared

in court on 31 January 1290, he claimed that he and a second attorney had set out from Cornwall together for Westminster (where they were scheduled to appear on 27 January) but on 19 January had found the River Tamar in flood at (North) Tamerton and had been delayed beyond the Tamar for six days. During that period they had lodged in (North) Tamerton, Wyke and Launceston, awaiting their chance to cross. Only at the end of six days had the river had subsided sufficiently to allow them to do so. In a fifth case, the river is not named in the record but it can be identified from its location (Cobham in Surrey) as the Mole. John of Leicester and his wife were scheduled to appear in the common bench at Westminster on 27 January 1306 but did not appear until the following day, 28 January. Their claim was that while on the way to court, perhaps from their home county of Cornwall, they had come to Cobham and found the bridge 'broken'. They had been delayed there until they were able to find a cart to take them across. The sixth and final case Brand outlines stands apart from the others since it involves the crossing of the tidal stretch of water (the Swale) which separates the Isle of Sheppey from the rest of Kent. Two men were scheduled to appear on 10 April 1279 in a session of the Kent eyre at Canterbury to hear the verdict of a jury but had failed to arrive at the hour of pleading. On their eventual appearance, they claimed to have been impeded on 10 April by the difficulties of crossing from Sheppey on that day, perhaps caused by an exceptionally high tide.

Imagine a full-scale commentary on such material. It would have to begin with the road network, literally its highways and byways, on which there has been curiously little work since a fundamental article by Frank Stenton of 1936 (though see also Hindle 1976, and now Evans and Allen 2016). It would have to include the distribution of bridges (Harrison 2004): I have long wondered if there might not be an index of wider connectivity in the geography of 'bridge piety', the varying extent to which construction or maintenance of bridges became a frequent object of charitable donation or bequest. It would have to extend across Britain, whereas most of the work done to date has been restricted to England and its obvious focus in the capital. It would weigh up the accessibility of passage by river as well as by road, and the challenges presented by natural obstacles and brigands (Childs 2006, esp. 265 for rivers). All this needs to be undertaken region by region in a comparative spirit. We know for instance that the capillaries of the English road network facilitated later medieval royal itineration, movement of people and goods on a mighty scale, to some surprisingly remote spots. How would that *viabilità* have compared with lowland Scotland's?

Proxy measures of connectivity, of the extent to which one area was in contact with another, have to be sought without preconception as to the type of evidence that will count.

Plague, the Black Death, spread to and across the country, as it spread across Europe as a whole, with astonishing, but variable, speed (see Benedictow 2004, map 1 and 123–45). That variation is an index of connectivity, even though on this topic the Scottish evidence is so exiguous as to make British-wide comparison impossible (Benedictow 2004, 145; cf. Kelly 2001 for Ireland). Another proxy might be found in the density and distribution of markets. Already in the mid-thirteenth century, most places in England would be on average no more than five miles from one. That figure not only tells us much about the integration of the English economy and about the expected scale of local movement; the regional differences that the average hides also need to be investigated since they point to the degree of accessibility of flows of goods to and from the major centres (Masschaele 1997).

The list of possibilities is large, and these are only hints of topics for research. The examples are all terrestrial. But that is simply counterbalance to the maritime emphasis on the sea of islands in preceding contributions. Include all the islands, decentre the British world, make sub-regions out of the Irish or North Sea (Squatriti 2001) – in effect Philippinize Britain. By all means use this to reconfigure the cultural history of the Middle Ages. But to Mediterraneanize these islands, at least in the way proposed by *Corrupting Sea*, requires more: attention to terrestrial connectivity. Feet on the ground.

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