Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East, 2: Government, Society, and Culture in the Roman Empire*. H.M. Cotton and G.M. Rogers (eds.). Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. xxix + 470 pp. ISBN 0 0878 2852 1.

At the same time that I began to reread these classic chapters of Roman history, I was also rereading Nabokov's *Lolita*. Both roused memory, intense pleasure, and surprise. Revisiting the one and the other was a rediscovery of provocative claims and questions, essence and style. The twenty contributions that make up this collation of Fergus Millar's essays form one of the decisive moments in the postwar writing of Roman history. What is more, as with the first volume of his collected papers (this is the second of a projected three) attentive readers of Roman history will surely have new insights opened to them and they will perhaps even discover (as did the reviewer) essays whose publication they had somehow missed. The first must-read among the reprints — one that should be read along with the author's almost-confessional introduction to the first volume — is Millar's evaluation of his master and teacher, Sir Ronald Syme. It is a revealing and critical appreciation of the first three volumes of Syme's collected papers that first appeared in the *JRS* of 1981 (and reprinted here as ch. 18). In it, Millar begins with the observation (399) that 'the publication of the collected papers of a great scholar is a moment for celebration and congratulation, and also for thought. For it is also an explicit invitation to see the writer's work as a whole, as something more than the sum of its parts'. Just so.

In this same spirit, I do not intend to run through the chapters of this second volume seriatim. The interested can peruse the table of contents. I prefer, instead, to consider three broad themes that are apparent in its various parts. First, the nature of the imperial monarchy and its governing of a world empire. Then, the place of provincial society in the imperial system. And finally, despite the fact that Millar — like the 'un-extreme historian' he sees in Syme, whose work was 'deliberately non-theoretical and non-explanatory' (415) — eschews the discussion of theory, I would like to reconsider some matters of method or, perhaps better, preferred approaches to the writing of history.

Whether Millar is creatively constructing his own historical interpretations or reconsidering those of others, he always comes back to the fundamental importance and significance of the existing data. His critique of Pflaum's *Procurateurs équestres* (reprinted as ch. 8), itself a marvellous example of the judicious and patient holding of an historian's feet to the fires of the known facts, is a case in point. By its very understatement, Millar's review seems to have acquired greater power in the intervening years, during which it has become manifest just how right he was and how much in error and misconceived were Pflaum's basic conceptions. In reconsidering the problems of equestrian careers, Millar confronted the difficulties posed by mirages of Roman history, many of them still a long inheritance of late nineteenth-century *Staatsrecht*, while some others were just plain assumptions about supposed Roman modes of organization and behaviour. His critique of Pflaum also indicated how the workings of patronage and personal connections in appointments ought to have been understood by the author (and as they have been subsequently explicated by Richard Saller, Norbert Rouland, and Claude Eilers, amongst others).

This same review suggested an interesting distinction between senators and the larger equestrian order with regard to 'career organization' that ought to have been apparent, if only historians had paid more attention to the facts rather than foregrounding their preconceptions of Roman 'bureaucracy' and political organization. In the light of rereading it, I now understand better how the emergence of the senatorial career was the peculiar result of intensive auto-regulation and conscious legal controls established in the later Republic — structures that were further refined in the early Principate for the obvious reason of controlling dangerous excesses of competition in the high office-seeking political elite. These specific political problems of regulation simply never applied to equestrians and so there never arose a commensurate intensity of demand to create a formally established career structure in their case. The useful and talented among the *equites* could be drawn upon as the needs presented themselves and as such talents were available and were capable of being used. This is pretty well what the facts indicate. So there was always a fundamentally dimorphic nature to service and status, and Millar's surgical dissection of Pflaum, so wonderful to appreciate after all these years, makes this apparent to any discerning reader. Much the same dawning of the facts, I am sure, will eventually become clear from Millar's reconsideration of Tony Honoré's overstructuring of the role of the late Roman quaestor and the service of these men to the late imperial state (chs. 19 and 20).

Millar's influential studies on 'the emperors at work' and on the structure and meaning of *aerarium* and *fiscus* (chs. 1-4) not only winnowed out false conceptions of government (as did his work on the false distinction between so-called 'imperial' and 'senatorial' provinces of empire), but they also established the fundamentally changed framework within which debates on the details still take place.[1] These investigations, as well as the detailed ones on communications between the central court and the periphery of the empire (chs. 6, 9-11), were either *Vorarbeiten* or subsequent developments of the well-known 'response model' elaborated in *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 1977, rev. ed. 1992. As a whole, these studies raised the question of 'to what extent the imperial system was basically responsive, directed to a significant degree to answering questions or solving disputes emanating from below' (207). One possible objection is that concentration on the evidence of the so-called 'libellus system' might produce a distorted picture of imperial government, perhaps obscuring just how much intensive regulation existed separately of such appeals and responses.[2] And specifically in the case of the emperor, the model depends on some highlighting and certain omissions, as has often been noted, of the emperor as army commander and as a sacralized figure who was believed in by ordinary subjects of the empire.[3]

Millar's detailed study of the flow of imperial information — the precise facts about the who, what, when, and where of how messages and resources move from the center of the empire to its periphery, and back — establishes the tenuousness and tardiness of these communications. But he also argues, conceptually, that activities that we would call 'diplomatic' were subordinated to and dispersed through the more general institutions of government, and that for this very reason they often called for the personal attention of the emperor himself (225): 'So far as major issues at least were concerned, the conduct of diplomacy, at all times *embedded within* the successive political structures of the Roman state, had long since been absorbed by the emperors in person...' (227, m.i.). Again, how much of what appears to be the internal governance of the empire was in fact a form of diplomacy that involved constant exchanges of pleasantries, information, and requests between imperial courts and quasi-autonomous rulers of various parts of the empire but who themselves ruled within its outer limits (ch. 11), in what Millar calls 'the politics of two-level sovereignty'.

In the same way, Millar holds that the society of the empire must be understood from the collected experiences of its constituent parts. If the history of the Republic can somehow be written more rationally from the center, then a similar perspective would severely distort the truth of the imperial social order. This imperial society itself was, in its classical form, still a mosaic of cities (336). Millar's principal interest in local society — apart from some now-dated forays into local languages (ch. 12) and culture (ch. 15) — are principally directed to the function of the urban élites in these constituent towns and cities. He locates the writings and deeds of a Roman Athenian, Publius Herennius Dexippus, in the framework of a new imperial culture, as those of a man who harkened back to the glory days in historical past of his own great city, and who thereby helped to provide his community with a critical ideological anchor in the midst of the 'barbarian' attacks of the mid-third century (ch. 13). The behaviour is not surprising, especially for the Greek cities of the eastern Mediterranean and most specifically for Athens. It would certainly not surprise any student of the so-called Second Sophistic ('bubble' or not). A more strategic foray, and one of the most important in the collection, aims to understand how this traditional world of city-states, and its values, as a basic infrastructure of the high empire, experienced a profound transformation that was probably already evident in the days of Herennius Dexippus. In a formidable piece bearing the technical title 'Empire and City, Augustus to Julian: Obligations, Excuses and Status' (ch. 16), Millar investigates the minutiae of the data on the fundamental contradictions between an empire with its wide-ranging strategic interests and the cities with their more purely local ones.

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[1] For some of the debates see, for example, E. Lo Cascio, 'Le techniche dell'amministrazione', in A. Schiavone, *Storia di Roma* 2.2, Turin, 1991, 119-91, at 162f. = ch. 1 in *Il princeps e il suo impero: studi di storia amministrativa e financiaria Romana*, Bari, 2000, 13-79, at 50f., citing, amongst others, P. A. Brunt, 'The Fiscus and Its Development', *JRS* 56, 1966, 75-91 = *Roman Imperial Themes*, Oxford, 1990, 134-62.

[2] G. P. Burton, 'The Roman Imperial State (A.D. 14-235): Evidence and Reality', *Chiron* 32, 2002, 249-80, esp. 263ff., who has pointed out that, alongside the response system, there existed a pervasive system of imperial regulation that ordered the normal details of day-to-day life in the provinces. Because of the scholarly attention lavished on the details of the network of petitions and responses that involved the emperor, this other more mundane world of government regulation has tended to be ignored.

[3] A perspective raised by M. I. Finley in his review of *The Emperor in the Roman World* in *The Times* (of London), 17 March 1977, 22.

I would have to dissent, however, from his claim that there was a real tension in the emperor's role as a general rule-maker and as a dispenser of exemptions (338). The two aspects of imperial power surely go hand-in-hand, as Weber clearly saw almost a century ago in his analysis of the modes of monarchical rule. But there can be no doubt that there existed a *structural tension* and a division of interests between the cities and the empire. By an exacting analysis of the data provided by legal, literary, numismatic and papyrological sources, Millar shows how there was gradually built up an irresistible and finally irreversible structure of general exemptions granted to high-ranking men tied to imperial service and status. In this manner, such men's primary loyalties came to be separated from their local venues, and, more important, from liturgical and other duties towards their own communities. Millar seems uncertain whether or not this process led to the creation of new status groups (341) or to a new class with its own interests (371: whether or not this was a 'class struggle' remains 'an unresolved question'). Again, the innovative and challenging research of one of his own students, Jairus Banaji, would tend to tip the balance in favor of seeing the process as part of the creation of a new class that also involved a fundamental re-orientation not just of local liturgies and political relationships to towns and cities, but also of taxation, the control of land, and the nature of the money system.[4] Millar's whole analysis, it might be noted, begins by taking a typical route: by asking what is fundamentally an operative question and then by pursuing the known data step-by-step until they begin to yield answers.

In the researching and writing of history, therefore, preference is always given to a close reading and analysis of the surviving evidence.[5] In the case of Pflaum and his analysis of procuratorial careers, for example, that scholar 'ought to have established the basis of his theory by an examination of all the documentary and literary uses of *ducenarius* and other terms' (156). If this basic precept of method had been followed, it would have revealed fatal flaws in Pflaum's arguments, and his anachronistic assumptions. Facts establish the likelihood, or not, of the historian's claims. The most useful point of departure in the situation of evidence faced by ancient historians is to ask specific operative questions. Rather than speaking grandly and theoretically about the 'foreign policy' of the empire, for example, it is better to ask 'how, by whom, and within what conceptual frameworks were the foreign and "frontier" policies of the Empire formulated?'

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[4] J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance*, Oxford, 2001.

[5] As is already quite in evidence for the first volume of collected papers, as observed, for example, by S. Benoist, 'Un parcours d'"evidence": Fergus Millar et le monde romaine de la République au Principat', *RH* 630, 2004, 371-90, at 373.

Such queries can then be followed by 'more specific and concrete, but equally fundamental questions' (161). Similarly, in the analysis of the distribution of cash payments in the empire (ch. 5), an operational question is forefronted: How were such massive amounts of coin actually physically moved around the empire? The question stems from what Millar calls — remarking on Van Berchem's pioneering works on taxation — 'the will to envisage in an absolutely concrete way the actual functioning of the imperial system' (91). Many of the questions are good pragmatic ones: 'So far as I know, no one has attempted to calculate how many soldiers will have survived until the age of discharge'. (98-99). Some scholars, subsequently, *have* tried to answer precisely these basic questions, and have thereby demonstrated the importance of having asking them in the first place.[6] And who can quarrel with the technique? It has worked wonderfully well. Consider the results.

There are, inevitably, some quibbles. Favorite *exempla* and passages — like the story of the Indian ambassadors to Augustus at Samos in the winter of 20/19 BCE, bringing naked slaves, a freak, some large snakes, a turtle, a partridge and a vulture (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.1.73; 177, 201) are re-run. One such case prompts the observation that 'the presentation of freaks and curiosities to the emperor would be an interesting sidelight on imperial history, worth exploring for itself' (224). But it might turn out to be more than a mere sidelight. And there are the Oxyrhynchite lamp-lighters of Egypt who swore a loyalty to their new Roman imperial monarch in 30/29 BCE (*P.Oxy.* 1453; 161 and again on 299). But these are well within the limits of toleration in a collection of essays of this kind, and both vignettes are sufficiently interesting to bear repetition. There is only one substantive argument that the reviewer finds questionable: the claim that the imperial cult was not a significant element in the Roman state's persecutions of Christians (ch. 14) — an odd conclusion that seems to be gainsaid by the very evidence adduced by the author himself. But instead of complaining ungenerously about quite minor matters, I would rather draw attention, at this stage, to a more serious deficit of the very kind that Millar himself highlighted in his review of Syme's collected papers (400). As with Syme's essays, Millar's are a marvel of argued minutiae: epigraphical, geographic, prosopographical, and other telling details, most of them of considerable interest to the student of Roman history. To gain access to these individual items, scattered over twenty disparate analyses, adequate indexing is necessary. But neither of the first two volumes is armed with anything other than a set of perfunctory general references. It is not too late. The reviewer appeals to the editors to equip the whole set with an adequate set of indexes, at least of places, significant persons, as well as of literary and epigraphical, numismatic and papryological sources. This can still be done with the publication of the third volume and would make the whole collection even more useful. It was, after all, a great good that was *finally* achieved for the Syme's collected papers.

Style is indeed a triumphant quality that defines some historians and their histories. Others sometimes prefer the sparer fare of a simpler substance. On reflection, it seems that there might well be cultural dimensions to these different sensibilities. In the very year that the grandest stylist of Roman history proffered the first volume of his monumental work to the reading public, there died in Edinburgh, in the heart of the homeland to which he had purposefully returned to die, another historian.[7] Being a Scot, which is to say 'not English', he wished to establish discernable facts, to know precisely how things happened in an almost tangible fashion: What concatenations of actions made events happen in the way that they did? Where were people located? Precisely how many of them were there? And what, precisely, was it that they did? As a skeptic, he held that arguments were to be built up slowly by severe inquiry and by collations of data, a calm if somewhat unexciting procedure from pragmatic inquiry to firmer knowledge. But David Hume was as deeply aware of — if as deeply distressed by — the 'irrational' elements of human behaviour, particularly religious ones, that were so evident in the historical process. Although they were very alien to his own nature, he knew that these sides of the human record had to be confronted. That would mean fully understanding Apuleius' experience as a provincial member of a world state as a profoundly religious one in which magical power, belief in the recuperative aura of a Graeco-Egyptian goddess, and the inner knowledge of neo-Platonic teachings were as central to the cultural transformations of empire as was Apuleius' place in its social and political order. Not least of all, it would also demand an understanding of emperors who were not just rational bureaucrats responding within a petition system, but who were also the living embodiments of behavior that was profoundly 'irrational' in Hume's sense.[8] They were icons of authority who acted out their own, sometimes very idiosyncratic notions of reality — many of them more deadly than any of Mr. Humbert Humbert's perversions —and arbitrarily imposed them on both court and society. More than a few of the emperors' subjects believed in their transcendent powers of healing, mantic insights, and the reality of their life-after-death. Of course, Hume, too, the historian, never resolved the problems caused by such 'irrational' human behaviour. It was one cost of his too enlightened view of humanity.

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[6] For example, W. Scheidel, 'The Demography of the Roman Imperial Army', ch. 3 in *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in Ancient Demography*, Ann Arbor, 1996, 93-138, at 117-37.

[7] J. Kenyon, *The History Men: the Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance*, London, 1983, 41-43; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 2: *Narratives of Civil Government*, Cambridge, 1999/2000, 176, cf. 193: 'We have reached a point where Hume's dislike of Christianity, and organized religion in general, is absolute and uncompromising. He has no project of doing away with it and replacing it with another metaphysics, because he thinks the human mind sure to go on producing it', and 244: 'It is still dogma with Hume that the scholastic intellect concerns itself with

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Yasmine Zahran, *Zenobia between Reality and Legend.* BAR International Series, vol. 1169. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. xvi + 130 pp. 60 figures. ISBN 1 84171 537 9.

Zenobia is history, though seemingly, she defies historical interpretation. At the same time, Zenobia is a myth, in the West no less than in the East. Any attempt to deal with her as a character and as a historical figure inevitably has to deal with the mythical and legendary constructions of the past – of a remote as well as a quite recent past. This challenge has now been taken by Yasmine Zahran, whose portrait of the Palmyrene queen is, rather than a proper scholarly work, essentially a literary essay (though published in the highly academic BAR series and equipped with references and annotations). Hence the book's dialogic structure, oscillating between 'auto-biography' (written by Zenobia herself as a fictional I-narrator) and author's commentary.

Until 1993, when Fergus Millar's epochal *The Roman Near East* was published, modern ancient historians generally followed the patterns of interpretation provided by the ancient sources. Millar's scepticism put forward a radically different paradigm: Zenobia and her son

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propositions that mean absolutely nothing at all, and therefore he is deeply concerned with the powerful mind's capacity to delude itself with absurdity'.

[8] It would be informative, for example, to compare R. Kapuscinski, *The Emperor*, transl. W. R. Brand & K. Mroczkowska-Brand, from the Polish, Cesarz, Warsaw, 1978; New York, 1983/1989, with Tacitus, and the historian's attempt to comprehend the gross effects of monarchical power of this kind.