Professor Sir Fergus Millar (1935-2019): A collection of tributes

Obituaries

Alan Bowman (*The Guardian*, 30th July 2019)

In 1977 the historian Fergus Millar, who has died aged 84, published a massive book, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, that got to grips in an entirely original way with the institutional character of the empire and the role of its head of state. Based in large part on an encyclopaedic knowledge of Roman law, Millar's analysis showed in detail how a great empire actually functioned with effective leadership and multifarious modes of communication.

Its assertion that "the emperor was what the emperor did", presaged in a 1965 article, "Emperors at Work", prompted considerable controversy in the world of ancient history. One reviewer, Keith Hopkins, objected that the emperor was also how he was thought about, imagined, represented, worshipped and so on. Mary Beard, a graduate student at the time, recalled how a live debate between the two both energised the subject and demonstrated how such differences of view could co-exist in a friendly manner.

The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic (1998) argued that the democratic and particularly the electoral processes of the second and first centuries BC were much more critical and effective than had traditionally been thought. It stimulated discussion, as also did lectures delivered at the University of California, Berkeley (2002-03), published as *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408-450* (2006). Here Millar combined the codification of Roman law and the acts of the Church councils in the fifth century into a compelling and entirely original account of the character and the functioning of the later eastern empire, a century after its formal separation from the west.

Millar's work transformed the study of ancient history. For him, Rome's empire was a vast and complex world, ultimately stretching from Newcastle upon Tyne to the Euphrates, with shifting borders, both defensible and permeable, and a rich tapestry of social and linguistic variety.

He dissected that world through the racy scenarios of the small-town politics and daily life in north Africa and Greece. He depicted the mosaic of Jewish internal struggles and rebellions against Rome in first- and second-century Judaea that culminated in the reduction of Jerusalem to the status of a Roman colony and the re-naming of the province as "Syria Palaestina". Through detailed study of a series of massive inscriptional monuments, he portrayed the grandeur and self-importance of a local family of civic benefactors in Asia Minor with crucial links to the centre of empire.

The seeds of his distinctive multicultural approach to Roman imperial society can be found in an early publication of 1969, one of a number of articles in which a handful of historians including Peter Brown examined the evidence for the survival of local languages and cultures in the Roman empire. Millar focussed on Syria and this theme was to burgeon into another book, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (1993), based on lectures delivered in Harvard in 1987. Although this book, like all his publications, was firmly rooted in constant and

meticulous reading and research in the libraries, his understanding of the variety and complexity of the late Roman and early Christian landscape in Syria and Jordan had been transformed by a visit and a tour of the major ancient sites such as Palmyra, Petra and Jerash (Gerasa) a few years before the Harvard lectures. He was fortunate to have done this before it became totally impossible. His work on Jewish history was also informed by frequent and close contact with Israeli scholars and visits to archaeological excavations in the field.

Born in Edinburgh, Fergus was the son of JSL Millar, a solicitor, and his wife, Jean (née Taylor). After attending Edinburgh academy and Loretto School, and national service (which he mostly spent learning Russian, with great pleasure), he studied ancient history and philosophy at Trinity College, Oxford (1955-58). A prize fellowship at All Souls College enabled him to undertake his doctorate on the historian Cassius Dio. He then became fellow and tutor at Queen's College (where I was one his first students); professor at University College London (1976-84); and professor at Oxford (1984-2002).

He served as President of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies and chairman of the council of the British School at Rome. He was elected fellow of the British Academy in 1976 and knighted in 2010.

During his time at Oxford he took pride and pleasure in creating a real community of postgraduate students (in both Roman and Greek history), by organising seminars, hosting coffee sessions and taking a genuine and constructive interest in their diverse subjects of study. Though he did not shy away from intellectual controversy, intellectual differences and disagreements were never obstacles to friendship or collegial relations.

Nonetheless, he became increasingly disenchanted with bureaucratic overload in the universities, encroachments on academic autonomy and reductions of financial support for long-term research programmes. These views were often expressed in irascible letters (even to friends and close colleagues) and one Oxford vice-chancellor remarked that he felt his day had not started properly unless his mailbag contained at least one grumpy letter from him.

In 1959 he married Susanna Friedmann, an academic psychologist. She survives him, as do his children, Sarah, Andrew and Jonathan, and seven grandchildren.

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The following addresses were delivered at his funeral in Wolfson College on 10th August 2019

Andrew Millar

Thank you to Frances [Grant] and to Sophie [Millar] for your beautiful words and welcome to everybody. Dad had those qualities that perhaps we all strive for, a deep and caring wisdom, an inner strength of purpose and a serene calmness even when faced with the more absurd aspects of professional and political life.

Most importantly, all three children have inherited his deep love and care for family life; there is no doubt his 59-year love affair with Mum has been of huge influence in helping us to create and preserve our three loving families. But we also do recognise that both Dad and Mum had a passion beyond their family, this being their pursuit of knowledge and learning in their respective highly successful academic careers.

It is a testament to both that their passion for academia did not affect our childhood, neither during playtime when we were younger, nor in other aspects of family life as we grew up. I remember all three of us as small children being given rides on Dad's back as he crawled around on his back in the garden; I remember his stories at bedtime, particularly Babar the Elephant, in which he loved the beautiful images. I remember how we all learnt to ride bicycles under his gentle tutelage – being pushed round the garden in collapsing circles until finally balance was achieved and stabilisers discarded.

But his love was also manifest by a deep tolerance, tolerance of his carefully nurtured lawn being torn up by those same bicycles as we pretended to be speedway riders, (he quietly re-sowed the lawn); tolerance of my youthful experimentation, like 'how far does a golf ball go when served with a tennis racket', yes, it really does go through the window of the flats opposite (and he quietly paid for the new window), and he tolerated my love of taking things apart, even the blackened parts of an old cooker that littered the garden for months.

Many of you will know of his deep love of sport, particularly golf and rugby; I think he might have had greater pride for the hole in one he played at St Andrews than many of his learned articles. And to have played rugby for Scotland would definitely have been worth more than a knighthood! This love and skill of ball games was sadly not inherited by me but definitely passed to Jonathan and the two of them would often create a stadium like atmosphere in the living room as they 'settled' to watch the rugby on a Saturday afternoon.

His tolerance of my passion for speed was severely tested when learning to drive, resulting in me hurtling his car round an unused airfield, whilst he read a calming text on a nearby grassy bank.

I think it is fair to say that both Jonathan and Sarah inherited more of his huge academic ability than I, although perhaps some of his intellectual curiosity was passed to me as one of the key qualities of a physician.

Curiosity and love defined the destinations of our family holidays, which alternated between the green-blue hills of the Scottish Highlands and trips to his Greece with its adored architectural sites. His interest was perhaps not always matched by ours as hedonistic beach days were rudely interrupted by swerving rides in hot taxis to visit strange places like Marathon, Delos, Knossos and Delphi, but boy am I now glad we went. Those were times you could touch ancient statues; stand where Greek heroes had battled; and re-run the races of athletes in past millennia. Nowadays on such visits one often can only point from behind a fence, reading a cheap paper guide, struggling to connect to past lives amongst the distant stones.

And Dad's love of the mighty beauty of Scotland has also been passed on by what damp, midge-ridden walks across bracken and heather but often ended in a warm peat-fired cottage on the edge of a Loch.

At home his guidance was always there – there have been many times in the last few weeks I wanted to ring him to ask advice – of course too late. But his calm intellect did not hide direct and effective guidance. His advice to "punch him on the nose" would now be regarded as inappropriate but it dealt effectively with a childhood bully and robust advice has enabled all of us children to meet life's many challenges with his spirit and vigour.

A loving family comes in many guises and growing up we were always aware of his other academic family – many of whom are here today – an extended family he cared for deeply. Perhaps unusually he had the capacity to care equally for both his immediate family and the extended one of his beloved academic community.

And of course his care and compassion were not short of humorous observation. We remember his stories of Navy life, such as being told to 'stand closer to the razor next time', or those from academic heroes like Ronald Syme who famously responded to the greeting 'have a nice day' with 'actually I have other plans'!

He loved the quaintness of the Oxford and Cambridge Club in London, with a full English Breakfast, and there was always the special breakfast of fried kidneys, liver and eggs on toast which Mum made him on special occasions.

He was a deeply thoughtful man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject but also characteristic was his deep knowledge of and care for those around him, manifested beyond everything else, of course, in his love for my mother.

He was someone from whom we all learnt great lessons and took inspiration from who he was and how he thought. Today we mourn the loss of a truly great man and a truly wonderful caring, father. Thank you Dad, we will miss you.

Alan Bowman

Fergus was a wonderful role model for very many of us here today, and probably for even more who cannot be here. There are so many ways in which he was a shining example, not least in giving us all consistent proof, time and time again, that appallingly indecipherable handwriting is not a sign of illiteracy or lack of intellect. How many of us have pored over that minute crabbed script trying to figure out whether what he had actually written was a compliment or a very robustly expressed criticism (or worse). I still treasure the postcard which he sent me in 1977 when I was appointed to a Studentship at Christ Church. It began 'Congratulations, you are now condemned to a lifetime of execrable dinners in exquisite surroundings.'

In fact, my first encounter with Fergus had been in 1964 in exquisite surroundings, his palatial rooms in All Souls where he began to teach his Queen's undergraduates one term before he

actually took up his Fellowship at Queen's. We wondered what such a nice and mild-mannered young man had done to deserve that and the answer of course was 'quite a lot', to say the least. There is a story about his election which I like to think is not *ben trovato*. The candidates for the post included a famously difficult and aggressive very small person who had already failed to obtain a few other college fellowships and during the customary dinner at high table after the interviews that candidate was heard to say in a loud stage whisper, 'Let's hope they make the right decision this time.' Indeed they did.

Over the next two years we his pupils had marvellous teaching, despite the fact that we tried his long-suffering patience with postponements which played havoc with his schedules. I have a vivid memory of knocking on the door of his rooms in Queen's and being told to come in by a crisp voice (not his), which turned out to belong to a person sitting at a typewriter who could only dimly be discerned through a dense fug of cigarette smoke -Susanna. We were never bludgeoned or hectored – you just had to listen and watch what he did – including those hours of assiduous reading and note-taking in the old Ashmolean Reading Room. But as with all inspiring teachers, there is at least one statement that sticks in the mind. When as an undergraduate I once strove to produce a brilliant, novel and completely ridiculous solution to some age-old unsolved historical problem, he simply said 'the key to real originality is having a point of view and developing it.' I have never forgotten that.

This is not the time or place to assess his huge contribution to historical scholarship. It can be taken as read and has been by very many of us here today. Just as important as the written word was the spoken word, over coffee or drinks in that widespread community of postgraduates and colleagues which he created with such energy and engagement because it was so important to him – dialogue as living scholarship.

He never shied away from controversy, especially in the broader context of what higher education should be. Sadly, some of it was directed to losing causes, contempt for the Research Assessment Exercise which he thought Oxford and Cambridge could and should have scuppered at the outset and the short-lived Council for Academic Autonomy. To the list of losing causes I am tempted to add Scottish Rugby …

With all that academic energy and commitment to four colleges in Oxford and one in London, we never lost sight of his devotion to Susanna and to his wonderful family, in which there are more doctorates than can be explained by any natural causes. We grieve intensely with and for Susanna and the family but I cannot bring myself to conclude with anything but positive thoughts and memories of Fergus, a mentor and friend who was even in his last weeks and days an amazing inspiration for all who were fortunate enough to know him.

Alison Salvesen

Fergus's main, earlier career was as an Ancient Historian within the Classical World. But on 'retirement', he read and wrote prolifically on later periods and on areas further to the east of the Roman Empire.

In 2002 he moved into the office next to mine on the third floor of the Oriental Institute, along with Priscilla. It was an ideal location for getting to the Sackler Library next door, attending Syriac classes with David Taylor, and most importantly, for convening the daily coffee sessions in the Oriental Institute common room. At 10.57 precisely each morning, Fergus would knock on my door, and ask somewhat gruffly, 'Coffee?' He would seem slightly put out if I was teaching or otherwise unavailable, but no-one willingly missed the gathering of 'café symposiasts' that was very much the highlight of each day. The daily coffee hour continued until 2014, when the Hebrew Centre people moved out to Walton Street, but until very recently indeed, Fergus was still creating gatherings on Monday mornings in the Oriental Institute.

You never quite knew who was going to be there at coffee. Fergus would issue specific invitations to scholars who were passing through, or to colleagues from other faculties, or former students of his, or relatives. This intellectually fertile and caffeinated intermingling of the lively and the interesting had all the advantages of high table commensality with none of the arcane rituals or the befuddling inebriation. And there were no outsiders. Babies, children, and teens were as welcome as a much-lauded Professor from Utopian State University, and they were treated as equally important. He took everyone seriously. Discussion ranged from current scholarship to novels, family matters, films, and — very occasionally — sport, preferably golf or rugby. Fergus put people in touch without claiming any credit for the resulting networks. Ideas were spontaneously conceived over a mug of Kona coffee. One such was John Ma's Aramaic project, which led to large numbers of Classicists learning Imperial Aramaic with David Taylor.

Even the academic disagreements proved fertile. For instance, Fergus was a fervent proponent of the importance of Syriac for understanding the Near East in Late Antiquity, and he regularly attended Syriac text classes: in fact he often grumbled about his student classmates' lack of preparation. Yet he took a very different view from us Syriacists about the origins and nature of the language. Since he disliked reading either theological or poetic texts (which are foundational in the Syriac corpus), it was difficult to convince him that Syriac must have had a reasonably well-established literary tradition long before his favourite dated manuscript of 410 AD (which was in fact a translation from Greek!). But his scepticism was effective in making us take a hard look at our own assumptions about the tradition. And over the years his own position may have also budged a bit!

Fergus was a marvellous example to the rest of us as a scholar and as a person – for him these were not two separate spheres, but one informed the other. Scholarship was not more important than family and friends. He was tolerant of all sorts of human weakness. However, like many of us he heartily disliked the bureaucracy and administrative overload that needlessly diverted energies that he felt should be used in the service of teaching and writing. Hence the frequent letters to the Oxford Magazine.

As the Syriac parting salutation has it, *fush ba-shlomo*, Fergus: 'remain in peace'. We will never forget you.

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The following tributes were delivered at a Memorial Event in the Sheldonian Theatre on 1st December 2019

Richard Sorabji, Fergus' Early Days

Fergus and I were together in 1954 for a very agreeable year of our two years' compulsory military service as Russian specialists in the Navy, but in London University, speaking Russian all day with our delightful teachers, who had escaped in horrifying circumstances from Stalin's Russia. One of them, a prisoner of Hitler's army, had poured boiling oil on his foot, in order to get hospitalized and so escape the advance of the Soviet counter-attack on Germany, which treated prisoners of Hitler's army as deserters.

We studied during the day in a private house in Russell Square, being taught first how to pronounce Russian, with a tape recorder playing back our mis-pronunciations, and with instructions on how to re-shape our mouths. We were also told to sit in seclusion on the upper deck of buses, burbling nonsense with a Russian accent. Later, we were allowed to read in Russian some of the great Russian novels as a treat, but also had to read novels from the Soviet period, in which the closest any author was allowed to approach sexual content was: 'he saw the golden down on her forearm'.

We had been selected by examination from a larger group of beginners in the language, most of whom were not asked to perfect their Russian, but were assigned to routine work on a 24-hour rota from which we escaped. We were appointed as Midshipmen, the lowest class of officer, but in London were not asked to wear our uniform. Once a fortnight, we were examined, and one single failure meant exile to the outer darkness to which the others had been sent, so it was worth working hard. Here I noticed one big difference between Fergus and me: he was much cleverer. He managed to do all his homework travelling 5 stops on the Central Underground Line from Russell Square for supper at our communal lodgings in Sussex Square, whereas I, like my room mates, had to continue studying until 11 pm.

At a later stage, after London, there were also optional activities. I learnt Russian folksongs, which I have sung ever since, while others performed in a Russian version of *Hamlet*. I do not know what Fergus chose from the wide range of choices. After the two years, we had compulsory refresher courses for one fortnight a year, and were promoted to Sub-Lieutenant, so that Fergus, like me, will have worn a golden ring on his naval jacket.

In later life, Fergus and I coincided first as teachers of different subjects in different colleges in London University between 1970 and 1984, and then from 1990 in attachment to Wolfson College, Oxford, where Fergus and Susanna were the stars of Burns Night with its haggis, and Scottish country dancing. I loved this, but on my only occasion of giving the speech in honour of Robert Burns, I was told my Scottish accent (unlike Fergus'), was so bad, that I recited Burns in Russian translation, where my pronunciation lessons at last bore fruit.

Professionally, Fergus and I agreed on one judgement. The most interesting book of late Greek antiquity, both for philosophers and for historians, was Porphyry's brilliant *On Abstinence from Animals*, which made a historical and philosophical case for not killing them.

John North, Fergus in London

Fergus Millar was an Oxford man for most of the time from when I first knew him in the early sixties till the recent lamented end of his life; my contribution this afternoon is to talk about the exceptional years, all too easily forgotten, when he was out of Oxford as Professor of Ancient History in the History Department of UCL. He was appointed in 1976 and resigned the chair in 1984, so that is seven academic years in post. In that time, though it wouldn't be true to say that he achieved all he aspired to, he did have a transforming effect on the way things worked for ancient historians in the University of London. And he did this very much his own way.

My very first memories of him in UCL, before his appointment started, were at a meeting with future colleagues (there would have been four of us in the Ancient History group) other historians and classicists, perhaps a dozen altogether. I assumed that a new Professor, not knowing his way around, and meeting the unusual situation of Ancient History as part of History not Classics, would take things cautiously. I could hardly have been more wrong: Fergus did most of the talking, knew just what he wanted and was fully briefed. I never knew how he was so well briefed and, alas, I can't ask him now.

The areas in which his most memorable achievements for the ancient historians belong were in his expansion of the subject and its visibility, his reform of the reach and impact of ancient history seminars and events and the place of research culture in academic life. First, the size and character of the Ancient History groups. This was done partly by reform of the entrance criteria, which was overdue in any case, partly by being more open to a wider range of students and partly by his being better known to a broad range of contacts. Fergus had this gift for meeting and getting on with all sorts of people and he put that I think to good use. The effect in any case was that ancient history students became a far more visible presence in UCL History than they had ever been during the pre-Fergus era. Even the graduate students were seen about; they had voices, they came to seminars and so on. This was a partial revolution at least: before that, History's tradition was that they came to see their supervisors and then went home.

The weekly ancient history seminar was re-organised and changed its character in many ways. The changes may seem minor, but they had major consequences. The weekly meetings were moved from the Warburg to the Institute of Classical Studies, where they live on today, still in fact on Thursday at 4.30. These changes had practical effects as well as symbolic ones. Thursday was a heavy teaching day for those in the University's teaching programme. There were real efforts to get staff and graduate students from across the whole University to come to it. So, in one way and another, Fergus was highly successful in bringing groups together.

The move into the Institute was also very significant: it is not an accident that ancient historians have established a far more significant role in the Institute's life since the 80s than they had had between the 40s and the 80s. At that time the activities of the ICS were dominated by Heads of Classics Depts who were too numerous to remember. The arrival of the regular Thursday seminars shifted the balance.

One of those attracted regularly to the seminars though not from the University of London, but the Brunel University, was Keith Hopkins. The (more or less weekly) confrontations between the two of them, both having at the time recently published important works, from very different points of view, certainly had beneficial effects on the publicity for the new order of things. I would not say myself that there was any love lost between them, but they did sustain a politely expressed dialogue of profound disagreement about the direction the subject should take.

I want to finish by speaking briefly about his efforts already in London and then afterwards to resist the rise of bureaucratisation and political interference in Universities and their work. He chaired for some years a noble and doomed body (his phrase I think) called the Council for Academic Autonomy. It was certainly doomed. We organised and publicised meeting after meeting; it was a great effort, but too few supporters ever rallied to the cause. Political interference won the day then and still does today.

To sum up briefly, what made the greatest difference was Fergus' capacity to make a group of people feel as a community and so generate commitment and loyalty. It was that gift that made the relatively minor changes in the way things were organised work out as they did.

The reason he gave me for leaving when he did, was that his health was beginning to suffer from the regime of driving from Oxford every day starting out at six. I imagined that was true, if only part of the truth; but I also thought it characteristically kind of him to put it that way.

Martin Goodman, Fergus and Jewish History

I do not think that Fergus ever explained in public how he came to spend so much of his working life on the history of the Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. According to the notes he left (with characteristic forethought) for the benefit of obituarists, it was by chance that, a year after he took up his post as Tutorial Fellow at Queen's, he happened to encounter Geza Vermes, shortly after Geza's arrival in Oxford as Reader in Jewish Studies. Geza himself wrote that he considered their meeting a providential accident. If so, Fergus helped providence by turning up to listen to one of Geza's first lectures in Oxford.

According to the preface of The Emperor in the Roman World, Fergus had already been reading Josephus' Jewish War and Antiquities in the late summer of 1961. Over the years, he came to find in Josephus a uniquely valuable voice for understanding the ancient Near East, but in the early 1960s it seems likely that one, rather different, reason for his interest in Jews stemmed from his marriage to Susanna in 1959. At the coffee and cake morning in the Clarendon Institute to celebrate his eightieth birthday, Fergus requested, as his birthday treat, that the portrait of David Daube – the great scholar of ancient law, who, as Regius Professor of Civil Law, had been a Fellow of All Souls – should be moved to hang next to his office in the Institute so that he would see it every time he went in and out, because it was at a lecture by Daube that he met Susanna. Fergus was of course firmly agnostic and proudly Scottish (and, like Richard Sorabji, I treasure memories of him at Burns Night in Wolfson), but he described himself on at least one occasion as an 'honorary Jew'.

The task of revising Schürer's History of the Jewish People to which Geza recruited Fergus lasted from 1969 to 1986. Schürer's History was a classic of 19th-century scholarship which was still much cited despite being hopelessly out-of-date. It was quite remarkable that a Roman historian at the height of his career should choose to devote himself to the selfless task of updating it. It was a massive undertaking, and it did not help that Fergus did everything so thoroughly. In what was then the Ashmolean Library, he checked every detail in each packed footnote individually, frequently returning to the shelves to look up something in the same volume he had already used for the previous note – and that he would use again for a note on the next page. For someone who spent so much time writing books in the library, this self-imposed exercise regime was probably a good idea. Fergus kept going by insisting that work had to be completed by specific deadlines. It never occurred to me, as a collaborator on volume 3 of Schürer in the 1980s, that (after nearly twenty years) these deadlines were wholly artificial.

Fergus's interest in Jewish history did not diminish once Schürer was safely off his desk. It was not accidental that his inaugural lecture as Camden Professor, in effect a prospectus for *The Roman Near East*, was published by Geza in the *Journal of Jewish Studies*. Fergus noted at the start of the article that 'I have got to be in the habit of following Geza Vermes's suggestions; and… it seems too late to stop now.'

Fergus was a compulsive attender of research seminars. But he was particularly assiduous in participating in the Tuesday seminar on Jewish History and Literature – right up to this March. In recent years he made a habit of stating firmly that his current seminar paper would be his last. But he had already asked me, on 21st May this year, despite what he called 'irritating cardiac problems', to pencil him in for a seminar paper in Hilary Term 2020 on 'The Gospel of Mark between Judaism and Christianity' – assuming, as he put it, 'more rumblings from extinct volcanoes would be bearable'.

Fergus had an extraordinarily productive retirement in the seventeen years he was part of the Hebrew Centre in his shared office in the Oriental Institute (and later in the Clarendon Institute) after he retired from the Camden Chair in 2002. It was typical of Fergus that he insisted on repaying the Hebrew Centre by teaching a Masters course on Jews in the Roman diaspora for nearly fifteen years after his retirement, and that he dealt with his irritation at the lack of a decent handbook on Jewish literature of late antiquity by co-writing one himself.

Like many others responsible for running institutions of which he was a member, I was a frequent recipient of Fergus's notes. I much miss having my efforts regularly marked, and the boost when, just occasionally, the note would contain a hint of reassurance that, despite everything, some things at least might be not as bad as they might be. I took such notes as evidence that Fergus cared, which indeed he very much did – for his friends and colleagues and students, for the community of ancient historians, for this University and higher education in general, and for the wider world. His legacy to all of us has been immense.

Tessa Rajak, Passages from the Author's Epilogue 'Redrawing the Map?' (from *Rome, the Greek World and the East*, Volume III)

The Greek World, the Jews and the East, was Volume Three of Fergus's collected papers, edited by Hannah Cotton and Guy Rogers. In the Epilogue, written in 2006, we find a vision of Ancient History that has so much of the voice of the quintessential Fergus, both in the detail and in the grand sweep and also of the grandeur of his uniquely open-minded conception. These combine with some more unexpected delights – not least the open-minded modernity that stands out, almost a decade, be it noted, before Fergus learnt to do email.

What follows is all in Fergus' own voice.

Approaching the Ancient World

This being a moment to look back at the ancient world as it evolved from (let us say) the Trojan War on the one hand and Moses in Egypt on the other, as its legendary starting points, to the Islamic conquest of the seventh century, which I would adopt as the – necessarily arbitrary – terminal point, it will be worth reflecting … both on the ancient world itself and on possible ways of writing about it. Since ancient historians tend to be of modest disposition, it is perhaps worth stressing that the period concerned covers two millennia, and is longer than that which stretches from the seventh century to the present.

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If we can approach the ancient world in an incomparably closer and more intensive way than was possible two centuries ago, this is due, first, to the organisation of knowledge achieved primarily in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, with the great *corpora* of inscriptions, coins and papyri, and massive series of archaeological reports. But we should be aware also of just how far the advance of technology has completely transformed our capacity to confront the remains of antiquity: firstly, simply by the availability of photographic images of everything … But secondly … the capacity to record, transmit, compare and combine these images electronically…The capacity to travel relatively easily, and thus, literally, to see any (or almost any) area of the ancient world is also a fundamental transformation in itself. But perhaps even more fundamental is the capacity to 'see' indirectly, without moving from the spot, an infinity of images of documents, artefacts, art-works, buildings and landscapes…None the less, at another level, nothing can substitute for the indefinable lessons of being there, of actually experiencing different environments.

A New Approach to Ancient Languages

That ancient world which is the object of attention here is … defined by the use of Greek and Latin. There were, however, other languages and/or scripts which were in use in the ancient world in question, from the Atlantic to Northern India, and from the second millennium BC to the seventh century AD – for instance Celtic, Etruscan, the Italic dialects, Punic, Phoenician, Egyptian, various branches of Aramaic including Syriac, and also Hebrew, Old and Middle Persian, Parthian, Akkadian, and Indian languages related to Sanskrit. Many of these languages do not in general suffer the 'disadvantages' of being seen through the lens of a vast store of medieval manuscripts, which have been studied, printed and re-produced in corrected editions for several centuries. In their case there is no option but for us to relate to them in the forms in which they were written in antiquity. The proposition that all these languages and cultures should play a part in our overall view of the ancient world – not of

course that they can all do so in the work of any one person – is clearly implied by mentioning them at all.

Canonical Texts and Historical Reconstructions

The question of how to write history may be equally complex in those fields where there are long-established and long-known 'canonical' texts which are not in essence historical in character, but which set out norms in terms of which the historical evolution…behind them can be interpreted. But should they be allowed to set those norms?... As an example, three groups of material where we are confronted with the extra problem that they each also retain a relevance for us which is not solely historical, but reflects their function in the modern world: the three cases are Roman law, the Bible, and the standard texts of Talmudic Judaism. Each of these bodies of text *can* legitimately be approached in a uniquely non-historical way … No such approach, however, is acceptable if our interest…is empirical and historical.

A Different 'Ancient History'?

It is remarkable how firm an intellectual and educational barrier has been erected against the incorporation in the canon of Greek texts used for educational study, firstly of the vast mass of primary material preserved on papyrus and in inscriptions, and, secondly of Jewish and Christian texts … It is puzzling to reflect on how few students will have been offered the opportunity to read a private letter on papyrus, an honorific inscription put up by a Greek city – or the Septuagint, or the new Testament, or Josephus' *Antiquities*, or Eusebius.

If a much wider view would have been desirable in principle, as it clearly would, we would have … to acknowledge that it is hard enough to create frameworks in which the young learn Latin or Greek (or have any awareness of past societies at all) without imagining a system in which it would be common for them also to study Hebrew, Syriac, Egyptian, or Akkadian.

Fergus and Israel: Hannah Cotton-Paltiel

On 16 July at 10:26 AM, having been informed by Fergus' daughter, Sarah, that Fergus had passed away, I wrote to the community of classicists and ancient historians in Israel: "Our friend, teacher and colleague, Professor Sir Fergus Millar, passed away last night, just ten days after his 84th birthday". I could not resist adding "An Emperor has left the Roman World… ."

Within the next few hours, my e-mail account exploded with messages from Fergus' students, friends and admirers in Israel — many of whom, in addition to making the annual pilgrimage to Oxford, also welcomed him and Susanna on their visits to Israel to see former students and friends, but also, as Fergus' pragmatic Scottish training had taught him, to see with his own eyes the locations where the historical events mentioned in the written sources had taken place. This was part of his shifting the centre of the study of the Roman Empire eastwards — a shift, fortunately done, not by an eccentric orientalist or a 19th century romantic, but by none other than the Roman historian *par excellence*.

Likewise, the first comprehensive multilingual corpus of all inscriptions, from the Classical period, from 4th century BC to the 7th century AD, from the territory of present-day Israel (*Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae* = *CIIP*) owes a huge debt to Fergus Millar's

programmatic battle cry in his article on 'Epigraphy' of 1983: namely, to abandon the absurd exclusion of the local languages from the major corpora of inscriptions, for "the richness of the epigraphic tradition comes fully into its own *only* when epigraphic texts in different languages, the contemporaneous expressions of different but related cultures, are studied together" — to cite Fergus' own words.

All this was still in the future when I arrived in Oxford in 1973 intending to write a doctorate on Tacitus. Had I stuck with Tacitus, I would never have become Fergus Millar's student, who unlike Haim Wirszubski my teacher at the Hebrew University, and Sir Ronald Syme, Fergus' teacher and predecessor to the Camden chair once removed, was not a devotee of the idiosyncratic Roman historian.

As befitted my provincial background, I was extremely ignorant of vital matters, such as the inevitable result of drinking sherry as if it were Coca Cola to quench my thirst, or that walking on stilt-like high heels in a flimsy dress to a New Year's party at the Millars' house, would turn me blue in the face: I shall never forget the expression on Fergus' face on opening the door, and his rushing for the Scotch to save this near-easterner from the frost.

Nor can I forget walking in the Valley of the Monastery of the Cross with Fergus and Menachem Stern, the author of *Greek and Roman Sources on Jews and Judaism*. It was a privilege, which had left me breathless, for their pace must have corresponded to that of their exchange of ideas. A few years later Menachem Stern was stabbed to death by terrorists on the same path. *The Roman Republic in Political Thought* (2002), is based on Fergus Millar's Jerusalem Lectures in memory of Menachem Stern in 1997, and dedicated to his widow, Chava Stern. The Hebrew edition of 2012 was dedicated to her memory. It would be nice to believe that the three of them would resume their friendship in heaven!

Zvi Yavetz and Zeev Rubin, his close friends from Tel Aviv University are no longer with us, and, alas, there is no time to cite more than the names of those who sent me their warm words and cherished memories: Gideon and Sarah Fuks, Joseph Geiger, Shimon Dar, Eyal Ben-Eliahu, and Jonathan Price.

Erich Gruen, Fergus and International Scholarship

Fergus Millar produced countless memorable, powerful, and authoritative statements over a lifetime of weighty and enduring contributions to scholarship. One of them, in particular, sticks out in my mind, coming as it does from perhaps *the* preeminent ancient historian of his generation. 'Those who study and teach the history of the ancient world suffer from a great disadvantage, which we find difficult to admit even to ourselves: in a perfectly literal sense, we do not know what we are talking about.' He referred, of course, to the fact that, even after the accumulated knowledge of generations of scholars, the gaps in our knowledge remain vast, and the most important questions we ask cannot be answered. Those words are characteristic of the scholar and the man, someone of prodigious knowledge but also unflinching candor and unpretentious humility.

The subjects on which Fergus and I worked over the years did not usually coincide. But in one area we both had a substantial investment: the nature of politics in the later Roman Republic. Fergus produced a series of stimulating articles and an outstanding book, *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic*, which set the framework and drove the discussion of the topic for two decades. I did not buy Fergus' interpretation, as he knew, and I wrote a long review of the book, expressing dissent. But I also unreservedly praised the work and expressed my deep admiration for its stimulating originality and potent impact upon the field. After its publication, Fergus wrote to me, saying that my disagreements were cogent and that he genuinely appreciated the generous and respectful manner in which they were expressed – but he was still unpersuaded. That too was characteristic of the scholar and the man.

Fergus and I were exact contemporaries, born in the same year within two months of one another. I am the older, in case you were wondering. Our friendship goes back a long way. We were students together at Oxford, although he was already working on his DPhil while I was struggling through Greats, and we knew each other only slightly in those days. The acquaintance ripened into friendship in subsequent years. In the past few decades, I was always welcomed by him in my visits to Oxford, and we followed a tradition of dinners at the Old Parsonage on each occasion. We also found ourselves together at other times in Jerusalem and in Rome.

Fergus made his mark in the US, just as he did in the UK and all over Europe and Israel. He was a well-known figure at Princeton, where he was twice a member of the Institute for Advanced Study. His frequent trips to Philadelphia to be with his family gave him the opportunity to visit the Institute on several occasions and to lunch with luminaries like Glen Bowersock, Christopher Jones, Christian Habicht, and Peter Brown. And he left a lasting imprint at Harvard where he delivered the Jackson lectures in 1987 which formed the basis of his monumental book, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337.*

Little did he know then that all this was just preliminary to his truly important visit to the US, namely that to Berkeley! My colleagues and I invited him to Berkeley to deliver the Kendrick Pritchett lecture. Fergus was one of the very first to hold that lectureship, awarded annually to a scholar of real distinction who crossed the lines between classical and near eastern scholarship. His lecture on "Caravan Cities" in 1991 was a harbinger of his ground-breaking work on the Middle East in the period of the Roman Empire. And then more than twenty years later he returned for a whole semester to deliver the Sather Lectures when he had immersed himself in studies of late antiquity, and which resulted in his superb volume, *A Greek Roman Empire,* on the period of Theodosius II.

For me, Fergus' visits to Berkeley remain vivid in memory. In the first, I recollect the long walk we took together to enjoy the ever sparkling company of David Daube whom Fergus had known at Oxford and with whom I had developed a bond during his later years at Berkeley. And Fergus' term as Sather Professor gave us much more extended time together. Fergus and Susanna and my late wife Joan and I walked the hills of Berkeley and explored the sights of San Francisco together. The memories are poignant. Joan became gravely ill not long after the Millars returned to the UK, and passed away in the following year. Fergus and Susanna were more than thoughtful in their letters and phone calls during that period. And Fergus' great humanity showed itself once more in the preface to his *Greek Roman Empire*, when he

wrote about his time in Berkeley: “We look back in love and sorrow on the companionship of Joan Gruen and her unique warmth and vitality. It remains impossible to come to terms with the illness which struck her only a few months after we left, and with her death in October of 2004.” The sincerity and sensitivity captured in those words represent the measure of the man. A genuine Mensch, if ever there was one.

With so great a presence one truly feels the absence. The end of Fergus’ life was no less powerful a testimony to the whole of it. I had the great, good fortune to speak with him on the telephone a few days (as it turned out) before his death. He knew exactly what was in store, but did not let that get in the way. We spoke about both professional and personal matters. He mentioned, as was his wont, a new book that had just seen and was eager to read. Although he knew that his remaining days on earth were quite limited, he faced them with unflinching resolution, courage, and wisdom. In those regards, Fergus Millar was unchanged to the end.

Fergus as Mentor: Katherine Clarke

I am not going to speak about Fergus as scholar – his works speak for themselves. Suffice it to say that, when examining Finals this summer, I was struck that in the Roman History scripts, the most commonly referred to, indeed pretty much the *only* referred to, work of scholarship was Fergus’ Emperor in the Roman World – just over 40 years after its publication. Clearly the rest of us need to do better. I was able to tell Fergus this in the last week of his life, and I think he was quietly pleased.

Instead, I shall say something about Fergus as supervisor, colleague and friend – Fergus as Camden Professor in Oxford and all that meant.

It’s customary to say that a relationship was abuzz from the first meeting, but Fergus and I enjoyed a more gradual warm-up than that. On learning that Fergus was to supervise my doctorate, I keenly went to his lectures on Pliny and Tacitus to find Fergus arguing the ridiculous proposition that Tacitus was no good; he was then part of the Greats exam board that outrageously gave me my worst mark (in Roman History!). It was not looking good. However, some elements were more auspicious – Fergus *had* liked my optional thesis on Herodotus and nature, which was be the origin of the last book he read for me; it was also positive that I’d been born and bred in Yorkshire, where for Fergus ‘the scenery just about begins to be acceptable’; we both liked a speedy and voluminous production rate. We quickly got into our stride. To be supervised by Fergus was to gain three-for-the-price-of-one, being supervised in reality by ‘Team Fergus’ – a Capitoline triad made up of Fergus himself, Susanna, and Priscilla. This was the team that occupied the Camden chair – and a formidable one it was.

Fergus was ahead of his time in running an informal Masters degree for his graduates before the degree had officially been introduced – fortnightly essays (even for John Ma) and a hugely motivating if inimitable regime of weekly meetings. I fell into a happy routine of running along to Brasenose at my slot – 11a.m. on Friday – every week for three years, frequently with the latest literary offering still warm from the printer to exchange for Priscilla’s typed version of

Fergus' illegible scrawl on the previous piece of work. Only Priscilla could read his writing, and even she not perfectly – one of earliest meetings with Fergus was enlivened by the tale of how, new to the job, Priscilla had transcribed a letter from Fergus to the Society for the Prevention of Roman Studies – an entertaining prospect for the Camden Professor. I still never enter Brasenose without being transported back to the countless occasions on which I would round the chapel corner at pace and glance straight up to Fergus' window in anticipation of what was always an uplifting and motivating meeting. Priscilla was key to these supervisions with her friendly greetings and her production of coffee. Superficially, it looked as though her effusive warmth and easy rapport offset Fergus' more reserved though no less supportive nature, but as time went on, I grew to realise that what made them such an extraordinary team was that they both embodied identical rather than complementary qualities – kindness, warmth and humanity.

Fergus' care for graduates extended far beyond his own supervisees – the Wykeham Chair was empty throughout my doctorate, but Fergus simply took everyone under his wings. Part of Fergus' graduate programme involved paying attention to the world outside Oxford. Here his undisguised pride and affection for the London scene came to fore – he would pack his old car with as many graduates as could fit in, and head off down the M40 to the Ancient History seminar at the Institute of Classical Studies, followed by drinks in UCL. On these occasions another hallmark characteristic would be on display – dislike of hierarchy and complete lack of pomposity. Fergus would always decline to sit with his colleagues and come to talk instead to the graduates.

Kindness – mentioned more than any other word in tributes. As colleague and especially in his retirement, when Fergus and I continued our frequent chats, I think colleagues would be amazed if they knew how often they were the subject of Fergus' benevolent enquiries. I never heard him snipe at any one; comments about individuals were invariably generous and supportive.

Warmth – even emails, which routinely transform innocent comments into offensive poison, in Fergus' hands became a vehicle of warmth and affection. Far outnumbered by hand-written letters, or better still conversations face-to-face, nevertheless Fergus' emails perfectly conveyed his humanity, the sense that he actually *wanted* to see people, talk to them, read their work. My difficulties in making it to his regular Monday coffee gatherings yielded a gently persistent sequence of 'coffee emails' – 'living in hope', 'still looking for a coffee time', 'coffee (as ever)', 'just to pursue the will-of-the-wisp, coffee'. Typically of Fergus' lack of self-importance, his solution was not to remain sitting in state, but with humbling generosity to change the venue to wherever would make it possible to have the chat he so valued – Blackwells, High Street, he even trailed across town to my room in St Hilda's. The jaws dropped on undergraduates waiting outside when the previous tutee turned out to be Sir Fergus, author of the only book they would ever cite in a Finals paper. He did my street-cred no harm! Similarly with his persistent but kindly encouragement to finish projects – 'I can't say how much I would like to see it in print'; 'as for the ms which I long to see… prompt reading guaranteed'. He had a way of convincing that his life would be enhanced by others' happiness and success – an irresistible form of motivation and support, born of human kindness.

Humanity – he hated abuse of power and oppression of individuals. Some of our last conversations concerned his dismay at the re-emergence of tyrannical dictatorships. He also disliked impersonal structures that made life harder, more miserable within the university itself. He thought the predicament of modern academics scandalous and said so frequently. One of the last emails I had from him was symptomatic – 'Only one minor aspect of the staggering insensitivity and ineptitude with which the University conducts itself. Time for a Peasants' Revolt (but not this peasant). Love, Fergus.' Yet another call to arms against what he saw as the inhumanity of large institutions, while also poignantly accepting that time was running out.

When I went to see Fergus at the John Radcliffe Hospital after the final prognosis had become clear, he was resigned to his fate. But also talked about his extraordinary good fortune, encapsulated in two figures. Firstly, of course, his beloved Susanna to whom he was utterly devoted, and following from her the wonderful family of whom he talked continually with love and pride. And secondly, Priscilla without whom he said his working life would quite simply never have been what it was. I couldn't help pondering in turn the stroke of good fortune which had come *my* way in being allocated to Fergus' supervision list all that time ago. Thus it felt right that the last two occasions on which I saw Fergus brought together these two key figures in the Capitoline triad of Fergus' world. Firstly, the birthday party which Priscilla organized a week before Fergus died. Those of us lucky enough to be there will never forget the sight of Fergus and Susanna surrounded by family and friends. But for me it was even more of a privilege to visit them both at home a couple of days later. As on previous Summertown visits, they were blissfully content to be home together. We chatted about the party and about family. Fergus thought he might be able to carry on for quite a while; sadly it was not to be. But I shall treasure that last time shared, and particularly the image as I left of Fergus and Susanna, radiant together on the doorstep of their family home, waving goodbye.

Jonathan Millar, Fergus and his Family

On behalf of my mother Susanna, my brother and sister, Andrew and Sarah, and the wider Millar and Mackenzie-Stuart family, I would like to thank everyone for coming here today to honour my father's life and academic achievements. I know that some of you have travelled internationally specifically to be here. He would have been absolutely thrilled to see so many friends and family here for him. I would also like to thank, in particular, all of the speakers for their generous and moving tributes to him as an academic, as a colleague and as a person and, finally, to Katherine Clarke, Martin Goodman and Alan Bowman for all the efforts they have made in putting this event together and, finally, to Brasenose and the university for hosting. Thank you very much.

My brother, sister and I knew that Dad was very well known in the world of Ancient History. But as you probably know Dad was a very modest man and self-promotion was not something that came naturally to him. So, I don't think we children ***really*** appreciated just how profound and far-reaching his influence has been until the last 3-4 months just prior to and following his passing. My sister, Sarah, experienced first-hand just how much his colleagues felt about him when she took him and our mother to the Oriental Institute coffee morning event in July

following his 84th birthday. She recounted this experience at his funeral in August and I could tell that it had a very powerful effect on her.

It is clear from the tributes that our father cared very deeply indeed about academia as a profession – perhaps too deeply – as some of his efforts to defend it got him into scrapes with government and the university. Although he held steadfastly to these views it was a frustration to him that these efforts were not more successful. But perhaps more importantly, Dad also cared very deeply about academics as individuals and treated his colleagues, even those that he had professional disagreements with, as part of his academic family. It is a comfort to us that he was so widely loved and admired. I would like to pass on a special thank you to Priscilla Lange, my father's long-time administrative assistant for nearly 30 years. I know there was huge mutual admiration, respect and friendship between the two of them. My father had hoped to make it to September to celebrate 30 years that she had worked for him but sadly that was not to be.

When my wife and I took my parents to lunch in July in Oxford the day before he died, my father worried out loud that he had concentrated too much on his academic life and that he had not done enough as a father and should have spent more time with his family. I can assure you that this was the first time I have ever heard my father say something that was utter codswallop. He was a fantastic father. When we were young he was always there to play in the garden, and had the patience to teach us how to ride a bike, how to drive a car (very quickly indeed in my brother's case – much to my father's horror), to play golf (very badly in my case – much to my father's great disappointment) and he was always there at our school plays and rugby matches. He never raised his voice or spoke a cross word to any of us – something I have spectacularly failed to emulate myself as a father. Sorry kids.

As adults, all three of us were able to rely heavily on our father's advice, counselling and insight during our own careers in academia and medicine. This advice was invaluable whenever we encountered political, strategic or personal problems of our own. Indeed, I think my father's greatest skill was that after you had spoken with him you felt more encouraged, more optimistic, more energised and more confident about tackling your own issues and problems – no matter how intractable or imposing they felt. I believe many of you in the audience may also have experienced that. In that respect he was not only a great father but also a true leader. I know that Dad was extremely proud of how all us children turned out professionally as we are now professors and consultants that variously lead and direct doctoral training centres, divisions, departments and stem cell institutes. But he was even more proud and satisfied that we all now have happy and successful families of our own. Family to him was everything.

Even so – there was one thing that was by far the most precious to him and that was his near 60-year love affair and marriage to our mother, Susanna, who has had her own stellar career in experimental psychology. I think it is fair to say that without our mother's enduring love and support it is highly doubtful that Dad would have be able to achieve what he did – something he freely and frequently acknowledged. If there ever is such a thing was a perfect marriage then this was it. Rarely have I seen a couple so loving, so devoted, so together than my parents. Not all of you will know but our mother arrived in England in 1939 as a 15-year old Jewish refugee from Germany, so we are lucky to be here. I am proud to say that she sits

here as Lady Millar – and I would like to thank her for being such a wonderful and supportive mother. And if I would like, if I may, to take this opportunity, on my mother's behalf, to thank everyone for multitude of condolences cards she has received over the past three months – these now number literally in the thousands. They have been a huge comfort to her.

I know with certainty that Dad would have hugely appreciated being honoured in this way today – but he would not have wanted anyone to dwell on what has passed but rather to get on with our own future lives with optimism and energy. Dad was not someone who overly liked sentimentality so I end with a poem which I think reflects how he would have wanted us to feel to bring this celebratory event to a close.

Feel no guilt in laughter, he'd know how much you care.
Feel no sorrow in a smile that he is not here to share.
You cannot grieve forever; he would not want you to.
He'd hope that you could carry on the way you always do.
So, talk about the good times and the way you showed you cared,
The days you spent together, all the happiness you shared.
Let memories surround you, a word someone may say
Will suddenly recapture a time, an hour, a day,
That brings him back as clearly as though he were still here,
And fills you with the feeling that he is always near.
For if you keep those moments, you will never be apart
And he will live forever locked safely within your heart

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The following tributes have also been offered

Brasenose College Newsletter (Ed Bispham, Alan Bowman, Llewelyn Morgan)

Fergus Millar was the pre-eminent Roman historian of his generation, a scholar of genuinely global stature, although his modest and unassuming nature concealed such distinction, recognised by Fellowship of the British Academy (1976) and subsequently a knighthood in 2010. Most of his work dealt with the Roman Empire (very widely construed), and latterly its manifestations in the (Greek) East, especially under Theodosius II. Yet his expertise and his inclusive conception of the subjected saw him also engage with the Hellenistic world, notably Jewish history in its Near Eastern context, and with the Roman Republic, where he single-handedly ignited a debate which still rages two decades later about how democratic the Roman Republic was. Fergus' association with Brasenose was principally as holder of the Camden Chair of Ancient History and a Fellowship of the College (1984-2002). He knew the college from his time as a doctoral student under the supervision of Sir Ronald Syme, his predecessor but one in the Camden Chair. Syme was a remarkable if somewhat remote mentor, and under his guidance Fergus produced the thesis which turned into his first book, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964), still a classic treatment. In fact, at this time and later in his career he acknowledged a profound intellectual debt to Peter Fraser, a Fellow of All Souls and a Brasenose alumnus. The book on Cassius Dio was followed by a succession of seminal books, including *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337*

(1993), *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (1998), *A Greek Roman Empire, Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408-450* (2006) and *Religion, Language and Community in the Roman Near East* (2013), not to mention edited books and four volumes of collected papers.

In 1959 he married Susanna (née Friedmann), an academic psychologist, a partnership which endured very happily until his death. Fergus found the experience of being a graduate student challenging in a context in which there was no real academic community and was something against which he reacted strongly. When he returned to Oxford (and Brasenose) in 1984, after positions as Prize Fellow of All Souls, Fellow of The Queen's College and Professor of Ancient History at University College London, he moved quickly to transform (or indeed create) an academic culture rooted in a sense of a real community of purpose and shared interest: regular seminars, and a sense that graduate students would be looked after and participate fully in the life of the Faculty are two lasting legacies; they seem so 'normal' to us that it is hard to imagine how novel they were when introduced by him. Fergus took on a heavy burden of supervision, and the loyalty and affection of his many (and globally diverse) graduate students to this day is the most eloquent testimony to the unstinting care and potent stimulation with which they were provided.

Beyond the formal College obligations of the Camden Professor as a member of the Governing Body, Fergus' strong sense of duty, as well as his highly developed awareness of what graduate students needed, led him to offer himself (most unusually) as Tutor for Graduates, a role he occupied with conviction and distinction for some years, offering to many Brasenose postgraduates in all subjects the same selfless energy with which he worked for his own students in Ancient History. He also played a very important role in the continued stability of the undergraduate community in Brasenose, again unexpectedly. With a change in staffing leading to the appointment of two young Classics Fellows within a year of each other, and in a climate of some scepticism in College about the long-term viability of the subject, Fergus was there to provide wise, patient counsel and a role model when it was needed most. When David Stockton retired, the University's hesitant attitude towards renewing the post, and the lack of a consensus in support of Classics within College had created a question mark over the subject's future. Fergus' contribution was central: writing to David's former pupils he was instrumental (well before the College had a Development Office, and indeed before Development existed) in raising enough money to allow the Ancient History Fellowship to continue on an interim basis until its permanent re-filling was effected. Again, the creation of a community was at the heart of this, the building of a sense that those studying the subject had something important in common, something which played a structuring role in their lives, and strengthened both their own undergraduate experiences and the subject within the College. It goes without saying that Fergus understood a College Classics community to involve postgraduates as much as undergraduates. This sense of community manifested itself above all in drinks parties, whose regularity and tone owed much to Fergus' persistent sociability. Susanna often came, and indeed Fergus, very much a family man, took great vicarious delight in the appearance of two young families with the Classical community in those years.

After his retirement Fergus and Susanna were regularly to be seen, and much appreciated, at the College's social events, and he retained a staunch and very characteristic loyalty to the institution down to the end of his life. His outstanding commitment to those in his charge, his

strong, even fierce, sense of what was right, his undemonstrative courage in advocating it, his wisdom, learning, and understated wit were at the service of the College and its students for many years. These will all be very sorely missed.

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Guy Maclean Rogers, Remembering Fergus Millar

I met Fergus Millar by accident. In 1977 I was studying Classics and playing soccer at the University of Pennsylvania when I was awarded a Thouron Fellowship to continue my studies in Britain. I didn't know a soul in Britain and had no idea where to go or even how to apply to universities. A friend who had some academic contacts in England recommended that I write to the Roman historian Robert Browning at the University of London to see if he could help.

I wrote to Professor Browning and I was delighted to receive a quick response. He politely told me that it was impossible for me to study at the college where he taught (Birkbeck, which was for "mature" students) but that I should write to his friend Professor Fergus Millar across the street at University College London and see whether it would be possible for me to attend UCL.

I had no idea who Fergus Millar was. I wrote anyway and I immediately got back a short, hand-written letter (which I still have). I had a lot of trouble deciphering exactly what the missive said. But I eventually decided that it offered me a place at UCL to study with Professor Millar. I told my professors at Penn. They went into shock. Did I have any idea who Fergus Millar was? Of course not. They referred me to a recently published book entitled *The Emperor in the Roman World*. That was who Fergus Millar was.

I arrived at UCL in the autumn of 1977. It was a golden era for studying ancient history at UCL. Besides Fergus, John North and Tim Cornell were teaching Roman Republican history, Margaret "Peggy" Drower (Flinders Petrie student and MBE) and Amélie Kuhrt (FBA) were offering tutorials in Near Eastern history, and Alan Johnston was the tutor for Greek history. I was in way over my head. But I was in intellectual heaven.

It was also the punk rock era and London was its epicenter. Many of my UCL classmates were aspiring Johnny and Joan Rottens. Very early on in my time at UCL I remember turning up at Fergus' office for a tutorial, along with some other students. One of them was a young lady whose hair was dyed intertwined colors of blue, yellow, and pink not found in nature. Various pins and sharp-looking pieces of metal hung from her nose, her ears, and her lips. That has got to hurt I thought. Fergus – dressed characteristically in a dark blue suit and blue shirt with a red tie – opened his office door to let us in. He didn't blink when he saw my classmate with the metal ornaments. In that soft, confident, welcoming voice of his he just said, "Come in, come in." Wow, I thought, this professor is squared away, as the Marines say; he is completely in control of himself.

What I didn't fully appreciate at the time was that Fergus' unflappable demeanor was based upon a large, generous view of humanity. Fergus famously wrote that man is what man does. But in reality Fergus saw beneath and beyond the actions of people, especially the young. He

discerned qualities within people – abilities, potential, character – that they themselves sometimes could not even see. And he found unobtrusive, effective ways to bring those qualities out and to encourage students' belief in themselves – despite their more obvious rough edges or flaws.

At some point during my first term I wrote a tutorial essay for Fergus about Pliny's famous correspondence with the Roman emperor Trajan. I spelled emperor incorrectly 13 consecutive times in the essay. (Don't ask.) When I received the essay back Fergus had patiently corrected each misspelling in his unique writing – some hitherto unattributed cursive script. Why Fergus didn't send me back to my home in Connecticut to dig ditches for a living right then and there I have no idea.

In fact, for some inexplicable reason, Fergus encouraged me to take a seminar with him the next year, entitled "The Early Rise of Christianity in its Historical Context." It turned out to be a transformative experience.

The student members of the seminar included myself, David Eisenberg (Bernard Lewis' future research assistant and later on senior partner at the White and Case law-firm in London), Daniel Frank (later Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies), and two very quiet British students. David, Daniel, and I shamelessly dominated the tutorials, holding forth at length about Josephus, second temple Judaism, and Roman imperial history in general. As the seminar was winding down at one point I worked up enough courage to ask Fergus why the British students in the seminar never spoke up in class. Fergus responded: "They're thinking." Ah.

I reminded Fergus of this exchange exactly 40 years after it took place. He seemed chagrined. But I told him that it was one of the most important moments in my (much needed) intellectual development. Think first. Then speak. Two words from Fergus could change your life.

After I finished up at UCL Fergus graciously agreed to write the first of many letters of recommendation for me, in this case for admission to a graduate program in Classics in the U.S. Despite his astonishing memory I am sure that not even Fergus could remember how many letters of recommendation he wrote on behalf of all of his students.

Years later I pointed out to Fergus the parallel between his prodigious letter-writing on behalf of his students and friends and that of the "good" Roman emperors for their *amic*i and *amicae*. I am not sure that Fergus was entirely amused by my comparison. What I was trying to express to Fergus however (in the spectacularly undiplomatic way, characteristic of the Rogers) was just how much so many of us owed to Fergus for his enormous generosity and support over decades.

At least in part because of Fergus' advice I ended up going to Princeton to do my doctorate. At Princeton I was reunited with David Eisenberg who was studying Islamic law with Bernard Lewis. While we were there Fergus and Susanna came to the Institute for Advanced Study for a visit. David – one of whose many side-jobs was to organize our social lives – invited Fergus and Susanna to a party over at the graduate college. It can hardly have been the grandest

invitation the Millars received at the time but Fergus and Susanna duly attended and lit up the room. As usual Susanna was brilliant and radiant and Fergus seemed to enjoy the company of the graduate Princetonians. No one worked harder than Fergus of course. But Fergus also loved a good party.

I know that the graduate students who attended the party were honored and flattered that the Millars came and spent some time with us. In my experience that was completely characteristic. Fergus and Susanna made young people in particular feel as if they were important and respected.

Years earlier, when Sir Ronald Syme visited UCL Fergus introduced me to him, saying "Sir Ronald, have you met Guy Rogers?" – as if it were somehow important for Sir Ronald to meet me. I was speechless at first. I think I then mumbled some kind of lame greeting. Poor Sir Ronald. He must have thought that Fergus had introduced him to an absolute *cretino.* But I always remembered that Fergus went out of his way to make sure that everyone in a room felt noticed and included.

In fact, long before "inclusion" became an academic slogan Fergus enacted the concept. No matter where you came from, no matter how old you were, what your race, class, or gender were Fergus welcomed you and, what is more, introduced you to other members of his magic circle: an unofficial, but very real *consilium* of Fergus' students, colleagues, and friends, all of whom were united by their passion for the study of the ancient world. Both in his research and how he welcomed outsiders Fergus did more than anyone I have ever known to open up the study of the ancient world. Lots of people talk about inclusion. Fergus created it and lived it without ever feeling the need to take credit for it.

Within Fergus' magic circle there was total intellectual independence and equality. I will never forget how excited Fergus was in 2008 when he told me about a student of his named John Ma who had written a "brilliant" article entitled "The Return of the Black Hunter." Fergus' eyes were literally shining when he told me about his admiration for the article. It didn't matter one bit to Fergus that John was decades younger. What counted was the originality and quality of the work. Fergus always told his junior colleagues to write exactly what they wanted to write, even if he disagreed with it. Despite his Olympian standing in the profession, Fergus always respected, even encouraged, his students' intellectual independence. How many truly great scholars truly respect the intellectual freedom of their students?

Fergus and I stayed in touch after he went back to Oxford in 1984 and I started teaching at Wellesley College in 1985. In 1987 Fergus visited Wellesley to take part in a colloquium focused on the work of the Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson about slavery in the ancient and modern world (*Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*). With impeccable courtesy, and his usual understated humor, Fergus nevertheless demolished Patterson's ideas about how Roman slavery developed and functioned in Roman society at the colloquium. Afterward all of the participants, including Fergus and Orlando, went out and had a long, convivial dinner together at the Wellesley College Club. So, yes, it was true that Fergus knew how to disagree in ways that were both polite and collegial.

But it would be very wrong to conclude that when Fergus politely disagreed about scholarly issues that he somehow didn't think that he was right. When Fergus said he thought Polybius was right about the Roman constitution during the third century BCE or that Josephus was the most important source for how a Roman province of the first century CE worked, he meant it.

Many people loved my biography of Alexander the Great; I am sure that Fergus was not one of them. On the other hand Fergus told me that he thought my second Ephesos book was stupendous. Lots of other scholars weren't quite as impressed. But that was Fergus. He was sure of his judgments and he was unshakeable, both with regard to scholarship and friendship. If Fergus was in your corner he was in your corner, come what may. The sun would rise in the west and set in the east before Fergus would desert a friend. It was unthinkable. Fergus' personal loyalty and integrity were adamantine.

Conversely, if Fergus thought that the independence of individual scholars or the humanities in general were under attack he did not hesitate to defend that independence, no matter who was doing the attacking or what the potential consequences to his own career were. Winston Churchill always said that courage was the foremost virtue because it was the one upon which all the others depended. Of Fergus' many virtues his selfless courage was the one that I most admired.

Of course I was honored that Fergus asked me, along with Hannah Cotton of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to be the editor of his collected papers. (My initial reaction to the invitation was: can Fergus really have forgotten that first Pliny essay I wrote for him at UCL?) It was an honor and privilege to work with two such distinguished scholars as Fergus and Hannah on the project, and in some small way to repay Fergus for everything he had done on my behalf over the years. I know that Fergus was proud of the collection and was grateful to us. That meant everything to me.

Of course a project of such magnitude took some time to complete and by the time we were done Fergus had written enough to fill up a couple of more volumes. Fergus told me that after his Roman Near East book with Harvard University Press there wasn't enough time or energy to write a follow-up about the Roman Near East from Constantine to Muhammad. And then, in effect, he went out and did exactly that in his two books, *A Greek Roman Empire* and *Religion, Language, and Community in the Roman Near East, Constantine to Muhammad*.

Over the last decade or so Nancy and I visited Oxford just about every year and went out to dinner with Fergus and Susanna, often joined by Hannah Cotton, and sometimes by David Eisenberg – or, as I used to say, we frequently double-dated in Oxford with the Millars. Fergus usually chose the venue and his preference was always for a place that had good food and was quiet (e.g, the Old Parsonage Hotel Restaurant or the Roof-Top Restaurant at the Ashmolean). Fergus hated loud background noise and did not hesitate to complain to wait staff if the racket got too loud. Fergus and Susanna were always better dressed and more temperate than Nancy and I were, I am afraid. But I believe that all of us enjoyed our reunions immensely.

Our last gathering was in January of 2019 for a luncheon at a very nice French restaurant in North Oxford. The food was excellent, though the service was a bit slow. But from my point of view that was a priceless gift. While we were waiting Fergus talked about going to school in Edinburgh and the punishments that were meted out to misbehaving boys. He said he could remember being rapped on the knuckles with a ruler to this day. He also spoke about his naval service and learning Russian. It was by accident he said. He had wanted to do his national service in a different branch of the military. But the naval recruiting station was the one that was open and they had places for people who might be able to pick up Russian. Did they have any idea who Fergus Millar was? Of course not.

Just before I left for China this July to teach élite Chinese college-age students about Alexander the Great I spoke to Fergus on the phone; it turned out to be our last conversation. Fergus seemed tired and his voice was weak. When I asked however if he had seen Martin West's book about the Hymns of Zoroaster he suddenly perked up and his love for the ancient world and great scholarship reinvigorated him. He told me that his family had gathered together recently to celebrate his birthday and he talked about how proud he was of all of them; they were all such successes but they were even greater human beings.

Why the gods chose to put Fergus Millar in my path I will never understand. Of course everyone knows what a truly great historian Fergus was. I have always believed that the mark of scholarly greatness was changing your field of study. Fergus changed how we understand the role of the emperor in the Roman World; he put democratic politics back into the study of Roman Republican history; he sketched out the first comprehensive mental "map" (a favorite Fergus word) of the Roman Near East; and then he projected that map forward to the time of Muhammad – more than implying that Islam itself did not develop outside the influence of the Roman empire that Fergus knew so well. It will take decades for scholars to absorb the impact of the essays Fergus wrote *after* the three large volumes that Fergus, Hannah, and I put together. Fergus was and is among the giants of ancient history, a different and worthy successor to Syme.

And yet, Fergus himself told me point blank in 1979 that what really mattered was character. Brilliant guys are a dime a dozen he said. Character is what counts. How and why Fergus became a man of such tolerance, generosity, humanity, integrity, and courage I do not know and it does not really matter to all of the people that he so profoundly and positively affected over decades through his scholarship and generosity. He was the greatest man I met as an adult.

There will never be another Fergus Millar. Yet Fergus' way lives on. Fergus' scholarship and values have been passed down through generations by his students and now have spread all over the world. Teenage students in Shanghai this summer were introduced to Flavius Josephus. Somewhere I can hear Fergus inviting them into his office to talk about the *Jewish Antiquities*. He welcomes them in that reassuring voice of his. "Come in, come in" he says. The circle is open, unbroken, and getting larger.

Thank you Fergus for everything you gave to us. A Man's a Man For A' That.

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Hannah Cotton-Paltiel, *Scripta Classica Israelica* XXXIX (2020)

With the departure of Professor Sir Fergus Millar (DLitt, DPhil, FBA, FSA) on 15 July 2019 an era in the study of the Roman world has come to an end. That era that was marked by the volume, the range and the impact of his writings on everything from Republican times to late Antiquity, by his teaching, and, just as much, by his unique personality.

Millar's huge influence on generations of scholars all over the world bears eloquent witness to the effects of his vast and manifold writings and teaching. At the same time, his reputation derives no less from his humanity, generosity and integrity. In this sense the title of one of his most important contributions to the study of ancient history, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), which centres on the theme of petition and response, fits Fergus Millar's place in the academic world to perfection. For while he stood at the peak of his academic career and achievements, Fergus Millar never lost sight of us, his students, "his subjects", who were struggling to master our respective fields of knowledge, trying to obtain academic positions, seeking promotions and striving to become fully-fledged members of the academic world. Nor was he blind to other aspects of our lives, which scarcely touched our academic performance: our boyfriends and girlfriends, and later on our partners, our children, our hopes, our struggles and successes — and our failures too.

Fergus Millar was trained in the British classical tradition, receiving a traditional secondary school education in Edinburgh which gave him mastery of both Latin and Greek, and an intimate acquaintance with the literature, the languages, and the then conventional views of Roman history. From there he went on to Oxford, where he studied ancient history and philosophy at Trinity College (1955-58). A prize fellowship at All Souls College (1958-64 enabled him to write, under the supervision of Sir Ronald Syme, a DPhil dissertation on Cassius Dio which was published as a book in 1964. In that year he became a fellow and tutor at Queen's College Oxford, where he remained until 1976, when he was appointed Professor of Ancient History at University College London (1976-84). Between 1975 and 1979 he served as editor of the Journal of Roman Studies. He returned to Oxford as Camden Professor of Ancient History and fellow of Brasenose College (1984-2002), and after his retirement continued to teach and take part in the activities of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish studies until his death. He was knighted in 2010.

Perhaps the most surprising, yet also the most dramatically fruitful, aspect of his academic oeuvre is his deep involvement with the history of the Jewish people. This was displayed initially in the new, four-volume, English edition of Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (176 B.C.-A.D. 135), published together with Geza Vermes and, later, Martin Goodman. In undertaking this formidable project of revising and updating the original German edition, Fergus Millar did "as much as any classical scholar in the twentieth century to make the historical experience of the Jewish people during the Hellenistic and Roman eras central to the study of classical history" (so G.M. Rogers in the "Introduction" to Rome and the Greek World, and the East I: The Roman Republic and the Augustan Revolution, p. xii).

And yet, quite in character, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ is presented, as it says in the introduction, as a tribute to Emil Schürer's "immense diligence, scholarship and judgement", for it does not offer new interpretations, not even those of the translators themselves (vol. I, p. vii). Such restraint is scarcely to be imagined these days in a young (Fergus was then only 35) scholar. Our only excuse is that we need "to be (promoted) or not to be".

I had the immense good fortune to become his DPhil student in 1973. I must have caused him some puzzlement and more worry, spending as I did more time in Rome and London than in the Ashmolean Reading Room — not to mention my absence from the required daily ritual of coffee-break at 11:00 AM. Having never left Israel before, I thought I should become acquainted with the "ruins" that were Rome, and the edifying entertainment one could find at Covent Garden and Stratford-upon-Avon, rather than devote my whole time to the writing of a DPhil in Roman History on the utterly prosaic subject of "Letters of Recommendation in Latin from Cicero to Pliny". At the last minute, at Fergus's suggestion, I added to it an appendix on "Documentary Letters of Recommendation". This gave me a first taste of work on documentary evidence, papyri and inscriptions; of the latter, Fergus greatly approved as a life-long and worthy pursuit, as indeed it has become for me. I am not the only one to have been put on the right track by him — and like many only half conscious of having been placed there.

Despite his formal achievements, he never felt himself bound by the formal titles of his chairs nor by the traditions attached to them. Nor was he content with library research from known sources. He wished to feel the very places where the events had taken place. He believed that a historian had to understand the physical/geographic context in which things transpired. He therefore spent time traveling to Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and quite a few times to Israel ("up to the snowbound peak of Mount Hermon" with the late Zvi Yavetz) before embarking on *The Roman Near East 31 BC-AD 337* (1993). Likewise, he toured Rome with a copy of Coarelli's Guidebook when turning to write on the Republic in what became *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic* (1998) and *The Roman Republic in Political Thought* (2002). The latter was the printed version of the Jerusalem Lectures in History for 2007, given in Memory of Menahem Stern, a scholar whom he greatly loved and admired.

I accompanied him on a trip to the Galilee in September 2009 to see as many of the synagogues as possible in order to gain insight into their function and Sitz im Leben. This was not simply scholarly tourism: as I discovered later it resulted in "Inscriptions, Synagogues and Rabbis in Late Antique Palestine", published in the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* (2011).

His supervisor, Ronald Syme, was famously an outsider, from New Zealand. So too was Arnaldo Momigliano, his predecessor in University College, London, who came to Britain as a refugee from Italy. Fergus Millar, as a Scot, was an insider but he was not a member of what to many looked, and still sometimes looks, like a self-perpetuating Oxford club. He wanted to shake it up. He desired British scholars to see that their grasp of their subject matter was limited. They needed to broaden their outlook by looking for new evidence as well as reconsidering and re-evaluating the evidence already at their disposal, the writings of ancient authors (other than historians), the documentary material, legal texts and the archaeological evidence. Above all he constantly posed new questions, looking not only at the Romans

themselves, but at all the peoples who inhabited the Roman Empire. Such a piece of literature as The Golden Ass, religious writing, legal texts — all had the potential to be new sources of historical evidence. It is precisely because he was so deeply aware that all we are left with on which to base our understanding of the nature of the ancient world and the course of its history amounts to no more than fragments that he insisted that everything was relevant, and therefore capable of being used legitimately as sources for our understanding of the past. No wonder he was impatient with people who spent their time mechanically applying "theories" — for there was so much material that had yet to be sifted through and digested.

Nonetheless, he was very appreciative of those scholars who limited themselves to the collection of historical facts without asking weighty historical questions: prosopographers, papyrologists, epigraphists and other experts on one or another piece of arcana. But I doubt that he would have called them "historians" as he understood the term. Although his technique seems to be very "Scottish-empirical" and dry, he was not against theory. Over-arching generalizations can be made as answers to questions, so long as those making them ground them in a thorough sifting of the evidence — especially new evidence — and so long as these generalizations are presented tentatively, in the anticipation that the discovery of a new piece of evidence may prove them false.

Of course in order to be able to use all that evidence one has to be blessed with a capacious memory, whether inside one's head or on paper. Fergus made and used myriad handwritten cards and notes, in a good (because it worked) old-fashioned way.

However, it is no use making notes unless you can recall that you have made them, and what their relevance is. Fergus's breadth was astonishing: the politics of the Republic, its legacy in political theory, the height of the Empire and its mechanisms, the multi-national East, the late Roman Empire, its transition to Islam — all examined in the original source languages, not only Greek and Latin, but Hebrew and Syriac as well. Any one of these would have been enough for a career, and most historians content themselves with only one small niche in any of them.

If at the start of his career Fergus had announced that this was what he would set out to do, he would have been dismissed as a self-deluded megalomaniac. And yet he managed to do it all without anyone feeling that he was overbearing, or that he had over-reached himself.

His personality was unique among scholars, dominant as he was. It would have been natural for a man with such accomplishments to be more than a little self-centred. And yet, having read his books, many people were in awe of him, only to be utterly disarmed once they met him in person and discovered how approachable, friendly and kind he was.

I met him before he was Professor Millar, long before he became Sir Fergus. Nonetheless, like many others, I can testify that none of the accolades and distinctions received changed him in the least; if anything, his generosity increased and became a tremendous burden of responsibility and duties: writing letters of recommendation, reviewing manuscripts, advising, and encouraging former students — often also mature scholars — to go on producing and developing, even changing.

Fergus is survived by the family that was always the real centre of his life: his wife Susanna (Friedmann), their children, Sarah, Andrew and Jonathan, and seven grandchildren.

Susanna was the love of his life. It was at the Old Library of All Souls College, during a lecture on Jewish history by David Daube, that he saw her for the first time — and fell in love. So he told us with warm pride, sitting in the same room, on the occasion of the celebration of his 80th birthday in 2015.

I would like to thank my husband, Ari Paltiel, who has shared my life-long friendship with Fergus Millar as well as the feelings which went into this Tribute.