Fergus Millar has contributed substantially to the debates on an amazing number of the problems and questions of Roman history, often being the prime formulator of those debates. The present volume provides ample proof for this claim. Still, I maintain that his work on the political and administrative role of the Emperor and the central and provincial administration in imperial times is the most influential part of his work.¹ This paper offers a reappraisal of this part of Millar’s œuvre, focussing on one of the central tenets of the topic just mentioned, the administrative communication between centre and periphery. This is, of course, just one aspect of the wider thematic field of the relations between centre and periphery in the Roman Empire. Theoreticians from many disciplines have developed approaches to this subject. The present discussion is confined to the abovementioned one.² The analysis will begin with a description of Millar’s most important arguments, followed by a discussion of the most influential criticisms. After evaluating the impact of the critiques, I will go on to debate some new perspectives of where we can go from here.

Unfortunately, even when narrowing the focus as proposed above, it is nearly impossible to give just a short introduction to the work of Fergus Millar. Not because there is nothing to talk about. Quite the contrary. Over the years Millar has drawn up an extremely rich tableau of ideas about how centre and periphery communicated and interacted throughout the Empire from the time of the Republic to Late Antiquity. But the very essence of Millar’s ideas, his method and understanding of history, at least as I read

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¹ This may be a personal bias, as I have been studying these questions for some fifteen years now.

them, is that his positions and arguments are extremely well documented.\(^3\) It is this scrupulous attention paid to the source material which can hardly be given the proper attention in a short article. A cursory survey of the pieces of evidence that are relevant to the topic under discussion would, unfortunately, be of no use either to them or to this writer. Millar’s work will therefore be discussed in a more abstract or essayist form. The dangers of this method are obvious. I hope that there will be some advantages, too. I would like to begin with some methodological questions.

1. Methodology

Millar ended his programmatic article, ‘Emperors at Work’, with the firing of a red warning flare: “Where, as here, we are dealing with a social system totally foreign to our own experience, common sense, ‘judgment’, the making of reasonable assumptions about what must have happened, are all equally irrelevant, indeed positively misleading. One may make valid deductions from comparable procedures in other parts of the same social system, but no others.”\(^4\) This comment certainly sets the tone for the work to come, at least for every scholar who, like me, considers theoretical approaches in themselves legitimate and helpful. The theme is taken up again in the preface of Millar’s most famous work, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (from here on ERW).\(^5\) Here, the author again comments on his methodology: no sociological works and models. This statement has often been taken as indicating a complete rejection of sociology, “la ciencia vaga sin domicilio conocido”, as José Bergamín once called it.\(^6\) To me, such a reading of Millar seems to be an oversimplification. Immediately after his oft-cited statement about sociological literature, Millar goes on to express his hope that students will make use of his work when trying to compare various other societies with Rome. And what follows is in fact a sociological commentary on the role, activity and representation of the Emperor in the Roman World. The language of the preface and afterword of *ERW*

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\(^5\) *The Emperor in the Roman World* (Oxford 1992), IX.

\(^6\) Quoted here from E. Santamaría, *La incógnita del extraño. Una aproximación a la significación sociológica de la “inmigración no comunitaria”* (Barcelona 2002), 15.