



KEITH HOPKINS

# Morris Keith Hopkins

## 1934–2004<sup>1</sup>

‘BE BOLD, BLOODY, AND YOURSELF.’ Such was the advice Keith Hopkins offered to a group of his early Cambridge graduate students, and he seemed to be transmitting his own code of scholarly behaviour. It certainly took a considerable amount of audacity to do all that Hopkins did to broaden the study of ancient and in particular Roman history. Yet the rethinking he advocated was not always well understood, and it remains to some extent an open question how deep the effects of his work have been and will be. Whether this is more because of the bloodiness of the reformer, the conservatism of his colleagues, or the utopian nature of the changes he hoped to bring about, could be endlessly debated. Of course anyone can be bloody: Hopkins wanted the sort of bloodiness that would lead to a more imaginative ancient history (‘empathy’ was a favourite word) and effectively diminish the amount of humbug and triviality perpetrated by his fellow ancient-historians; this was essentially an optimistic mission.

When Hopkins looked back on his tenure of the Cambridge chair that he had long desired and then occupied for sixteen years, he was dissatisfied with himself; but it can easily be argued that no one in his generation did more to keep the subject in vigorous health. He introduced new topics, and demonstrated the importance of topics that had once been marginal. Having learned historical sociology (from Elias, Giddens, and others), he was able to conduct a series of structural analyses of Roman society such as had rarely if ever been attempted by previous historians. He arguably

<sup>1</sup> I am profoundly indebted to Rachel Hopkins for letting me see a videotaped interview that she conducted with her father on 25 January 2004.

did as much as anyone in this field has ever done to make his colleagues reflect about historical method. And over a long period, because of the breadth of his interests and the accessibility of his writing, he shared with his mentor Moses Finley much of the privilege and responsibility of telling British scholars in other specialities what the ancient world had really been like. As much as anyone since Momigliano, he suggested to a wide variety of them not only that Roman history was an intrinsically important field but that some of its practitioners were sometimes worth reading. And it may be added that although the sales of Hopkins's book *A World Full of Gods* did not rival those of say *The World of Odysseus* (the book which gained Finley a non-specialist following), he spoke to a larger public—often, in recent years, on television—than most other scholars reach. What that public heard, whether it knew it or not, was a deeply original voice.

What scholars encountered, when they listened to Hopkins or read his works, was a sharp intelligence and a person who derived deep satisfaction as well as frequent amusement from applying that intelligence to history and historians. What saved him from excessive bloodiness, in the eyes of those who knew him well, was that he criticised himself as searchingly as he criticised anyone else. He constantly wanted to improve his practice of the historian's art. In his later career, therefore, he tried hard to fashion a new kind of ancient history appropriate to the 1990s, an effort that was in the end partially frustrated. But his colleagues also encountered a personality that was sometimes too aggressive to be capable of persuasion. With people he liked, Hopkins was charming to the point of seductiveness, and he judged with fine precision just how much self-revelation conduced to solid friendship. As an ancient historian he deserves to be remembered as one of the most original, perhaps the most original, of his generation, notwithstanding many flaws in his work and one large scholarly argosy that did not return to port.

Morris Keith Hopkins was born at Sutton in Surrey on 20 June 1934, and died in Cambridge shortly after twelve on the night of 8–9 March 2004. His father Albert was a successful trader in textiles, his paternal grandfather was a Kentish stone-mason. For the first seven years of Hopkins's life, his father worked for a London firm in what is now Ghana, and visited England and his two children at rare intervals. His mother Hélène was the daughter of an Austrian Jewish lady ('Austrian' in the pre-1918 sense), Helen Wagschal or Wagschall, who was born in Isfahan. She was the daughter of a Russian dentist who was naturalised as an American but practised in court circles in Iran, a world that is

vivaciously described by the dentist's sister under the pseudonym 'Khush-Amed' in a volume entitled *Memoirs of a Lady Dentist and her Experiences in the East* (London: H. J. Drane, 1907).

Helen Wagschal eventually moved to England, in circumstances which cannot now be known, and survived long enough for her beauty and her 'outrageous' behaviour to make strong impressions on her young grandson. Hélène was sent to a Catholic school but remained Jewish in some sense, later getting baptised in order to be married. While she was a young mother she mostly resided in the Gold Coast too, so that the two Hopkins children, Keith and his older sister April, did not live with both parents until Keith had been some years in boarding schools. He first went away to school before his fourth birthday, and entered Brentwood School at the age of seven, leaving in 1952.

Legend has it that the six-year-old Hopkins wrote a precocious letter from school asking for books by Gibbon and Macaulay so that he could get down to writing the history of ancient Rome. The letter in question, which is undated but clearly belongs to that period of the boy's life, does not mention Gibbon, Macaulay or any other author, but asks for books so that the writer can become 'a great man'. Meanwhile there were war-time hazards for anyone in the vicinity of London. His sister recalls an occasion when, while they were staying in Hampstead, an explosion, which must have been a V-1 or a V-2 rocket, blew out the French windows in the room where the children lay in bed. Their mother reacted fatalistically, far too much so in April's opinion.

Hopkins did not send any of his five children to a boarding school. He was inclined to puncture the pretensions of Brentwood. But this ambitious youth did very well there, and not only as a pupil; he was also part of the establishment—senior NCO of the cadet force, captain of the chess team (an unusual combination), yet also editor of the school magazine, a member of the rugby XV, head of his house, and finally senior prefect of the whole school. Photographs show a good-looking young man sitting next to the headmaster, wearing a gown and also a proper expression of entitlement. Classics were still at that time regarded in such schools as almost the only proper intellectual activity for the most able pupils: in short, Hopkins conformed and excelled, and in December 1952 he was elected to an Exhibition in Classics at King's College, Cambridge (later he became a Scholar). He knew how to accept responsibilities, more than most males of his age, and he had a thorough knowledge of Greek and Latin.

If this upbringing had any lasting ill effects, they were invisible in the later decades of his life. Those who knew him when he was young are inclined to suppose that his early life made for a level of irascibility that

diminished only in the 1960s and 1970s. As his bloodiness gradually confined itself to specialised academic channels, a sense of his own imperfections came more into view; this was indeed one of his most attractive characteristics.

Early in 1953, the eighteen-year-old visited the United States for the first time, as Britain's representative to a 'world high school forum', which meant many weeks of seeing the sights in different parts of the country. Enthusiastic letters home still survive. The other surviving record is a photograph of the international delegation of students in the company of a quite bemused-looking President Eisenhower.

National service followed. Hopkins had no special affinity for the sea, but he did have an affinity for Russian and entered the Royal Navy's language programme. After basic training, Midshipman M. K. Hopkins completed a year of Russian at London University (School of Slavonic Studies), and then six months of further training at the Joint Services School at Bodmin, qualifying as a 'Service Interpreter' in February 1955. He was not displeased to recall later that out of 300 or 400 who began the course, only twenty-five were commissioned at the end of it. Besides Russian, he also learned that a high proportion of naval officers continued to come from prominent public schools.

At King's too, as an undergraduate, Hopkins seems to have been especially aware of the peculiarities of the British class system, all the more so because during several vacations—and this was a most unusual thing to do—he taught in a secondary modern school where his best pupils were, in his opinion, excluded from Oxbridge precisely by class and not by lack of ability. At the same time he could see the social mobility in his own family: his father, he used to say, was a cockney, though well-to-do and an aggressive Tory.

Hopkins was taught classics at King's by L. P. Wilkinson and Donald Lucas, but as an undergraduate he probably did not at first see himself as a future scholar. His Part I Tripos result was a II.1, which makes it very difficult to suppose that he was deeply engaged by the classics. Sir Nicholas Goodison recalls 'play[ing] bridge in each other's rooms in Bodley's Court, usually with a bottle of something good chosen by him from the College's wine list—then extraordinarily good value because the College never raised the price'. In or about 1957, however, Hopkins attended a seminar taught jointly by Cambridge's two most prominent ancient historians, A. H. M. Jones and Moses Finley,<sup>2</sup> and in his third year Finley was his

<sup>2</sup> Finley must still have seemed very American: he had only had a regular position at Cambridge since 1955.

supervisor; it can be conjectured that Hopkins now quickly saw that ancient history could be a real intellectual challenge. And Finley, he said, made him work as he had never worked before.

Not that his progression into academia was unhesitating, and there was some thought of following a career similar to his father's. He also took and passed the Civil Service exam. A year in America was in fashion, however, and before the Tripos results were known he was accepted by the History Department at the University of Illinois in Urbana, where he spent a year acquiring a wider historical education than Cambridge offered to its classicists.

Hopkins's first in Part II of the Classical Tripos in 1958 must have helped to convince Jones, who was Professor of Ancient History, to encourage his academic inclinations: in 1959 he took up a State Studentship and was awarded the university's Henry Arthur Thomas Studentship. Jones was writing his encyclopaedic *The Later Roman Empire*, and it must have been with his help that Hopkins saw that late antiquity was at that time practically a historian's Eldorado; this was to be Hopkins's scholarly focus for four or five years (but not thereafter, one can only guess why). The crucial influence right at the beginning was, however, Finley, who was beginning to work a scholarly revolution in those years, helped by a wide historical education, a magnetic personality, and considerable ambition. Finley, like Arnaldo Momigliano, saw and deplored the intellectual insularity of ancient history in Britain, and most of all the feebleness of a view of antiquity that paid no attention to such fundamental facts of ancient life as slavery.

From Urbana, then, it was back to Cambridge (with stays in Tübingen and Geneva), where Hopkins started a never-to-be-completed Ph.D. dissertation with Jones as his supervisor; its intended subject is no longer clear, but from a phrase Hopkins wrote some six years later it appears that contraception under the Roman Empire was at least part of the object of his research.<sup>3</sup> Another early line of inquiry produced his first scholarly article, 'Social Mobility in the Later Roman Empire: the Evidence of Ausonius',<sup>4</sup> a well-written essay in which a single family is used as a lever to overturn the then-popular notion that late-Roman society was highly immobile. Nowadays one might carp about this argument, but in 1961 Jones and Finley—and Hopkins—were the only ancient historians

<sup>3</sup> 'Contraception in the Roman Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8 (1965–6), 124 n\*.

<sup>4</sup> *Classical Quarterly*, 11 (1961), 239–49.

who were capable of formulating a sustained argument about social mobility at all—and Hopkins was the one who did it. Meanwhile Finley was determined that Hopkins should overcome what he saw (not without some envy, in my view) as the defects of a British classical education: he needed to learn some social science, and for Finley that meant above all sociology or economics.

In those days young British academics moved quite quickly into teaching positions, and when the lectureship or teaching fellowship came, you took it. In 1961 the Sociology Department at the University of Leicester, which was headed by the distinguished Ilya Neustadt,<sup>5</sup> and also contained the equally distinguished though not yet famous Norbert Elias, needed assistant lecturers. The appointments committee presumably had little difficulty in selecting Anthony Giddens, a fresh Ph.D. in Sociology and the future director of the London School of Economics. The simultaneous appointment of Hopkins was more daring, since he had no serious sociological credentials whatsoever, and it was engineered by Moses Finley, as Hopkins later recounted; Neustadt, however, was the person who had to take his courage into his hands. Later on, Hopkins more or less seriously credited Giddens with having taught him sociology; and both of them used to attend the lectures of Elias. The latter ‘emphasized’, in Giddens’s words, ‘a comparative and developmental approach to sociology, which clearly resonated with Keith’s approach to ancient history’. Giddens also recalls the great scandal young Hopkins caused by entering the Leicester University senior common room not wearing a tie. But he was not staying for long: he learned sociology so rapidly that two years later he was given a position at Britain’s social-science power-house, LSE.

He was teaching sociology but his work continued to have Roman history as its object: he began writing a fellowship dissertation for King’s called *The Later Roman Aristocracy: a Demographic Profile*. In this first large-scale work (never published as such), he argued that under the emperors Rome’s senatorial order suffered from serious infertility, and then explored in detail various possible explanations.<sup>6</sup> King’s was impressed and awarded Hopkins a fellowship, which he held from 1963 until 1967. Not even Finley had written about ancient demography, and the truly modern bibliography of the subject consisted of a single article

<sup>5</sup> See T. H. Marshall’s account of him in A. Giddens and G. Mackenzie (eds.), *Social Class and the Division of Labour: Essays in Honour of Ilya Neustadt* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. xi–xvi.

<sup>6</sup> See ‘Elite Mobility in the Roman Empire’, *Past and Present*, 32 (1965), 12–26: 24–26, repr. in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society* (London, 1974), pp. 103–20: 117–19.

in the *American Journal of Sociology*.<sup>7</sup> Another remarkable piece of work in this period was the article ‘Eunuchs in Politics in the Later Roman Empire’,<sup>8</sup> which gave quite magisterially a structural explanation of the rise and continuation of the eunuchs’ power in the late imperial court, showing how even their nasty reputation (‘lizards and toads’ are the words of Basil of Caesarea) had a definite function.

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In 1963 Keith Hopkins met and married Juliet Phelps Brown, a child-therapist in the making and a powerful intellect who was to have a large influence on his personality (it can be presumed that she was in part responsible for her husband’s undergoing a year of psychoanalysis in the mid-1960s) and on his work as well (throughout their married life she read most of his work in time to offer useful criticism). They had three children together, Rachel, Edmund and Ben, all of them great sources of parental pride.

Hopkins was now the son-in-law of the labour economist Sir Henry Phelps Brown, who also became a scholarly adviser and helped him mature as a social scientist. Phelps Brown, he wrote in 1978, had given him ‘repeated tutorials in economics’, and the lessons were highly visible.

The student was now on a par with his Cambridge teachers, and both Jones and Finley recognised his extraordinary ability; a quiet remark in the preface of *The Later Roman Empire* reveals that the only scholar to whom Jones had entrusted a reading of the whole of Part II, the ambitious analytic part of the book, had been ‘Mr. Keith Hopkins of London University’.

The move to LSE (assistant lecturer in Sociology 1963, lecturer 1964) was brought about by the professor of demography there, D. V. Glass. He had been asked by King’s to assess Hopkins’s fellowship thesis; having read it, he ‘telephoned and offered me a job’, pointing out that if Hopkins really wanted to learn demography, LSE not Cambridge was the place to be. King’s most obligingly allowed him to retain his fellowship. The move in the direction of sociology seemed more pronounced now, and it must have been in the next year or so that Hopkins showed for the first time the strong interest in quantification that was to mark most of his career. This

<sup>7</sup> Some had asked the questions (see for instance R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford, 1960), p. 243), but had not found good ways to answer them.

<sup>8</sup> *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 189 (1963), 62–80, later revised as ch. 4 of *Conquerors and Slaves*.



can be seen in 'The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage' and even more in 'On the Probable Age-Structure of the Roman Population'.<sup>9</sup> These two articles can be said without exaggeration to be the beginning of serious study of the historical demography of the ancient world. In both cases Hopkins essentially set the terms of the debate that has unrolled ever since. 'Contraception in the Roman Empire' was another wonderfully original paper;<sup>10</sup> as with demography, the subject was not utterly new, but it had not previously received informed or thoughtful treatment, and it certainly was not part of mainstream ancient history. Three papers in three years changed the basis of Roman social history, not simply by putting new topics on the agenda but by showing which techniques would produce the most plausible results. All of these papers are buttressed by the traditional philological and bibliographical prowess of the ancient historian, but their aim was to make an impression on sociologists and social historians: the choice of the journals to publish in (see above, notes 3 and 9) was not casual. And though the majority of the problems addressed were quite technical, one of the most impressive qualities of these contributions is the author's concern with wider issues, including family and emotions: Hopkins was already thinking about empathy, a central theme in his later work.

The degree to which Hopkins now carried conviction as a sociologist was indicated in 1964 when he was appointed review editor of the *British Journal of Sociology* (a position he held until he left Britain in 1967). And he enjoyed himself greatly at LSE: one graduate student of that time, John Cooke, has recalled how in a weekly seminar 'Keith opened our eyes each week both to the classics of sociology and anthropology and to the relevance of applying them to comparative history.'<sup>11</sup> The extraordinary degree to which Hopkins managed to live a double intellectual life in this period is illustrated by another sociology paper based on extensive research, 'Civil-Military Relations in Developing Countries',<sup>12</sup> which reflects contemporary concern, ostensibly non-ideological, with 'development' in poor countries and with the effects on this process of military coups. In the same year there came out another enormously wide-ranging

<sup>9</sup> *Population Studies*, 18 (1964–5), 309–27, and 20 (1966–7), 245–64.

<sup>10</sup> *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8 (1965–6), 124–51. Cf. also the sure-footed little paper 'A Textual Emendation in a Fragment of Musonius Rufus: a Note on Contraception', *Classical Quarterly*, 15 (1965), 72–4.

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 13 April 2004.

<sup>12</sup> *British Journal of Sociology*, 17 (1966), 165–82.

paper, 'Slavery in Classical Antiquity'.<sup>13</sup> This and 'Structural Differentiation in Rome (200–31 BC): the Genesis of an Historical Bureaucratic Society',<sup>14</sup> were leading towards the kind of structural analysis of Roman society and Roman imperialism that finally came together in *Conquerors and Slaves* (1978). It hardly mattered if he did not quite get the vectors of Roman expansion right: he was far ahead of anyone else.

All this could have led to a chair in sociology in Britain, but the first interesting chair that was open was in Hong Kong, with the double advantage that it could be done on secondment from LSE and that it looked like a clear break with classics. Hopkins's closest relatives were somewhat dismayed that he intended to transplant himself to Hong Kong, but once the opportunity arose acceptance was overdetermined: Hopkins took his family with him, and he found out for himself what the British colonial world was like, and how to run a sociology department. The appointment (which was for three years) seemed to mean giving up ancient history—sociology written in Hong Kong could hardly be about the Romans. Yet that seems not to have been Hopkins's long-term intention: he was already at the centre of the debate about ancient history (in so far as such a sprawling subject can ever be said to be concentrated in a single debate), and he knew it, and there was a powerful need to finish the structural and sociological book about the Roman Empire that eventually became *Conquerors and Slaves*. Hopkins indubitably saw that Finley was likely to succeed to the Cambridge chair (as he did in 1970), and that he would have to retire by 1979. There was a grand solution to the sociology-or-ancient-history dilemma, only available to a person of great mental energy: do both.

The new professor of sociology threw himself energetically into studying Hong Kong's massive housing problem. Research teams from the Sociology Department set about documenting the colony's intense over-crowding, in conditions which were made more difficult by the Cultural Revolution (the inhabitants had four hours of water every four days in the summer of 1967). Hopkins took a lesson in Cantonese every day, measured rooms without number, and wrote four papers on Hong Kong housing, one of which, 'Housing the Poor', appeared in a book he edited under the title *Hong Kong: the Industrial Colony. A Political, Social and Economic Survey* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1971),

<sup>13</sup> In A. de Reuck and J. Knight (eds.), *Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches* (London, 1966), pp. 166–77.

<sup>14</sup> In I. M. Lewis (ed.), *History and Social Anthropology* (London, 1968), pp. 63–79.

pp. 271–335.<sup>15</sup> The essay begins ‘Hong Kong is a cruel society in which very little assistance is given to the poor’, and proceeds to document the assertion: ‘in 1956 . . . , in the most overcrowded district, the average living space was only 12 sq. ft. . . . per person’. ‘It is amazing that [the] overt paternalism [of the Hong Kong government] has survived . . .’; what rendered such conditions tolerable for many was the colony’s almost unparalleled economic growth since the Second World War. He remembered the colonial officials years later (‘arrogant, self-centred, narrow-minded’), but also asserted, typically, that he, not they, had been mistaken about housing policy (it appears<sup>16</sup> that he had recommended that the government should divert resources from building high-rise blocks of flats into improving physical conditions in Hong Kong’s large areas of improvised squatter housing). At all events, he departed rich in memories of Hong Kong sounds and smells. And the Roman historian had seen something of what he thought ancient poverty might have looked like. The ‘cruel society’ most in his mind was Rome.

There was also another sense in which Hopkins became a real sociologist in Hong Kong: he was able to think of research projects being carried out by groups, a largely alien mode of operation for British historians and classicists at that time. This was to continue: all three of Hopkins’s ancient history books were in one way or another the results of collaboration.

After two years, at all events, Hopkins decided that he had had enough of Hong Kong. Having won an invitation to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton as a social scientist (though the School of Social Sciences, soon to be headed by Clifford Geertz, had not yet formally come into being),<sup>17</sup> he resigned from his Hong Kong chair. His parting comment to the *Hong Kong Standard* complained about the ‘slow development’ of his department, and about the unrest of the university’s lecturers he said that it would be ‘strange if lecturers do not take a critical view of the university they are teaching in’.

In retrospect what seems most anomalous about this sequence of events is not that Hopkins went to Hong Kong and investigated housing—

<sup>15</sup> Phelps Brown was among the contributors. Hopkins also published his inaugural lecture *Public Housing Policy in Hong Kong* (in the University of Hong Kong *Gazette*, Supplement of 21 May 1969), and ‘Public and Private Housing in Hong Kong’, in D. J. Dwyer (ed.), *The City as a Centre of Change in Asia* (Hong Kong, 1971), pp. 200–15.

<sup>16</sup> See Hopkins’s article in *UNICEF News* no. 77 (1973), 16–19. But there is some unclarity on this point.

<sup>17</sup> Given the way the Institute functioned in those days, it seems likely that J. F. Gilliam played an important role in arranging this invitation: he was certainly an admirer of Hopkins’s work.

that was a brilliant educational idea; what surprises is that during the rest of his career, which included fifteen years as a sociologist in London—fifteen years that saw the beginning of the Thatcher period—he never spoke out on any question of public policy. Hopkins was indeed politically moderate even when young (though he never, he said, voted Conservative); he would explain that he did not believe that any political party or movement was likely to produce a net decrease in social injustice. ‘Right and Left are not the terms in which I think’, he was once quoted as saying in an academic context,<sup>18</sup> and there was some truth in that; at all events, he always seems to have avoided a markedly left or right identity. Meanwhile there was a vast amount of work to do, both in ancient history and, after 1972, in building up the social sciences at Brunel.

After the Institute for Advanced Study, Hopkins returned to LSE for two years, as a senior lecturer in sociology. A squib in the *TLS* (March 31, 1972) entitled ‘Classicists and Sociologists’ accused the ancient historians of living in a hermetic world and of being indifferent to generalisation; the author sensibly remarked that matters might improve ‘if ancient historians spent one paragraph in each article explaining the significance of their problem’. Several ancient historians are accused, but three are praised, Peter Brunt, Finley of course—and, less predictably perhaps, Momigliano. The same year provided two enormous opportunities: he joined the editorial board of the young and innovative Trevor Aston-led *Past and Present* (in a sense replacing A. H. M. Jones, who had died in 1970), and he was appointed Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the also still young Brunel University (created in 1966)—with the great advantage of staying in London. For a number of years he did much to shape *Past and Present*’s ancient-historical side (eventually he grew less interested, but did not resign until 1999); this work is the subject of a memoir by his Cambridge successor, Robin Osborne.<sup>19</sup>

The Brunel appointment meanwhile took up a great deal of energy, and Hopkins’s colleague Peter Seglow recalls how everyone in the department shared in such tasks as interviewing the undergraduate applicants. The ideological wars of the 1970s sometimes made themselves felt, and for a time Hopkins was quite unpopular with the left-wing staff. But his reputation as a departmental administrator grew (which is worth mentioning, since he never had such a reputation later on in the Classics Faculty at Cambridge), and that was what led to his being appointed

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Times*, 16 May 1976.

<sup>19</sup> *Past and Present*, 185 (2004), 3–7.

Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (1981–5). It was a difficult era of Thatcherian cuts and their after-effects.

The subject of his inaugural lecture at Brunel was nicely selected to connect social anthropology and antiquity: brother–sister marriage in Roman Egypt, an anomalous but well-attested phenomenon—familiar to scholars but still mysterious. Hopkins's study of the problem was so detailed that in many countries the author would have thought that it was a book.<sup>20</sup> He was probably better equipped to explain this custom and its long persistence than anyone had ever been, yet it was a sign of things to come in his intellectual life that instead of arguing for any single explanation he left the issue open and made a prolonged effort to understand the feelings as well as the life-situations of those involved.

The years spent at Brunel allowed a long series of debates with other ancient historians in various settings in the University of London which are invariably remembered with nostalgia by those who took part in them, or at least by those who lived to tell the tale (for it was here that Hopkins delivered his technique of lethal intervention). Deep disagreements were no obstacle, and one of the main reasons was Hopkins, his energy and originality.

This period also saw him quite often in North America, as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania (1974), a member of the Institute for Advanced Study again in 1974–5,<sup>21</sup> and as a visiting professor for one quarter at UCLA (1979). During the second of these visits I invited him to lecture at Columbia, which was our first meeting. At the start of his lecture, the speaker came out from behind the lectern, sat cheerfully on the small table in front of it, and looking as well as sounding like something completely new explained the Romans to us for sixty extraordinarily stimulating minutes. A long and festive but also intellectually strenuous evening at my apartment followed, and the beginning of strong affection.

Two major schemes occupied Hopkins's scholarly energies during the 1970s: one was to put together the structural and sociological account of the Roman Empire which he had already been working on at intervals for several years—this was eventually to become both *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978) and *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983). When he was invited to give the Gray Lectures at Cambridge in 1977, at a relatively early age (Moses Finley at work again), he delivered a preliminary version

<sup>20</sup> The lecture was published in expanded form in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 303–54.

<sup>21</sup> He was a member of the Institute for a third time, a rare privilege, in 1983.

of the the two central chapters of *Death and Renewal*—the part that is recognisable as traditional sociology. The other notion was to build a model of the Roman economy, or at least of a very important part of the Roman economy—this became ‘Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire’ (1980),<sup>22</sup> the culmination of work going back a decade.

*Conquerors and Slaves* and *Death and Renewal* were presented as a single project, ‘Sociological Studies in Roman History’, volumes 1 and 2, and they served as an aggressive manifesto. The introduction to the first volume says that it is

an attempt to analyse a changing social structure and to evoke a lost world. It is also an attempt to apply some modern sociological concepts and techniques to Roman history. . . . The achievements of the Roman world need to be interpreted with *empathetic understanding* [my italics] of what the Romans themselves thought and with concepts which we ourselves use.

A less lucid paragraph proclaims the importance of ‘enter[ing] the thought-world of the Romans’, and accuses other ancient historians of having failed to do this because they attributed too much modern rationality to the ancients. The charge was not completely unfair, but such sweeping claims grated even on those who were willing to learn. When the author wrote ironically about those who were interested in facts and evidence, it was all too clear that in practice he relied on them as much as most historians and indeed more than some others. He let it be known that he was against the established methods, while in the preface he acknowledged the help of several of those who practised them; the debt to Brunt was particularly clear. The provocation was very effective in a sense, if not always productive: the book was widely reviewed by ancient historians and led many of them to serious reflection.<sup>23</sup> Others, however, ignored what was really new about his approach, and they must have made the author think that the classicists had changed little since he wrote his *TLS* essay of 1972.

The book is not unified by a single topic, although slavery is at the centre of three of its five chapters. It is, however, unified in a different way: precisely as it claimed, it exemplified some of the ways in which a sociologist might approach Roman history. The first chapter remains unsurpassed as an account of the complex effects on the republican

<sup>22</sup> *Journal of Roman Studies*, 70 (1980), 101–25.

<sup>23</sup> Thus the mixed review by E. Badian (*Journal of Roman Studies*, 72 (1982), 164–9) included the most extended methodological reflections to be found anywhere in that author’s works, as far as I know.

Romans of seven linked phenomena, ‘continuous war, the influx of booty, its investment in land, the formation of large estates, the impoverishment of peasants, their emigration to towns and the provinces, the growth of urban markets’. What was distinctive about his approach was not so much, as the author claimed, the description of macrohistorical developments which the Romans themselves could not possibly have understood—for those Romans who looked around them certainly noticed the phenomena just mentioned and had some understanding of them. What mattered most was rather his ability to link all these large trends together.<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, however, the section of the book that seems to have won most assent was more traditional in appearance: it analysed some little known ancient evidence, the 1200 or so manumission inscriptions from Delphi (a study in which Hopkins has P. J. Roscoe as his collaborator). Another chapter concerned Rome’s divine emperors, arguing that they provided the empire with ‘symbolic unity’. Nowadays this argument may or may not carry conviction, but it effectively restarted a discussion which had long been stalled.

Some complained that *Conquerors and Slaves* exaggerated the extent of the author’s departure from traditional methods, and it can be said that he did not have the traditionalists quite in focus. But few will now doubt that the onslaught was needed.<sup>25</sup> Nineteen seventy-eight was indeed the year of provocation. The astute review editor of the *Journal of Roman Studies* was inspired to invite Hopkins to review Fergus Millar’s elaborate volume *The Emperor in the Roman World*, the preface of which read as an open challenge to all that was distinctive about the work of Finley and Hopkins. The challenge needed an answer, and the result was a lengthy assault entitled ‘Rules of Evidence’,<sup>26</sup> which, however, criticised the author quite briefly for failing to consider what social scientists had had to say about kingship and at greater length for the more commonplace sin of generalising on the basis of insufficient evidence; also for leaving out ‘the sympathetic understanding of feelings and fears, of ambiguities and ambivalence’.

There is hardly any economic history in any strict sense in *Conquerors and Slaves*, but in the years just before and after the publication of Finley’s influential book *The Ancient Economy* (1973) the economic history of the

<sup>24</sup> The most serious lacuna in this work may have been its failure to choose between a status model of Roman society and a class model (not that that exhausts the options): cf. the comments by B. D. Shaw, *Helios*, 9, 2 (1982), 17–57 at 31–6.

<sup>25</sup> This book seems to have been translated more than any of Hopkins’s other works: it was put into Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and Korean.

<sup>26</sup> *Journal of Roman Studies*, 68 (1978), 178–86.

Roman world became one of the chief objects of Hopkins's reflection. He detached himself from Finley's substantivist view of the Roman economy (perhaps he had not been much attached to it in the first place), according to which genuine growth was always an impossibility. In a series of papers published between 1978 and 1983 Hopkins debated this. A long article called 'Economic Growth and Towns in Classical Antiquity'<sup>27</sup> proposed that contrary to Finley's view, teasingly referred to as 'the current orthodoxy', the Roman Empire brought into being 'a significant volume of inter-regional trade', without directly confronting the issue whether this was accompanied by *per capita* growth across the whole population of the Roman Empire.

Meanwhile (1978–9) the Cambridge chair fell vacant but the election was won by a more seasoned scholar, J. A. Crook.

'Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire' (1980),<sup>28</sup> possibly the Hopkins production that has been most cited in the scholarly literature, represents, together with the revised version written fifteen years later, the culmination of his published thinking about the Roman economy. The argument was that the Romans' extraction of cash taxes from the provinces acted as a powerful stimulus to long-distance trade, and—once again without facing the question of overall growth—Hopkins cautiously distanced himself from what he later called the 'static minimalist' model of the Roman economy that was so dear to Finley. The attractiveness of the argument was not simply that it provided an explanation for the apparent relative prosperity of the Roman Empire, but that it linked so many different phenomena together, in particular the money supply, long-distance trade, government expenditure and levels of taxation. The vulnerability of the model, perhaps not a grave one, is that it assumes a system in equilibrium.

Finally, for the time being, came his introduction to the collective work *Trade in the Ancient Economy*.<sup>29</sup> This set out with considerable elegance two competing models of the economy of the high Roman Empire: the Finley model, which is said to be 'by far the best model available', and something else. But what was that something else? The alternatives were to agree with Finley or to be 'in marginal dispute' with him. The following pages, however, seem to be in far more than marginal disagreement, and the conclusion that 'the Finley model of the ancient economy is

<sup>27</sup> In P. Abrams and E. A. Wrigley (eds.), *Towns in Societies* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 35–77.

<sup>28</sup> See above, n. 22.

<sup>29</sup> In P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins and C. R. Whittaker (eds.), *Trade in the Ancient Economy* (London, 1983), pp. ix–xxv.



sufficiently flexible to incorporate this modest dynamic, without undermining its basic primitivism' must count as one of the most diplomatic sentences Hopkins ever wrote. As Hopkins, and indeed Finley, might have said, the Oedipal blow remained undelivered.<sup>30</sup> And there the matter rested, as far as Hopkins's published views were concerned, until another article of thirteen years later.

*Death and Renewal* might give the impression of being a collection of essays by various hands, but its central section at least is a unity: this consists of 170 pages of lively but down to-earth argumentation about the Roman aristocracy, co-authored by the younger scholar Graham Burton.<sup>31</sup> This centerpiece is framed by essays about gladiatorial games and Roman funerary practices (the latter co-authored by Melinda Letts),<sup>32</sup> which are not sociological in any easily recognised sense but look forward to Hopkins's own more impressionistic and more 'empathetic' later style. The effect of this book on some of us was to make us wish for more, all the way through: chapter 2, for instance, argued in effect that the replacement rate of the republican aristocracy was by aristocratic standards not especially high—though what was original here was not the conclusion itself but its formulation in statistical terms. Few would doubt now that Hopkins and Burton were broadly correct about this, but they could have strengthened their case with a clearer definition of 'aristocracy' and also by some discussion of contemporary perceptions of aristocratic dominance. Chapter 3 is Hopkins at his best, establishing and explaining the still more rapid turnover in the senatorial order of imperial times; he thus brought the emperors' system of government into abruptly sharper focus. Even the most captious critics found this part of the book difficult to fault, and its results remain fundamentally important for the history of Roman government.

*Death and Renewal* seemed to solidify Hopkins's reputation. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1984, and in the following year he was named to the chair of Ancient History at Cambridge in succession to John Crook. Yet the old sociological mission seemed to be running out of passion, and the projected third volume of the series, which was apparently called *The Price of Peace* when it was in effect abandoned, seems not to have received much attention after 1989 or 1990. The on the whole somewhat negative reviews of *Death and Renewal* provoked no published

<sup>30</sup> For Finley's awareness of the psychological relationship see his review of *Death and Renewal* in the *London Review of Books*, 22 Dec. 1983.

<sup>31</sup> The author of an insightful obituary published in *The Guardian*, 29 March 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Now Melinda Letts, OBE, Chairwoman of the Long-term Medical Condition Alliance.

response, and no more than two of his later articles were obviously sociological.<sup>33</sup>

The new professor returned to Cambridge, and also to King's, with enthusiasm. The death of Moses Finley in June 1986 must have been a serious blow, but Hopkins now had research students of his own for the first time, and the institutionalised opportunity to lead ancient historians in novel directions. There was also a fair amount of agreement at that time, though no unanimity, that the undergraduate ancient history curriculum needed to be redesigned, and Hopkins naturally favoured the move away from text-centred ancient history to a more thematic structure. And Cambridge seemed to have declared that Hopkins's kind of ancient history was to be preferred to other kinds.

The good was very good indeed. A considerable cohort of extraordinary graduate students frequented Cambridge in those years, and many of them found Hopkins the most challenging academic presence they had ever encountered; this was as true of specialists in Greek archaeology, for instance, as it was of Roman historians (Hopkins himself was growing more aware of visual evidence). Many learned permanent lessons from him. A tiro scholar who encountered him in that period, Jas Elsner, said that 'he was wonderful . . . in encouraging stones to be thrown in every glass house of the academy, and in urging the young to break all the rules. It was invigorating and exciting.' The word 'invigorating' occurs again and again in such assessments, and he was the only leader in the field who provided, in the words of Greg Woolf, 'the really savage root-and-branch criticism that a bright undergraduate or beginning graduate needs to stop complacency setting in'. And 'he was perfectly happy to be treated the same way by us when he gave papers'.

But in several ways the Cambridge professorial role did not in the end suit Hopkins very well, or such at least was what many thought. He treated some graduate students with what was perceived as unwarranted harshness. Incidents of the latter kind he usually regretted, I believe, for he was far from being an unkind person; but he did not always carry out his professional role as a restrained mentor. And being easily bored by institutional procedures, he paid little attention to the British Academy just as he neglected the Cambridge History Faculty—which harmed the

<sup>33</sup> 'Graveyards for Historians', in F. Hinard (ed.), *La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain* (Caen, 1987), pp. 113–26 (in which he argues that the 43,000 inscriptions of the western Roman Empire that give of the age of the deceased are demographically useless), and an article of 1998 referred to below.

cause of ancient history; in the eyes of some, he also short-shrifted the Classics Faculty.

The Cambridge chair did not of course mean that Hopkins would subside into being a more normal and conventional scholar. *The Price of Peace* continued for a time, but it no longer had the shock value of the first two volumes; and it may be that the disappointing reception of *Death and Renewal* had somewhat undermined the larger project. Egypt exercised more and more fascination (Hopkins, typically, was not to be frightened off by the papyrological mafia), but the project he often called *Crocodile Mummy*, an attempt to enter the social and religious life of Roman Egypt via the use of writing there,<sup>34</sup> took shape slowly and was ultimately absorbed in part into *A World Full of Gods*.

The move towards religious history, and particularly what was exotic and fantastic in ancient religion, was substantially a new interest discovered after the return to Cambridge, notwithstanding some earlier work on emperor-worship. 'From Violence to Blessing', in part a discussion of the strikingly long survival of the archaic feast of the Lupercalia, showed how difficult a task Hopkins had set himself. He attempts to strike a balance between an analytic approach and an empathetic one. The analysis is as trenchant as anything in *Conquerors and Slaves*; but the empathy was more elusive. The sources are entirely arid about what it felt like to be a Lupercal, or to be beaten by the Lupercals, at any date; yet 'we need', so wrote Hopkins, 'to think and feel ourselves back into how different Romans themselves experienced rituals', as an antidote to the elitism of historians both ancient and modern. The aim was a worthy one, but how could the fellow of King's feel like a man or woman in the ancient Roman street? The question continued to echo through Hopkins's work down to the end. Some of his friends wanted him to address it via the lengthy historiographical debates of the past, going back to Febvre and even to Vico, but he preferred to preach by doing; *A World Full of Gods* was the result.

The old sociological Hopkins and his younger brother the economist Hopkins were still at work in the early and middle nineties. 'Conquest by Book' made use of his new work on Egypt to set some context and highly pertinent question marks around some of the contentions in my book *Ancient Literacy*.<sup>35</sup> 'Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery' attempted to

<sup>34</sup> Something of the scope of this plan is indicated in 'Conquest by Book', in M. Beard *et al.*, *Literacy in the Roman World* (*Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Supplement 3) (Ann Arbor, 1991), p. 140 n. 17.

<sup>35</sup> See the volume mentioned in the previous note, pp. 133–58.

evoke the experience of Roman domestic slaves by putting under the microscope the fictitious ancient lives of the slave Aesop.<sup>36</sup> The author tried to show ‘how a master and a slave, and by implication how many masters and many slaves, struggled to negotiate their competing interests’. This paper has been contested and it probably underestimates—oddly enough—the distorting effects of story-telling, but it is nonetheless remarkable, for it shows the historian thinking his way into the life of a Roman slave—which was a very considerable achievement.

In ‘Christian Number and its Implications’<sup>37</sup> the sociologist put together a most extraordinary synthetic history of Christianity in the first four centuries. Here Hopkins seems to decoy the reader into thinking that the main subject is going to be that old problem, the numbers of the primitive Christians,<sup>38</sup> while in fact he intends to go much further and draw some startling conclusions about the spread of Christianity (for example, that there were perhaps forty-two literate Christians in all about 100 AD, and that there is a good structural explanation for the amazing passion of the Christians for dogmatic exclusivism); thus the reader who does not like the conclusions but cannot reject Hopkins’s very plausible numerical reasoning finds him/herself faced with an impossible dilemma—to the great enjoyment of the author. This paper may be judged to be the high point of all Hopkins’s later work.

His last important economic-history paper was a detailed reprise of and revision of ‘Taxes and Trade’, occasioned by a lecturing visit to Japan.<sup>39</sup> More polemical but at the same time more moderate than its predecessor (‘the model-builder . . . has to know much of what the sources tell us’), this essay makes two large statements. The first is a reiteration of the importance for the study of ancient economic history of thinking with models. But the conclusion is more intriguing, for it marks a further departure from the Finley model of the Roman economy (in fact Finley scarcely appears):

<sup>36</sup> *Past and Present*, 138 (1993), 3–27, reprinted in R. Osborne (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman Society* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 206–25. The reader will realise by now that the claim at the beginning that the author was not aiming at ‘the discovery of truths’ was something of a Hopkinsian ritual, rather like the Maori haka. The main aim was to investigate ‘the seamier side of slavery’ (6), and that meant a search for facts, facts about what the Romans regarded as normal behaviour (8).

<sup>37</sup> *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 6 (1998), 185–226.

<sup>38</sup> Here he drew on R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: a Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 7–13.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Rome, Taxes, Rents and Trade’, *Kodai*, 6/7 (1995/96), 41–75, reprinted in W. Scheidel and S. von Reden (eds.), *The Ancient Economy* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 190–230.

. . . the political integration of the Roman Empire brought in its train a gradual integration of the economy. . . . The Mediterranean Sea made transport of a trade surplus between coastal provinces relatively cheap and easy. In my view, therefore, the balance of probability is that the economy was integrated in [a] limited sense. . .

The Roman Empire experienced in consequence 'limited economic growth'. At the same time, this integrated economy 'sat on top of' a huge 'basic natural economy'. None of this was an abrupt break with the Hopkins of 1980 or 1983, yet it seemed to remove an essential foundation stone from the Finleyan edifice. Many questions remained, as the author of course knew.

The genesis of *A World Full of Gods* was unusually complicated. Recognising his own limitations as a historian of the spread of Christianity, Hopkins made use of King's new Research Centre to gather around him, beginning in 1992, four postdoctoral fellows with diverse expertise, Catherine Hezser, Wolfram Kinzig, Seth Schwartz and Markus Vinzent. It was a high-stakes experiment, all the more so because the original plan was that the five should write a collaborative work—notwithstanding differences of style and belief (or disbelief). Expertise about Judaism was to hand, expertise about patristics too. In retrospect it became clear that the project required that all the participants should share a broad similarity of approach; they probably also needed to be of similar academic standing. In one sense, however, the project was an undoubted success: to say that all five learned a great deal would be an under-statement—for some of the collaborators, all of whom have become important figures in their own fields, the time in Cambridge with Hopkins was an intellectually transforming experience.

The collaborative project eventually collapsed, and Hopkins in the end was probably not its main beneficiary, for it is doubtful whether *A World Full of Gods* works even on its own terms. Here was a historian who wanted to represent rather than convince (the book does not argue a case, though it certainly puts large obstacles in the way of some other views of the subject), who wanted more than ever to avoid the traditional monographic form, to get away from what he revealingly called 'the deadly scholasticism of most Roman historical monographs' (*TLS*, 23 April 1993). Above all, the book set out to show the subjectivity and one-sidedness of all accounts of ancient Christianity and its context, not, however with the aim of replacing these accounts with a single verity, but rather, as he once said, with a 'multi-centred view'. And once again, wanting to overturn the view that the religions of the Roman Empire were

‘dull, unemotional and colorless’, he attempted ‘empathetic understanding’, of Christians, Jews and pagans alike.

And further still, the author wanted to *épater*, and also to sell many copies. Hence time-travel (the means by which, long ago, the BBC used to teach prehistory), the script of an imaginary television documentary, and a description of a fictional dinner-encounter between pagans, a Jew and a Christian. (None of this, truth to tell, suggested to connoisseurs of historical fiction that Hopkins had missed his calling by opting for academic history.) Another bright idea—back to the scholarly audience again—was to compose imaginary critiques of the book from disguised friends of the author.<sup>40</sup> This was very cleverly done, and may have been the high point of his empathising mode. But what the book may most have needed was in fact real critiques and an author who would listen to them. The stakes go up when you have Finley’s chair and hardly any of your friends wants to be your harsh critic any more; besides, Hopkins had in any case usually anticipated their objections. In the end, since the identity of the imagined reader oscillates so much, we may think that no one could be satisfied (in fact the broadsheets liked the book more than scholars did).<sup>41</sup>

Some may be tempted to fit *A World Full of Gods* into a decline-and-fall narrative, but that would be a serious mistake: Hopkins’ best work in the 1990s was as inventive, disturbing and thought-provoking as ever. *A World Full of Gods* is in fact rather rich in interesting ideas (for example, the notion that martyr acts were a substitute for, rather than an incitement to, flesh-and-blood martyrdom), and it is not at all short of erudition (though for a self-reflexive book it keeps specific scholarly debates at a surprisingly considerable distance). The book has the old Hopkins verve and energy, and any reader who succeeds in getting past the juvenilia and in jokes is likely to see that it raises fundamental questions both about historical knowledge and about history writing.

‘What would an objective account of early Christianity look like?’ he asks. Yet for long stretches the author expounds in a conventional objectivist fashion. He makes conventional critical use of ‘the sources’ while accusing them of being ‘arbitrary’ (that cannot be quite the right word).<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The letters from ‘Hartmut’, ‘Avi’, ‘Josh’, ‘Mary’ and ‘Andrea’ were done so convincingly that some have thought they were genuine. There is ample evidence that they were KH’s own work.

<sup>41</sup> But the reviewer in *Der Gnomon*, H. Leppin, concluded by saying (74 (2002), 157) that the book was ‘ein höchst anregendes Lesevergnügen’.

<sup>42</sup> He speaks of the ‘impossibility and undesirability of writing an objective history of a religious movement’ (60), yet he quite often corrects the misconceptions of others on the assumption that we will recognise that he is unprejudiced.

The trouble for the historical reader is that while he/she may well agree that objectivity on this subject is impossible, we still think that understanding it requires us to leave aside patently unhistorical views of the matter, and such questions as whether Christianity as it is now practised is good for the human race (as maintained by one of Hopkins's fictive critics). As for empathy, one of Hopkins's time-travellers remarks that being there did not help with the understanding of Roman emotions, and *A World Full of Gods* makes only a very limited amount of progress towards recreating them: Hopkins saw the problem without being able to invent a way around it, as he wrote on another occasion. The author would have had to strip away more of his British academic personality, and answer the still unanswered question 'With what emotions did the diverse inhabitants of the Roman Empire react to the world and the people around them?'

A final verdict on the scholarly parts of this book might be that certain intuitions, to the effect (most notably) that the Christians' obsessive desire to control sex was, paradoxically, part of Christianity's appeal, are extremely rich in possibilities. On the other hand, some central themes are not in the end explored in adequate detail. At one point for example the author proposes a rather dated contrast between older Roman religion as a set of practices and Christianity as a set of beliefs, but at the end of the book he leads us, cleverly it must be said, to a directly opposite view of Christianity: 'for most, *being* a Christian may have mattered more than believing'.

A future biographer would be well-advised, I think, to consider carefully what *A World Full of Gods* reveals and conceals about the author's personality. It is obviously a playful book. It resolutely keeps psychoanalytic considerations at bay—which may weaken its handling of emotions. It hints at some points, so it seems to me, that its atheistic author is not fully indifferent to religion after all ('Andrea's' letter). And in an intriguing passage, one reader at least sensed that the author felt strong sympathy for a position he attributes to 'Avi'. Quoting a passage from the Talmud, Avi says 'what I like particularly is its wry humor and implicit self-questioning. . . . It is as though the rabbis collectively knew that no religious interpretation is, or can be, final.' Yet this means only what it means, not that the real author was identifying himself with the rabbis.

Hopkins would probably not have welcomed any such conventional marker of old age as a Festschrift, but two of those who had worked with him, Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf, were ingenious enough to devise an equivalent gift, a collection of papers by nine former students

and protégés entitled *Rome the Cosmopolis*.<sup>43</sup> Its variety, sophistication and readability speak extraordinarily well both of Hopkins and more generally of Cambridge in his time.

The main project that was cut off by Hopkins's death was a short book about the Colosseum, commissioned by Profile Books for a series edited by Mary Beard. He drafted quite long sections, but almost nothing was ready for the press. Professor Beard took the manuscript in hand, and effectively wrote a book of her own,<sup>44</sup> with Hopkinsian elements, notably a very characteristic speculation about the number of gladiators who are likely to have died on the job every year, empire-wide, and its demographic significance. One new article is in the press,<sup>45</sup> but in the judgement of Hopkins's literary executor, Dr Christopher Kelly, there is little if anything in his surviving papers that was ready for publication. We can, however, hope for a collection of the most notable at least of his published essays.

In 1999 Hopkins once again undertook administration, becoming Vice-Provost of King's. He enjoyed this so much that he effectively silenced the voices of those who would have preferred him to stick to the life of a scholar. Whether the fellows of King's got quite what they expected it is beyond the scope of this memoir to inquire. It can be assumed that they had never before Hopkins's time received a memo from the college grass (requesting them not to walk on it in the winter). There were strains on old friendships over various issues, but at least it may be said both that Hopkins presided successfully over the election of a new Provost and that he was deeply devoted to what he saw as the college's best interests. It was appropriate that the inveterate sceptic, having been buried in the churchyard of Finchingfield in Essex, in sight of his own house, was commemorated with a memorial service and fine music in King's chapel.

Keith and Juliet Hopkins were divorced in 1989, and in 1991 Hopkins married his long-standing companion Jennifer Simmons. Two daughters, Charlotte and Sarah prevented the aging professor from becoming too professorial ('we had to stop playing Monopoly because Dad used to sulk for hours if he lost'). The last period of this family's life together was spent in a house at Finchingfield. Its garden became one of the chief

<sup>43</sup> Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>44</sup> K. Hopkins and M. Beard, *The Colosseum* (London, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> 'The Political Economy of the Roman Empire', due to be published in I. Morris and W. Scheidel (eds.), *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires*.



objects of Hopkins's care and one of his chief pleasures. He derived intense enjoyment from deploying arguments, but at least as much from creating harmonies and contrasts in his flower beds. This was an authentic passion, always to be shared.

Keith Hopkins's public persona was the unembarrassed hedonist, who sought pleasure with fine wines, at table (he was an outstanding cook), in gardens, in far-off places, and in the company of women. These pleasures were, obviously, quite genuine, and it was an added pleasure that they sometimes scandalised his staid colleagues. He unstintingly gave great pleasure to others too, and was a profoundly sociable being. His numerous friends found him endlessly delightful company—to an extraordinary degree he could make people feel more themselves, more alive.

Arguably, and perhaps paradoxically, hedonism made him a better historian. He undoubtedly had more ability to empathise with his historical subjects than most historians, and was vastly better qualified to understand members of the Roman elite than drier members of our fraternity (and that means effectively all of us). But the Petronian façade should not be allowed to conceal the very industrious scholar (he rejected much of his own work, otherwise there would have been more publications), constantly curious and constantly wanting to do better.

He had an exceptional talent for the quick comprehension of an argument and its weaknesses (Hopkins QC would have been a fearsome courtroom presence), and he could be a very hard critic. Those who had a ready arsenal of replies could be enormously invigorated, but not everyone was able to benefit, and a modern style of teaching is normally held to require a more patient approach. It has to be admitted that there was a touch of cruelty sometimes. And in criticising the work of others, he allowed himself too many purely subjective judgements, dismissing as 'boring' work by historians, sometimes very good ones, who happened to have interests different from his own (which is not to deny that he was commonly right). Towards the end of his life he was still speaking of 'the conservatism of my fellow professionals'. He regularly 'tr[ie]d to upset fellow scholars by non-conformity' (1998), and indeed there is never any shortage of conformists of all ages who need upsetting. He sometimes reminded me of Brigadier Ben Ritchie-Hook, a character in some of Evelyn Waugh's novels who was 'barely one part bully. What he liked was to surprise people', preferably with explosives.

Yet the overall effect of Hopkins's critical and teaching activities was immensely positive for Roman history in general as for many individuals. It is enough to imagine what the field would be like if Hopkins had chosen

to become a civil servant. He loved the brilliant young, and drove them on, realising that they would all be different from him—except in one respect, namely that they would reflect about how they worked and wrote.

For most of his scholarly life, Hopkins returned constantly to problems of evidence and epistemology. They were not really his forte. His use of evidence was usually very sophisticated—though sometimes it is possible to find fault. But by the 1980s and 1990s it was not a revolutionary stance among historians of any kind to assert that all history is subjective. And the theoretical debates ignited by Hayden White and others did not in fact interest Hopkins much if at all (I remember no reference to the linguistic turn anywhere in his work). The theory also needed to correspond better with the practice, which had a good deal of factuality about it.

But the defence arguments crowd in. While many ancient historians nowadays realise that their calling requires a very agile imagination, most of the field's old 'grandees' (another favourite Hopkins word) would have tended to deny it, and very few of us have discussed in print what the implications might be; Hopkins, above all people, put this matter on our agenda. At the beginning of his career, as stated earlier, he increased the range of ancient history to a degree very rarely achieved by an individual scholar. It is very important too that he seldom if ever deployed his efforts on the side of orthodox verities: sometimes it was full frontal revisionism, sometimes what he practised was a sort of insidious undermining—but in any case he wanted a better solution, or a more empathetic description. While he exaggerated the sins of the 'conventional' historians, it was a healthy instinct to search for unconventional answers. And while he was a harsh critic, this predatory behaviour, as Greg Woolf has remarked, 'improved the fitness of the herd'.

Throughout his career as a scholar Hopkins strove to solve fundamental and very difficult historical problems, and to do this in an exciting and immediate fashion. Just as he refused to lead an entirely routine academic existence, so he refused to conduct routine research—almost every paper has something daring about it. And he never deluded himself into thinking that he had written the final and definitive word about any historical subject. Richard Saller has written perceptively that 'he was a restless intellect, unwilling to stick with what he did best'. I would put it rather differently: his intellectual energy was such that he could never sink into complacency. And that is the scholarly attribute that most deserves to be remembered.

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