



PRIMARY SOURCE

BOX 1.5 Hopkins, K. 1978. "Review: Rules of Evidence." *Journal of Roman Studies* 68: 180, 182.

I regret that Millar has written a socio-political analysis of Roman emperors without explicit consideration of power, legitimacy and authority . . . In sociological literature, power is often conceptualized as the capacity either to make people do what you want against their will, or to shape their desires so that they want to do what you want. Let me stress straight away that I am not advocating that all history should be sociological history, nor do I intend to enter here even a short essay on power. I want only to raise some of the questions to which a conceptual awareness could and in my view should have led Millar . . . One of my main dissatisfactions with Millar's history is the absence of explicit problems. He seeks only to describe, not to explain. Once again, I have not been completely fair. Millar sets himself one problem repeatedly; at the beginning of each section, he typically studies the origins of a practice of institution . . . [but] explanations of origin are only partial; they do not explain persistence . . . Millar completely overlooks what we call structural functional explanations, that is[,] explanations of how Roman institutions and practices, values, expectations and beliefs related to each other in enabling the Roman political system to function and persist . . . One problem is that the ancient sources, the evidence, are elevated to the level of sacred texts . . . On the whole, Millar seems to assume that the sources by and large faithfully reported the world in which they lived. But it is conceivable that ancient sources, like modern newspapers, reported the abnormal more often than the normal . . . The evidence is not holy; it is itself a social construct and so should not be taken at face value any more than one should take *The Times* or a contemporary academic political scientist as necessarily right. The historian should interpret his sources actively, by trying, for example, to understand what the ancient sources took for granted and so systematically under-reported.